



JUDY BAKER

*The
Quartering
Act*

The painful road of time, separate lives, and war require determination and courage for two enemies to embrace a love so powerful and forbidden.

The
Quartering Act

by

Judy Baker

PRAISE FOR THE QUARTERING ACT

The Quartering Act is an excellent read. Love the opening that gave us the flavor of the struggle against Britain and moved us gently toward the hero/heroine's first meeting. Ms. Baker does a masterful job weaving the major conflicts around Boston so familiar from our history books. She twists the plot pulling the lovers away for a huge break in time allowing both to move toward other facets of their life." Reviewed by Bluebell of the Long and the Short of It.

The Quartering Act is a one of a kind novel. Very few books are based in the American Revolution and Ms. Baker captures the spirit perfectly. Katherine and Jeremy's story is very romantic and well told as they must hide their love while war is raging all around them. The reader benefits from the research put into this book and can feel the fortitude of the patriots as they fight for their country. This novel is a great story of love and bravery and I enjoyed it immensely. Bonnie from Coffee Time Romance & More

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

The Quartering Act

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Cover Art by Dawné Dominique

Publishing History
First American Rose Edition, 2008
Print ISBN 1-60154-435-9
Canyonland Press 2019

Dedication

All the hours I spent in research and writing this story is dedicated with loving appreciation to my darling daughter, Tori Baker and her friend, Jodi Pierce. Without their screenplay, *The Quartering Act* would not exist. Thank you for your help and guidance.

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Chapter 1

1770 Wings Falls, New York

The torch flames flickered shadows over the platform in front of the old postal house. James' glance darted in her direction. Biting her bottom lip, Katherine Heaton stepped further into the darkness of the huge oak trees. She shivered. He'd be furious if he laid eyes on her. Squinting, Katherine studied her brother's rigid figure, barely recognizing him.

Oh, James—what is coming about? Your hatred for the Redcoats has gained you a reputation. God help you; they even know you by name. She sniffed and took a short, fretful breath.

Pa, where are you?

Her long fingers flattened against the frozen tree bark, and she wanted to melt her body into its trunk. With a slight head movement, she peeked around the tree. James paced back and forth, jerking on a rope held tight in his hands.

A shiver sent her numb fingers up to pull the hooded cloak tight against her form. Her gloved hand rubbed against her cold nose. She shifted from one foot to the other and wiggled her toes while struggling to ignore the bitter dampness creeping up her petticoats to nip at her legs beneath her thick wool dress. One would think after twenty years in Wings Falls, she should be accustomed to such frigid

winters. Probably just nerves.

Katherine suddenly felt sad and frowned. Dear God, she did not want her life to change. Why did the Redcoats have to come? What rights did they have in America?

“What the...Katherine Heaton!” whispered an angry voice from the shadows behind her.

With a gasp, Katherine whirled and immediately recognized the dark shape as her close friend. “Paul...”

“My God-what are you doing here?” he demanded, stepping closer. Paul grabbed her arms and pulled her toward him. “Never mind, don’t try to explain, I know you too well.”

Katherine stumbled so close to him that his hot intimate breath touched her frozen face.

“Now, get home and go fast, Katie, do you understand?”

His urgent voice made her breath catch. “Paul, what’s...”

“Katie, hear me. You dare not be here when things start to happen. Trust me, Katie. Go.”

Before she could object, he shoved her toward home and mumbled, “I’ll not let harm come to you. Now, go.”

Katherine hurried off a few feet, slipping into the foliage. Before dashing into the darkness, she glanced back and hesitated. She waited to make sure Paul had returned to the crowd, and then scurried her way back to where he’d found her. She was determined. Besides, she had not been standing in the bitter night air just to go home before she knew what they planned. Being a patriot meant something to her too.

Cold and anxious, her jaws clamped down to smother a whimper as her gaze turned to James, her brother. The full moon peeked through gray clouds to spread its eerie glow over the swinging noose held in his hands. An uncontrollable quiver shot through

her.

Katherine blinked away tears, alert to the slight movement her brother made as he raised his arm and rubbed the back of his hand against his nose. Her gaze landed on the noose again. *Oh, God, please keep him from harm's way.*

Even at this distance, she could sense his tenseness. He stared straight ahead like an effigy. Fluffy white snowflakes drifted down from the heavens to rest on stone cold shoulders.

How well she knew him. No doubt in her mind, his thoughts focused on a cause not even the wintry air could penetrate.

Only two years older than she, James looked like an old frail man-wet sandy hair, long skinny arms and legs, dressed in tattered woolen clothing that hung loose on his body. She knew differently. Strong in body and mind, James never faltered in his beliefs. Though a bit self-willed, he swore to retaliate against those who didn't believe in the cause. At times, she grew frightened at the depth of his worrisome passion. Yet, he could be such a sweet brother, always protective.

Detecting a slight movement, Katherine darted her suspicious glance toward the far end of the platform. She recognized Spencer Norton. His head hung low. Hands shoved deep into his pockets, he shuffled his feet back and forth. She once heard James call him a little weasel.

James glanced down at the rough, hard rope wound around his stiff fingers. He pulled the noose tighter, waiting. Where were they? Things were quiet. Too quiet. How long would he have to wait?

He pulled his coat collar close around his neck and made a conscious effort to ignore the cold. Low mumbles wafted through the still night air, drawing his focus down the road toward the far end of the commons. He narrowed his gaze on the shadowy

figures hovered beneath hot torches.

The crowd of a dozen or more men turned and headed toward him. James took an unwavering gulp of air. His gaze followed the oncoming patriots moving up the center of the road toward the postal house. Their torches puffed out a smoky trail of flames to the beat of frozen snow crunching beneath their feet. He gripped the rope and anticipated their open hostility.

He stood steadfast and looked down into faces of doubt as each colonist gathered silently around the platform. Their gazes locked on the noose held tight in his hands.

“Is it true, James?” Paul Bennett spoke in a controlled voice. “We can’t do this? It isn’t right.”

James’ temper flared.

Their eyes connected.

Paul, his dearest friend since they were old enough to walk, had an easygoing attitude and quiet disposition that usually helped James control his short temper in times of turmoil. But not now.

“How can you ask if it’s right?”

Paul lowered his eyes from James, pulled his hat down over his brow, and shook his head. This act could turn unpleasant for everyone. Maybe he’d feel better when Daniel arrived.

Frowning, Paul turned his vision toward the dark, thick trees along the outskirts of the Commons. Squinting, he searched for movement. Katie could be stubborn at times. Hopefully, she sensed the danger he conveyed.

Glancing over his shoulder, he studied the men surrounding him. They stared at James, waiting for assurance. Their ghostly white faces beneath wide brim hats caused his brows to pull together into a deeper furrow. He fell silent along with the assembled colonists, and then, he felt a slow, restlessness shuffle through the crowd.

“You can’t forget what Adams told us.” James’ unfaltering voice flowed over the crowd. He searched their faces. “Don’t you feel suffocated by the Crown? Is it not time the Brits heard our voices? We have to act. Now. The fight for independence and separation from the Crown begins here.” James raised his hand and dangled the noose in front of his friends and neighbors.

“We all know the government rests on the King’s law—not us, the people. We are the people. This is our mission—our destiny. Nothing is left but to resist. Rebel we must, but never let them drain our spirit. We demand freedom. Our voices will not be silenced by the intimidation from the Redcoats-or King George himself.”

Serious agreements filtered throughout the townsmen. Impatience stirred through the crowd. They liked what they heard. Some no longer looked upon Daniel Heaton’s hot-tempered son as a traitorous rebel, but their New World representative.

“Now’s the time to cut the umbilical cord from the mother country and separate our New World from the old,” James demanded. “The Stamp Act will be the tinder to the bonfire, and we’re the spark that will ignite the flame.”

Katherine crept forward. She listened to her brother’s voice plow the cold night air. His words were powerful, compelling. Her skin tingled with excitement, yet a frightening chill ran down her spine. She chewed on her bottom lip. James sounded inspired to give the speech of his life; however, his obsessive hatred for the Redcoats frightened her.

She observed the crowd change from concerned townsmen to fervent patriots. At this instant her patriotic temper rose with all the farmers and shopkeepers, ready for battle and eager to fight for the right of freedom of choice.

Fretful, Katherine blinked a wet flake from her thick eyelashes and fixed her gaze on her brother. *Oh, James, maybe Pa spoke the truth when he said the life we know now would soon be no more.* Teary eyed, Katherine filled her lungs with the icy air, determined to be strong. Though she sensed her naïve, carefree days were about to slip away.

She pressed her lips tight to will away the sting in her eyes. Oh Pa, are we headed for war? Where are you? James had been adamant about your orders for me to stay back at the farm. He would surely be furious if, or when, he found out his sister disobeyed. Paul would tell him. She was sure.

Katherine heard the thunder of horses' hooves seconds before someone shouted her father's name.

She flipped the snowflakes from her eyelashes with her gloved fingers and released a sigh of relief. Pa. Finally. Excited to know he'd arrived, she darted forward tripping over a branch, jolting her senses to reality, and Paul's warning.

She slipped behind a tree.

The entire crowd quickly turned southward to the sound of approaching horses. Anticipation intensified. Her pa drew near. Pride swelled within her knowing the patriots thought of her pa, Daniel Heaton, as their loved and trusted leader. He would guide them in the right direction. He'd make things right.

The men scurried out of the way to make space for the galloping horses and their leader. The townspeople sent a cheer into the night air.

A British Stamp Agent tied and bound over a horse squirmed in panic. Daniel, leading the horse carrying the captive, pulled back on the reins to come to a halt just short of the platform. In a fluid motion, Daniel jumped down from his horse and dragged the Stamp Agent from the nervous stomping animal.

Amidst the loud clamor, Katherine's gaze followed Spencer when he jumped from the platform to help pull the terrified man up the steps toward James.

She pressed her quivering lips together. *Oh, dear God, no. James, you can't. This isn't the way to make the Brits take note. We can't just kill the captive to prove how serious we are. This act would bring about a consequence, which could lead to disaster. Even war.*

Faces and voices of colonists blurred in Katherine's mind when her gaze fell on the noose held open for the man's neck.

She heard the panic in the wild-eye man. Stuttering, his hysterical voice pleaded, "Please...please, sir...I beg you. My...my family. Don't do this."

Katherine brushed away the tears. She knew he had no chance, and yet he struggled.

When James grabbed the trembling agent from Norton, she covered her mouth to stifle a scream. Dread churned in her stomach. *Oh, God, don't let James do this, please.*

Her eyes widened when Norton coiled the end of the rope in his hand and tossed it into the air over a sign attached to the postal roof. Frozen to her spot, she watched him tie off the end to a post while James struggled to place the noose over the frantic man's head. She wanted to run out and stop the madness.

Startled by a scream from the crowd, Katherine jumped when the horrified voice yelled, "They're coming."

Petrified, she listened to the approaching loud rumble of horses. Katherine clenched her jaws, unsure of whether to stand or run when she recognized the oncoming Redcoats.

"Move...head for the woods." Daniel's voice jolted the townspeople into action.

A loud boom filled the air. Panic exploded. The crowd dispersed to flee in different directions. Only a few stayed to stand against mounted British soldiers.

Once again, the soldiers fired on the terrified patriots scrambling toward the woods.

Katherine covered her ears. She couldn't move. She couldn't take her gaze off her pa and brother in the midst of the chaos.

"James, there's no time," her father shouted with fear.

Katherine swung her glance toward her brother's determined expression. She knew.

Ignoring his father's warning, James yanked the noose tight around the captive's neck.

Her skin chilled. "No, James!" Katherine screamed, but the alarming ring of her voice came too late.

In that very second, the noose slipped down around the Stamp Agent's neck and in one swift movement, James pushed him off the platform.

Like a rag doll, the man plunged down...a loud snap of his neck...dead. The agent's body jerked then went limp.

Katherine stared at the corpse rocking back and forth on end of the rope, lifeless.

Shocked at what just transpired, a steady stream from her eyes slipped down along her cold cheeks, dropping onto her cloak. *How could James just stand there? How could he do this? Oh, God.* The expression on his face frightened her.

Redcoat movement caught her attention when they rode in aiming their pistols. Her father screamed at James to run. The scene before her seemed to slow, like an event passing before her in a stage play.

Enclosed in the protective forest, Katherine's frightened body shook while her gaze stared at a patriot tossing a torch through the postal window.

Orange flames shot to the sky against the night curtain of snow.

Terrified by the panicked motion of patriots fleeing, she wanted to run too, but her feet would not move. In the confusion of all the turmoil, she failed to see Paul run toward her until the painful grasps of his hands pulled her down to the ground, behind thick underbrush.

Katherine jerked against Paul. She was dazed—she could hardly breathe from his tight grip around her middle. His hand covered her mouth, choking in the surfacing gurgle that wanted to yell.

Unable to drag her gaze from her father as he rushed to his horse, Katherine squirmed to free herself. She needed to get to Pa.

Helpless, she watched the British soldiers jump from their horses. They took aim and fired toward several colonists running for the forest.

“James,” Daniel hollered, tossing the musket to his son. “Run—get out of here.”

James reached out, grabbed the musket from his pa, but realized it was too late to run when a shot rang past his ear. Determination gave way to the fury within pushing him to charge the Redcoats.

“No!” Daniel screamed, running toward his son.

The Redcoat pointed his pistol and fired.

In the heated conflict, the gunfire zinged past James.

Daniel came to a sudden stop.

Rage filled James’ sick gut. His feet brought him face to face with the soldier’s fist pounding him breathless. The strong swift swing of the Redcoat’s arm initiated a final blow to his stomach, doubling him over.

The soldier grabbed his bayonet and raised the weapon to finish the job but stopped in midair when a pistol poked into his ribs.

“Bastard,” Daniel whispered, flinching from the

sharp pain in his side. Before he had a chance to pull the trigger, he staggered off-balance and dropped to his knees.

Instantly, the soldier turned and pierced Daniel with his bayonet.

“Father, no.” The adrenaline rush brought James to his feet. In an agonizing breath, he stared down at his pa, realizing what had just happened. His intense gaze took in the red blood oozing out of his father’s gut.

A deep wrath took over his emotions. In his fury, he grabbed his father’s pistol and faced the stunned soldier. He pulled the trigger.

James stood over his enemy. A sneer spread across his lips when the young soldier slumped to the ground with rounded eyes and an opened mouth. The dying soldier appeared scared, like a frightened animal.

“I killed him, Pa,” James whispered. Dropping to his knees, he lifted his father’s head and adamantly promised, “I’ll kill them all.”

James stared at the previously white snow his father’s blood now painted red. Surrounded by King George’s soldiers, he cradled his father in his arms determined to avenge his death.

The postal building blazed into a bright orange turning the area to daylight. Tears streamed down Katherine’s cheeks when the fire glowed on her father’s lifeless body. Her mind spun.

Unable to think, she squirmed so unexpectedly she freed herself from Paul’s tight grip. She darted out into the opening toward James.

Suddenly, Paul grabbed her, jerking her body to a halt.

Dazed, still several feet from her father’s body, she stared into the face of the British officer standing over her brother. He stared directly at her. His eyes of sorrow imprinted on her brain. The blood

drained from her face, cooling it. Her legs went weak.

Paul's forceful grip yanked her back into the darkness of the forest. Stumbling into the bushes, he pulled her down. His smothering grip around her middle all but caused her to black out.

One by one, men of the Sons of Liberty drifted in through the concealed hatch in the blacksmith's attic. Several loyal patriots had been meeting in secret for the last few months. Steadily, the small group had grown to include the majority of the townsmen. However, this night proved different—their leader...dead.

Each man gathered around the table. Their questioning glances darted toward Thomas Bennett and his son, Paul. Most were young and fired up with what had happened that evening. But, the elders of the town sat tense and made gestures and comments displaying their worry.

Paul dropped his pistol on the table and planted his troubled body into a chair. He glanced at his father's anxious expression. He looked tired, exhausted with his face drained of color.

A heavy sigh escaped Paul's lips. He rubbed his eyes and listened.

"What should we do, Thomas?" asked a fellow patriot, drawing his bushy brows together.

"We have to get James out of jail."

Hearing his father's exhausted voice waver, Paul's distressed gaze darted around the room.

"Why?" Norton's angry voice echoed through the quiet room. "James murdered the agent and a British soldier. I refuse to be a martyr for his radical ways. The only reason he's not laying dead in the snow along with his pa is because the Brits want to hang him by the neck as an example for the rest of us."

"He's right," agreed the town blacksmith, still

wearing his black apron. "But we can't just leave him be."

"We won't," muttered Paul." Glaring at Norton, Paul's jaws tightened.

"James would never abandon us," spoke another from the far end of the table.

"We have to get him out," Thomas urged with a sigh of desperation. "You know, if it had been your son, you wouldn't allow him to be hanged by Redcoats. We're all responsible."

Paul rested his elbows on the table, placed his hands over his eyes, and blocked out the voices. His mind flashed back to the woods where he had discovered Katie. He should have known she wouldn't go home. Stubborn, like the autumn redhead she was. He never guessed she would slip from his clutches. Fortunately, he grabbed her again before she got too close. Even at that, she got near enough to the Redcoat officer who just stood there staring at them. Why he hadn't shot, Paul wasn't sure.

Paul squeezed his eyes closed, combed his fingers through his hair, and focused on the rescue of his best friend. He opened his eyes and glanced at his fellow patriots' faces. *Why did they hesitate? Why didn't they want to help James?* He listened while his blood stirred with rage.

"We can't go against trained soldiers that outnumber us—what—four to one? Daniel's dead. Do we risk our own lives to free James?" argued a shopkeeper.

Paul's usual mild temper flared. He leaped from his chair and pounded a solid fist on the table. "Damn." His angry voice sailed across the room. "We've gone too far now. We've taken a stand for what's right, and the time is past to think about the risks of our own lives."

Tired and infuriated, his stare drilled into them. "We all killed a British agent. James might have

been the one to put the rope around his neck, but we're all responsible for his murder. That includes you, too, Norton."

"Don't you dare blame—"

"You're a damn coward." Paul shot an enraged glare at Norton. "Don't forget you're as much a part of this as James. You handed over the damn agent to James, remember? You might have well been the one to push him off the platform."

"It's not my fault," Norton lashed out. Suddenly, he shot to his feet, leaned over the table, and roughly pushed Paul backward.

With a solid stance against the table, Paul threw a hard punch and connected with Norton's jaw, dropping him to the floor.

Adrenaline pumped Paul's pent-up anger. He shot his body over the table and pounced on his victim. With each punch landing on Norton, Paul's temper grew.

Finally, two patriots pulled him off the man. Heavy breaths rasping from his mouth, Paul stood glaring, ready to attack, again.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," Thomas pleaded. "If we fight amongst ourselves, we accomplish nothing. This is just what the Brits want. We can't forget the real issue."

Paul curled his hand into a hard fist, stood firm, and let his challenging glare penetrate across the table to Norton. In an effort, he turned his narrow gaze away from his opponent, swinging a rebellious look over all the patriots.

He observed each man. "From the beginning, each of you knew what this cause meant. If you let James hang because you're cowards, then the principles we so-called Sons of Liberty are founded upon represent nothing."

He spoke the truth, and yet, they shamefully avoided eye contact.

Disgusted, he turned to his father. Under no

circumstance would he back down.

"We're all accountable for this evening's actions," Thomas' low voice begged to reason with the group. "Daniel gave his life, and James is risking his for what we believe."

When no one responded, he glanced at his son and said, "I'll stand behind you, son, whatever you decide."

"I'll not let him die, Father. James will expect me to act. I *will* get him out."

Silence settled over the crowd.

A soft knock drew the group's attention to the hatch. All heads turned and stared at the tall scout entering the room. An intimidating icon of a man in his early forties stood there.

"Adams, this is a surprise. We didn't expect you," Thomas said. His voice filled the hushed room.

Samuel Adams, the moving spirit of the Sons of Liberty, looked over the solemn group with an irritated expression. "I don't suppose I have to ask whose damned fool idea it was to go after an agent of the crown. And you followed him like pigs to the trough."

Heads drooped; not one person dared to look at Mr. Adams. "Now, Daniel is dead because of it. We'll be damned lucky if James is still alive by dawn."

Paul's face heated. "I'll not listen to anymore," he lashed out.

Kicking over a chair, he grabbed his pistol off the table and headed for the hatch. Before stepping through, he sent one last appealing glance to each patriot.

Thomas shifted his position on the snow-covered ground where he crouched among the dark phantom tree limbs. He shivered with apprehension and strained his eyes to search the surrounding area of the jailhouse. Faint candlelight drifted from the open doorway.

He glanced at the other patriots hunkered down, out of the sentries' sights. They waited. Their ghostly clouds of breath drifted up through the winter chill. No doubt, nervous as he.

Several long minutes later, Thomas made out a body slithering on the ground. He released a thankful sigh. The dark form crawled its way through the thicket toward him. An uneasy relief caused Thomas to reach out and touch his son's shoulder.

"Only two guards on duty," Paul whispered.

"There's supposed to be three."

Paul leaned back against a tree. "Maybe he's out reporting." He loaded the black powder into his pistol.

"Or, taking a piss," commented a shaky voice on the other side of his father.

Paul glanced around and nodded. He too had a twitch in his gut for what they were about to attempt. Startled by a crackling branch behind them, he swirled around.

Thomas pulled out his knife.

"Whoa, just me." Adams' foggy whisper filled the air, "Thought you could use another hand." His large, shadowed figure emerged from the darkness with Norton and a few more patriots.

"Well, you took long enough." Thomas grinned and lowered his weapon.

Paul turned back and continued to load his musket. "What'd it take to make you come to your senses?"

"We stand by our own. You know that. Besides, looks like we're not the only ones here to rescue James." Adams dragged a shabby coated kid from behind him and shoved him toward Paul.

The slight figure stumbled forward.

Paul frowned. He certainly didn't need a kid to get killed in this rescue. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed the oversized pants and coat. The weapon

in the tattered gloved hands appeared too heavy for the scrawny kid. A quick glance under the farmer hat pulled low over the shadowed face caught Paul's breath.

A pair of large green eyes stared back.

He stiffened and leaned close.

"Katie Heaton...what the...are you out of your mind?" Paul scrambled to his feet. "What do you think you're doing? Rescuing James on your own?"

Paul clamped his mouth shut. If his voice rose loud enough to attract the Redcoats' attention before the group was ready to engage, they wouldn't succeed, and James would die.

Uneasy with her presence, he grabbed the pistol from her and dragged her down to the ground. Scowling, he whispered to Adams, "Keep her here."

"Father." Paul's anxious voice drew Thomas' gaze. "Head round the backside. I'll pop this crimson bastard while you take care of the other one."

The small patriot group split up; silent feet struck out toward the left of the jailhouse while Thomas made a gesture to a few men to follow him.

Adams gave a quick nod to the two other patriots and sent them off to disappear into the night to accomplish, yet, another mission.

Paul turned and stared through the thickets. Torches burning on each corner of the jailhouse gave him enough light to judge the distance of the soldier standing near the door. He shot a quick glance toward Katherine, which silently meant for her to stay put.

He raised his musket, took aim, and waited, his eyes glued on the unsuspected soldier, and his trigger finger ready. The moment he could almost make out his father's position on the other side, he focused down the long musket barrel. Carefully aiming at an easy target, he fired.

The chilling explosion sent a white smoky cloud

into the night air. Katherine's nose filled with the black powder smell of death. She peeked through the brush.

The British soldier slumped down in a dead heap.

Biting her bottom lip, she closed her mind to the fact that the Redcoat, seconds before, had lived and breathed.

She pulled her vision from the soldier and centered her attention on Thomas rushing out of the shadows. Instantly, he pointed his pistol and fired at the second soldier. Katherine held her breath when he pulled his knife from his belt and stabbed the life from the wounded man.

Thomas' voice drifted to her ears.

"Payback for Daniel, you bastard."

Like a cunning snake in the forest, Paul hurried to Thomas' side. He squatted by the dead soldier and quickly fumbled through the man's pockets. In a conscientious effort to find the jail keys, his hand froze.

A shadow fell over the dead body.

Without moving, Paul lifted his gaze to the enemy.

The Redcoat stepped through the doorway, musket in hand, and a deadeye aim on Paul's head.

Paul jerked back seconds before the Redcoat fired. The near miss pumped him into action. A rush of adrenaline knocked him off balance when he grabbed the musket from the dead soldier and squeezed the trigger. The shot missed its target allowing the frightened soldier to take off, running for the safety of the thick forest.

Another shot rang out.

Paul whirled.

Adams stood at the dead man's feet, smoke swirling from his musket pointed toward the disappearing soldier.

“Damn, I think I just wounded him. Hurry, Paul,” Adams urged. “He’ll be back with more Redcoats.”

Paul shoved his hand into the pocket of the dead man and located the keys. With one quick toss, he landed them in Adams’ hands, jumped up, and followed him through the jailhouse door.

Katherine shivered. She noticed Thomas’ hands shake while he reloaded his pistol. He and the others waited, glancing in all direction expecting danger any moment.

Her heart pounded. *Please, Paul, hurry.*

She strained to listen to any unwelcome sounds from the commons area or townspeople. Others must have heard the shots. Curiosity would move them toward the commons as well as the British soldiers.

Then, just seconds later, Thomas darted a glance in her direction. She too could hear the thunder of approaching horses.

On the verge of panic, Katherine took in a breath of relief when three figures stepped from the building.

Paul emerged from the jailhouse supporting her badly beaten brother.

“James.” Katherine darted toward him.

Adams stopped her in his grasp. “Whoa, little one.” He jerked her out of the path of the heavy snorting animals rushing toward the jailhouse.

Two patriots rode in and came to a sudden stop in front of Paul. With quick moves, they jumped off the animals to help James on one while Paul mounted the other. In a fury, Paul grabbed the reins of his friend’s horse and rode hard and fast into the depth of the woods.

Before the forest swallowed her brother, Adams’ grip tightened on her arm.

He motioned for his men to split and head out on foot in different directions.

Practically dragging her, they retreated into the forest to make their way to the concealed cellar near the church.

Close behind, armed British soldiers galloped into town, heading toward the jailhouse.

1772

Two British officers, high atop their mounts, advanced toward the small town of Wings Falls, New York. Captain Jeremy Burke glanced over his shoulder to take in a quick look at the slow moving foot soldiers that followed close behind.

Worried, he faced forward. He inhaled the brisk hint of autumn air. Now and again, wood-burning smoke greeted his nostrils. His sharp gaze roamed over the distant fields and down the narrow dirt road. A rider, a fourth of a mile away, headed toward them.

“Bout time.”

Jeremy’s attention sliced toward the rough, impatient commander. He pulled back on his horse’s reins at the same time the Colonel’s hand motioned for the regiment to stop.

The rider, no more than sixteen, halted his horse just short of the two officers. He saluted. “Colonel Harrington.”

“Report.”

The Captain shot a quick glance at the thick neck, square-shouldered colonel, and back to the young man who clearly felt intimidated by the authoritative voice.

“There’s a farm around the bend. I reckon it’s about two miles ahead. The town’s less than a mile.”

“Good,” retorted the colonel in a harsh voice.

“Thank you, sir.” The young scout saluted.

Irritated, the commander snapped his hand and ordered the scout to the end of the line.

Captain Burke aimed his gaze toward the colonel and waited patiently. He flexed his jaw muscles.

The pompous, middle-aged commander, with his proud posture, rode fully dressed in his uniform of blue, faced with red and white-lined cloth. The son-of-bitch placed his appearance and army career high above the men under his command. This wasn't right.

Jeremy turned his head to take another fleeting look over his shoulder. The volunteer troops waited to continue their march. The shabby, unkempt men with solemn faces would certainly be in for a long hard winter. Poor bastards would feel it the worst. Only officers wore wool regulation uniforms. The New World enlisted men had to wear whatever they could get their hands on. Yet, his commander showed no compassion for those he called imbeciles and dumb farmers.

Harrington constantly reminded them that the so-called patriots were traitors. They all should be punished for heresy and strung by the neck until dead, better yet, burned alive.

Captain Burke swung his gaze down at his own high-topped, leather riding boots. Fancy compared to the tattered clods the men wore.

He breathed in the autumn air. Poor souls—he wondered if they really knew the unsettling aspects of what lay ahead.

Aware of his superior next to him, the Captain faced forward, squared his shoulders, and sat tall and dignified upon his stallion.

“Lieutenant,” demanded Harrington. Without acknowledging the soldier riding up from the back of the long line of men, Harrington stared straight ahead.

“Yes, sir, Colonel,” said the tall lanky lieutenant,

drawing his horse along side his commander.

"You'll remain with the men while Captain Burke and I ride ahead. I intend to take over a suitable lodge since our stay will be longer than I anticipated. Once arrangements are made, we'll return to find the men a campsite for tonight."

"I had the impression Miss Hendel's in town accommodated you rather well." A smirk spread across the lieutenant's face.

"She did ol' boy...she did, but, tonight I desire the comforts of a soft bed. Not minding, of course, should a lovely lady choose to warm my body. Now, lieutenant, keep an eye on this group, and don't let'm get out of control."

Jeremy pulled his blank gaze from the lieutenant to his commander. Out of curiosity, he asked, "Do you have a thought of when we'll return to the Boston area?"

"For now we're to stay in a central part of the country, so we can assist our superiors from either direction. According to the map we studied last night, this should be the place."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, son, let's hope there are more prospects around here than mere farmers." Harrington's wishful voice trailed away. He kicked the horse into a canter.

Jeremy turned and gave the young lieutenant a quick salute before he tapped his horse's flanks to follow Harrington. Focused on the man ahead, he drew in a breath and exhaled slowly, forcing himself to relax.

He couldn't deny it. The crude commander, efficient and loyal only to the point of what it would get him, was indubitably a selfish bastard. Jeremy didn't feel disloyal toward his country because an officer of the crown rubbed him the wrong way. He just didn't like him as his superior officer, nor as a man. He'd much rather camp with the men than

with such an egotistical person.

Jeremy's brows furrowed. He glanced around letting his mind wander. He was a loyal Captain of King George's army, and he knew his duties. He'd been sent to this New World to help reinforce order. Yet in the three years he'd been here, there had only been one major skirmish. Three years—not so long since he stepped off the ship in Boston Harbor to discover an elegant simplicity to the New World.

He had never expected to find a content and happy people. In fact, he hadn't known what to expect. The rumors in England led everyone to believe this foreign land contained wild, untamed low-class people, and their only help relied on the King's support and control. From his observations, they seemed undemanding, proud, and surprisingly, strong and independent.

Jeremy took in a slow, deep breath and smelled the clean crisp breeze that was so unlike the stale air of London. Now, his time in this New World was short, and he was sure he'd miss the fragrance of sweet autumn dew. He'd experienced all the seasons here, but this turned out to be his favorite.

Though autumn lingered on the edge of winter, the breeze felt more on the warm side, not like the damp fall season in England. Strange, the farmers called it Indian summer. This unusual foreign land continued to fascinate him. Harvest time seemed a vibrant center of these people's lives, unlike in the London society he had left behind. Just days before, he'd watched some farmers bustle about squirreling away supplies for the long winter ahead. Though a necessary labor, the colonists performed it in such a way of thankfulness—as if they needed no more than that which the earth gave them. Strange—he'd miss this New World once he returned to England.

Whoa," Anne Heaton commanded, pulling back on the reins, bringing the team of horses to a halt

near the corral. She glanced over at her daughter seated beside her on the old wooden buckboard seat and grinned. "It turned out to be a pleasant ride to town. Don't you think? Hope we didn't forget anything."

Katherine shot a quick glance back at the supplies they had purchased at the mercantile. "Oh, I think we got everything and then some."

The cool breeze brushed her long hair from her shoulders. Shivering, she felt the chill through her thin cotton dress. "Brr, we got home in time. Temperature drops in the late afternoons-winter's not far off."

Anne's dark-eyed gaze took in the farm. "I'm sure you're right, and we have lots to do before it sets in."

Katherine climbed down from the wagon just as she caught a slight movement near the barn door. Grinning, she raised her hand in a quick, friendly wave toward a scrawny black boy.

A bright smile flashed across his face.

She shuddered, returning Eli's smile. Gathering her hooded cloak tighter around her body, she made a mental note to get the boy a heavier jacket if he continued to do chores for them throughout the winter.

"Mother, you go in while Eli and I unhitch the horses."

"All right, have him fetch the supplies. I'll get a good fire started in the hearth to warm the house."

Katherine motioned Eli to come help, but she noticed the boy's wide grin of white teeth fade into suspicion when his round black eyes trailed away from hers toward the galloping sound of horses. The shy boy stepped behind the barn door.

A quick glance over her shoulder revealed two Redcoats.

Katherine sucked in a quick breath. British soldiers. She lifted her hand to shade her eyes from

the low afternoon sun. What did they want?

Stepping around the wagon, she touched her mother's arm and indicated the oncoming visitors.

A hurried look in the direction of the barn told her Eli's wrinkled brow detected concern. She watched him go unnoticed by the soldiers and knew he would slip out the back door of the old barn.

Her frown shot back to the unwelcome callers.

Captain Burke struggled to remove his gaze from the elegant creature before him. *An image of rare beauty.* The afternoon sun on its trek westward complimented the two attractive women standing near the team of horses. Reflections of the natural light illuminated the young woman's face framed by her long, shimmering hair.

He reined in his horse alongside of his commander and gazed upon the woman. The aura around the redhead matched the high-spirited chestnut horse next to her.

"Ladies," Harrington greeted them in his condescending manner. Without dismounting, he stated, "You fine-looking women shouldn't be out here. Man's work, isn't it?"

Her mother's cool, but polite manner addressed the officers. "How kind of you to be concerned with our welfare. You shouldn't have come all this way to inform us such a task ill-benefits our station."

"My duty to the fairer sex, ma'am." His gaze narrowed. "May I speak with the man of this settlement?"

"Katherine." Anne's low voice trailed to her daughter's ears. "Tend the horses."

With her gaze on the strangers, Katherine took the reins from her mother. Frowning, she noticed her mother's innate calmness, but alert eyes turned from her to face the officers.

Slowly, Katherine slid the leather-worn reins along the neck of the horses and over their soft

velvet noses. With a slight jerk on the lead, she walked them toward the barn. Unwilling to leave her mother alone, she stopped short of the entrance. Without a second glance, she listened while tying the reins to the corral post.

“My husband, sir, is dead. I’ve been a widow some time, now.”

Harrington tossed a skeptical glimpse toward his captain. His gaze skirted the farmhouse area. “No doubt, an untimely and violent death...such a common thing in this harsh and untamed land.”

Katherine glared in the officer’s direction, bells going off inside her brain from the man’s arrogant tone and attitude.

She heard her mother take in a deep breath and in her low, controlled voice, she said, “If I may ask, sir, what is the purpose of your visit?”

“By all means. I’m Colonel Bernard Harrington, and this is Captain Jeremy Burke. We are officers of His Majesty King George. And, you are...”

“Anne Heaton. This is my farm.”

“My dear, I must commend you on such a fine place.”

“Sir?” Anne stiffened.

Harrington raised an eyebrow and declared, “I’m sure you’re aware of his Majesty’s dominions in America and the Act hereby that the colonies must provide quarters for his officers. I am an officer of the Crown; therefore, I instruct you to grant us living quarters. You appear to have sufficient room for me and my captain.”

Katherine glared at the over-stuffed, arrogant man. They barged into their home neither caring how intrusive they were nor how unwanted. She glanced at her mother and noticed her slight hesitation.

“Of course.” Her mother’s lightened tone aimed toward her. “Katherine, please go prepare a room for

the two officers.”

Stunned, Katherine’s eyes widened. She couldn’t make her feet move. How could her mother do such a thing? Who cared what *His Majesty’s act* stated. They had no right.

“Katherine.”

Against her will, she headed for the back door of the farmhouse. Placing her foot on the step, she hesitated, turned, and shot one more glare of disgust toward the colonel.

The captain’s lips curled upward in a slight smile. The beauty with her obvious dislike for the colonel still had not given him a glance.

Spellbound, Jeremy studied her proud poise. She looked familiar. He’d been in her presence before, but where?

He stared at the door where the elegant creature disappeared. When he finally looked down at Anne, he noticed a strong resemblance between mother and daughter, and most surely, in spirit too. Independence, pride, and self-confidence were not common traits found in many women, at least, in the English women he knew.

The suspicious colonel glanced his way and announced, “We’ll find a nearby place adequate for the troops and return before dark.” Without another word, Harrington pulled on the horse’s reins and headed in the direction of town.

Jeremy nodded politely to Anne, and then followed but not without stealing one more look toward the house.

When he caught up to Harrington, the commander turned to him with a smirk on his lips.

“Well, well, well, Captain, this could prove quite an adventurous stay after all. Don’t you think? Who knows what could happen while under a roof with

two good-looking females.”

He snickered. “Yup, all kinds of possibilities.”

Despondent over the thought of how Harrington’s mind worked, Jeremy felt an emotional conflict regarding the state of affairs in this New World. He felt uneasy intruding on the lives of the people of this land. A vision of a fiery-spirited redhead flashed across his mind.

Shouldn’t they have some rights, or some say?

Jeremy sucked in a deep wearisome breath. His duty as a soldier was not to think, but to follow orders.

“Captain, I’ve heard the name before-Heaton. Where? Sound familiar to you, Burke?”

Now, he remembered. How could he ever forget those large round eyes painfully staring at him?

“Yes sir. I believe the Heaton boy was arrested several winters ago for hanging a British agent.”

“Ah, yes.” He nodded. “I assume the kid’s related to the women in some way.”

Jeremy nodded. Most likely his mother and sister he thought. He could never forget her face, or the horror in her expression that night she appeared out of nowhere.

“Hmm, how convenient.” The Colonel straightened in the saddle, “We’re taking up quarters at the home of the Heaton renegade.”

“Probably.” Jeremy frowned. He didn’t like it. Nothing good could come of living with this family.

“Doesn’t he have a bounty on his head?”

“I think so.”

“Do you have any details?” the Colonel asked, slowing his horse to a walk.

“Not much. I arrived right after the incident took place. All started by a group that claimed to be members of the so-called Sons of Liberty. Suspect they’re the ones that helped him escape. At first there seemed to be some concern the farmer rebel would stir up more trouble, but it’s been peaceful in

this area. He's probably gone."

"We'll get him. Sons of Liberty, my ass, more like sons of traitors." Kicking his horse in the flanks, the Colonel ordered, "Stay alert, Captain, for any devious activities going on around that farm."

Jeremy allowed the commander's incensed annotations fade, while his mind floated in a different direction. The striking young patriot woman certainly appeared completely opposite from the women he knew in England.

Her mother called her Katherine. How fitting.

The instant Eli's eyes spotted the British soldiers, he took off through the barn and out the back in such a hurry that he barely registered the sharp rocks beneath his bare feet.

He approached a cellar door behind the old Baptist Church house, and without a second thought of the required secret knock, he burst through to find James and Paul sitting across from Norton, Thomas, and a few others.

James jumped when the door flew open. He snatched up his wood grain fifty-caliber pistol and aimed.

"You almost got yourself shot, boy," James yelled. He lowered his weapon to the table and stared at him.

Eli doubled over, gasping for air. "James! James!"

James frowned.

"The soldiers...at yo farm," he stuttered through quivering lips. When James leaped to his feet and shoved his pistol into his holster, Eli stepped back. But not fast enough. He cringed as James grabbed his arm.

"They're what? What did they do?"

"I see and hear nothin'. Just saw'em there."

"How many?"

"Two. Theys officers. Theys talkin' to yo ma and

sister.”

James released the boy. Absorbed in thought, he paced in front of the other men, contemplating. He welcomed any action against the Redcoats, short of doing something that could cause harm to his family.

Since the murder of his father, James had changed. Out of his uncontrollable contempt for the Redcoats grew hatred, and an impatient, unrelenting hunger for revenge. He liked being known as one of the most aggressive, sadistic, patriots around. His strong animosity toward the intruders weighed heavily on his mind.

James' gaze swung to Paul's concerned expression.

“What do you think, James? They must've been tipped off in Boston on your whereabouts.”

“No, no way exists for them to know we've relocated back here.” However, like his best friend, James' doubts rushed to the surface.

“Even if you're right, we can't assume. They might know you're in the area.”

Paul's father, Thomas, agreed. “He's right...you'd better find a place to hide low until we find out what or who they're after.”

James nodded. “I'll find a place.”

Turning to Paul, his brows furrowed. “Ride out to the farm and make sure all is well. Keep an eye on Mother and Katie, and see what they have to say about those Brits.”

“Sure, no need to ask. Just stay in touch.” Holstering his pistol, Paul headed through the trap door.

Paul restrained from pushing his horse to a full gallop toward the Heaton farm. He didn't want to draw unwanted attention from any Redcoats that might be in an inconspicuous place. Nowadays, spies could emerge anywhere, especially if they heard

rumors of James' return. In an attempt to appear unhurried, he settled into the saddle while watching the road ahead. To keep his worried thoughts off Katie, he centered on the earlier discussions.

Meeting in the daytime was unusual and precarious, but their emergency gathering had been necessary. They probably should have waited until dark instead of risk being noticed, especially by those American supporters of the crown. Sure as hell, they'd inform the British officials if they suspected the slightest gathering.

Paul wasn't sure they really needed to discuss the protest linked to the Sons of Liberty and the burning of the Massachusetts lieutenant governor's house.

He grinned. Well, sometimes action aimed toward freedom was worthy of praise and pride even if it required violence.

He kicked the horse in the flanks to move a little faster. It would take him an eternity to reach the farm at such a snail's pace.

Darkness blanketed the sky by the time he stood on the Heaton porch. He knocked and held his breath, and then pounded his knuckles against the door. He shifted from one foot to the other, waiting. The door creaked open and large, worried eyes met his.

"Paul." Katherine smiled, but her vision scurried out toward the dark road. She pulled the door open wider, stepped out, reached her arms around his neck, and gave him an affectionate hug.

Paul sensed her nervous concern. "Eli told us you had visitors. Are you all right?"

"We're fine. Where's—"

"James didn't come. He's hiding. We weren't sure if the Redcoats knew of his return."

"Oh, thank goodness." Katherine's soft voice hesitated, before she said, "The two officers...they'll be taking quarters here."

“What?” Paul’s hands went to his pistol, and he quickly swung his gaze toward the road.

“I don’t remember their names. There’s a colonel and his captain. They said they needed our place while their regiment’s here.” She glanced back toward at the house. “Mother and I just prepared supper for them. I thought you were them.”

“I don’t like it. What else did they say?”

“Oh, Paul, they were so arrogant. They claim the right to intrude on our lives because of an act passed by that King George.”

Paul reached out and squeezed her arm in a worried gesture. He understood; though he was not happy.

“Katie, if you refuse to assist these officers it might cause suspicion and draw attention. We can’t afford to have them snooping around. Not now. Not with James so close.”

Paul’s mind twisted with the thoughts of the Redcoats in the ladies’ home. “Tell me, what else did they say? Did they mention the duration of their stay?”

“No, nothing else, except they would return by dark, so maybe you should go. We’ll be all right.”

“Are you sure?”

“What options do we have? They’re officers...and, I hope, gentlemen.”

Shaking his head, Paul glanced over his shoulder. He squinted down the long dark road for signs of movement and turned back. “We have none. Besides, I heard about several colonists wounded in a skirmish when they refused, so let’s play it safe. Who knows, maybe you can hear some crucial information from the officers.”

Katherine nodded.

“Stay safe, Katie,” he mumbled, staring into her troubled green eyes.

He knew they weren’t in a position to disagree with the Redcoats. Turning, he stepped down off the

porch and grabbed the reins, and then glanced up at Katie, "My farm's not far. Send Eli if there's a problem."

Paul stared intently down the dark road. Mounting, he aimed his horse toward the woods, so he could circle the long way around to his farm and elude the officers. *More British soldiers, not good.*

Katherine pulled the golden brown loaf from the brick fire oven, saturating the air with its yeast-leavened aroma. She heard her mother open the front door and greet their new houseguests.

By the time the Redcoats had returned late last night, she had retired, only by her mother's demand. Then, at sunrise, they had saddled their horses and rode off. Their day turned out to be no different from any other while tending to their chores except for the extra preparations required for the supper meal.

Yet, to have men in their home was unsettling. If only James still lived with them, but he didn't. He had to hide or be hung. *Goodness. Forget it Katherine. For James' sake, she had to be brave.*

When the colonel entered the kitchen, Katherine continued to place the food on the table without a glance toward him. If this first day's routine became the pattern of their stay, and then maybe, just maybe, she and her mother could survive this invasion.

Out of the corner of her eye, she kept the rude colonel in sight. His behavior showed neither manners, nor appreciation. He pulled out a chair, grabbed a fork, and motioned with his hand for his supper to be served like an old, pompous King.

Clenching her jaws to keep from reprimanding the unpleasant man, Katherine poured him a cup of coffee. She hated these intruders sitting at her table.

"Katherine, dear."

"Yes, Mother."

"Please fetch the captain for supper. He went to

the barn to tend their horses. Oh, and show him which stalls to use.”

“But, Mother-” She hesitated. Leaving her mother alone in the company of the Redcoat was not to her liking. “It’s all right; you’ll be in shortly.”

Katherine reached for her shawl, opened the backdoor, and turned to give the repulsive officer a scowl. He had not waited for anyone. He shoveled food into his big mouth, acting as if it were his last meal.

A short, disgusted breath escaped her lips. She shook her head toward the uncouth man, and then shut the door behind her. *Too bad it wasn’t his last meal.*

Revolted, Katherine rushed across the yard, slipped through the barn door, and glanced around to find the other intruder.

Her eyes focused on his back at the far end of the barn. She could hear him mumble. Stepping closer, she paused and listened.

His low, soothing tone serenely spoke to the animal while he brushed its shiny coat.

She fought against recognizing this Redcoat had a sensitive side to his demeanor and even admiration for his animal. Her brow wrinkled. These were things his colonel didn’t have, she was sure. The selfish man in her house certainly had no respect for humans, much less animals.

Clearing her throat, Katherine drew the captain’s attention. “Sir, I trust you found the feed and hay for your horses.”

Jeremy turned to absorb the vision before him. “Yes, you are very kind.”

He hadn’t expected her. To touch his gaze upon her played havoc with his heart, not to mention his thoughts. The extraordinary woman with her large green eyes stared into his with a command of confidence and warning.

Absorbed in her direct stare, which told him to conduct himself appropriately, Jeremy pulled his gaze from hers to trail over her long dark-red hair. It flowed down her back, free, like a beautiful horse's mane, enticing. How would it feel to run fingers through such silky—?

"Mother wanted you to know supper's ready. Sir, I dare say if you don't go now, there might not be food left. Your colonel seems to be a glutton."

Her firm voice brought his eyes to her lips, and then to her squinting, stern glare, staring straight at him. Laughing in delight, he settled the horses inside the stall, turned, and gazed at her serious expression.

He tilted his head, arched a brow, and said, "Lead the way." Glued to the vision before him, he would willingly follow.

Katherine suffered a slight rapid jitter in her stomach when his stark blue eyes disclosed amusement rather than intimidation. He suddenly looked familiar. *Had she seen him before?* Dismissing the thought, she stepped back.

"You, un...Captain, this stall will be yours during your stay, and might I ask, how long that should be?"

"I hope our inconvenience is only for a short time. It's actually my commander's decision on the length of our stay. I'm truly sorry for our incursion."

Shocked at his politeness, and for something to do, Katherine slammed the stall gate shut and turned to head back toward the house.

By the time Jeremy seated himself at the table the colonel had finished eating. The overstuffed officer had settled back on two legs of his chair and was puffing away on one of his well worn wooden pipes. He displayed a content gleam in his eyes.

Jeremy, aware of the women scurrying about the kitchen, ate his supper silently. His attention

wavered from his commander's small talk about the regiment to the irresistible glances he kept stealing in Katherine's direction. She never spoke a word—just helped her mother wash utensils and put them away.

When she knelt to place the iron pot on its holder over the hearth, he couldn't pull his gaze away. The bright yellow flames played shimmering sparkles on the highlights of her long hair falling over her shoulder.

Once finished, he pushed back his chair, patted his stomach, and said, "Thank you, ladies. You prepared a delicious meal."

"Thank you," Anne mumbled.

Gathering his plate, she glanced at her daughter. "Katherine, show these gentlemen to the sitting room," and then she added, "You might want to stoke the fire." Turning her attention back to the men, she said, "You can relax and have a smoke there and not be disturbed."

Dropping the drying cloth on the large wooden table, Katherine strolled toward the door without a glance toward them. Her stiff voice mumbled, "This away."

With a fleeting look at her mother's warning expression, she quickly added, "Please."

"Captain," Harrington muddled his words with a loud, wide-mouth yawn. "I'll have another smoke out on the porch. Let the woman show you, and then come out. We need to discuss a few things."

"Yes, sir." Jeremy followed Katherine down a long hall where she stopped at a door.

"This is our sitting room," she indicated, opening the door. She turned a quick peek up to find his clear, blue eyes lingering on her face—a little, unsettling flutter feathered over her.

Clearing her throat, she said, "Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to get back to the kitchen to help

Mother.”

Katherine turned to take her leave when the touch of his hand rested on her arm. Glancing down at the tan hand, a tingle traveled up to the nerve in her neck.

She raised her head and stared into his eyes, eyes she had seen before.

He didn't pull away, and his gaze poured into hers, sending a strong message that tugged at her heartstring, an attraction she'd never felt before.

“Katherine, may I call you Katherine?” His voice drifted to her senses.

Her name sounded like sweet music from his lips, romantic. She couldn't deny he had a seductive way about him when they locked eyes. However, the disturbed beating of her heart annoyed her. After all, he was the enemy.

Katherine jerked her arm from his and unlocked her gaze. Without thinking, she pressed the palm of her hand against his chest, covered with the red and white uniform. It reminded her of what he represented.

Lifting her head, she stared into his eyes. Taking in a quick short breath, Katherine suddenly recognized him.

“You, sir...you have charge over me and my mother. We are at your mercy in our home, so it's your choice to call me Katherine if you wish. It makes no mind to me.”

When she referred to him as an enemy, he dropped his arm to his side.

He softly apologized. “I'm just a person, doing a job, and I want no harm coming to you or your mother.”

“Sir, you are a soldier of the King of England...a Redcoat. In my eyes, responsible for killing my father.”

“It was an unfortunate circumstance, and I regret it happened to your family.”

“Even so, you are responsible. Don’t you always follow your orders? You were there that night.”

“Katherine—”

“It very well could have been you who pulled the trigger that murdered my father.”

“Katherine, it wasn’t...”

“It matters not. Not now. A Redcoat caused his death, and you are a Redcoat.”

“We’re not all in belief of what we are charged to do.”

Katherine took a step back and stared. Words flowed from her trembling body. “Then, Captain, you have a problem within your soul to decide what is right. You should know we’re simple people, living uncomplicated lives. We’re happy in the life intended for us. We don’t ask for much, and God is our provider, not the crown of England. God is our King and he guides us to do right...it’s that plain and simple.”

Her sharp voice struck a note.

His eyes softened and melted into hers, unveiling a compassion she didn’t want to know existed.

A quick pivot headed her down the hall. One thing for sure, she would stay clear of the captain, and most assuredly, suppress the growing attraction for the handsome man.

Jeremy leaned against the porch post of the Heaton farmhouse, waiting. He scanned the surrounding fields until his focus landed on two impatient soldiers. Their restless horses stomped the dry, dusty ground.

Seconds later, Harrington’s boots echoed on the wooden planks of the porch when he stepped from the front door. Ignoring the riders, he paced back and forth.

Harrington stood at Jeremy’s side. Contemplating, he slapped a riding glove against his

leg. After a moment, he placed his black hat on his head, and then squared his shoulders and said, "Captain, Gage only wants me for three days while he's en-route to Boston."

"Sir?"

"Since he's been headquartered in New York, he's been busy with the Indian uprising. I wouldn't doubt if, in due course, he moves his headquarters to Boston. Especially, if the friction increases between us and the colonists."

"Do you think he wants to see you in regards to those articles Adams wrote in the colonial newspaper? Not to mention the pamphlets spreading throughout the colonies."

"Huh, my guess, too," Harrington answered, frowning. "We all know those letters encouraged the colonists to take action against our government. Hence, the orders for those damn newspapers to stop circulation."

"In all likelihood, it's one of the reasons for so many warships in the Boston Harbor? I hear they're armed with fifty cannons each."

Jeremy's skin crawled.

"Mark my word, Samuel Adams and his articles will come to an end for stirring sentiment against the British. One day General Gage will issue a warrant for his arrest, and he'll be sent to England along with other American agitators for trial."

Jeremy glanced up in time to catch sight of Katherine rounding the corner of the house heading toward the barn. As always, her beauty distracted him.

Harrington stepped down from the porch. "Captain, I'll send word if my return is delayed."

"Yes sir," he remarked in his military tone.

With difficulty, Jeremy followed his commander to his horse and forced himself to focus on his duties. He attached the satchel to Harrington's horse, stepped back, and stood at attention.

“There’s one other concern, Burke,” Harrington said, mounting. “I suggest you keep an open eye around here for any suspicious person. Some traitor might try to contact these women. They could be the means for us to capture that turncoat Heaton.”

“Sir.” Jeremy saluted Colonel Harrington, and then lingering, he watched for a moment until the men rode toward the open road.

A movement in his peripheral vision drew his attention to the figure exiting the barn. His eyes followed her strides toward the back door until their gazes connected. She jerked her head up with an air of arrogance, and then marched into the house.

Jeremy grinned. Her spirit intrigued him. She had managed to keep distance between them. More than a week had passed since they’d settled in, and their temporary home at the Heaton farm bordered on the tense side. It didn’t help matters when the colonel taunted the ladies at meal times. Jeremy knew they were ill at ease in their own home, and he didn’t like it.

Mixed emotions surfaced. It would be better to leave the farm for their well-being, but he wanted to stay close to observe, or keep them safe if needed. In all honesty, he knew his attachment to the place related to his captivation with the Heaton woman. A dangerous road to follow...after all her brother had a wanted poster hanging over his head.

Her brother, the turncoat, a renegade against the King of England, murdered an agent of the crown. Yet, he was a hero in the eyes of the colonists.

What would he have done in the same situation? The kid only killed the man who killed his father. What if he were born and reared in this new land? Would he not also want independence and freedom of choice?

It was something to think about—or, maybe, because he belonged to the crown, he shouldn’t go down that trail.

A quick glance at the sun inspired him to stop searching for excuses to delay the ride to the Robinson's farm.

Jeremy walked out of the Robinson's barn with the young, skinny lieutenant, a conceited know-it-all in his early twenties. He skimmed his eyes over the farm area and studied the British troops dispersed throughout the yard.

Most were busy pitching tents and unloading equipment. The rules given by the Quartermaster General were strict, and it was Jeremy's duty to check closely to make sure his men followed those regulations. To him this proved to be more of a precaution for his men than for the officers. He knew the policy of separate company could create problems if not carried out correctly. He didn't like the power play attitude of some officers and made sure there were no opportunities for them to afflict unnecessary punishment on his men.

"Sir, we're about organized here. Think this place will work out?" asked the eager lieutenant.

Nodding, Jeremy replied, "This location's fairly secure."

"Yes, sir, but not so close to you and Colonel Harrington as I'd like. But it'll suffice. Besides, the colonel seems to prefer the Heaton farm."

"Uhm," Jeremy mumbled. His mind lingered on all the commotion and preparations.

When he glanced across the field, his brows pulled together.

The man they called Norton stood eyeing them.

Jeremy watched him mount and ride off. He dismissed the man and turned his attention back to the lieutenant's words.

"And now you've got it all to yourself...pretty ladies and all."

Jeremy lashed a ricocheted glance at the lieutenant, warning the young soldier silently. "We'll

know for certain if General Gage wants us stationed here when the colonel returns, but keep the troops prepared and on alert.”

“Yes, sir,” he properly replied. The lieutenant saluted his superior and turned in the direction of the field site.

Satisfied after his inspection of several tents designated as sleep quarters, Jeremy stepped out into the open yard and directed his long stride toward his horse. Glancing around, his eyes rested on a group of colonists lined up on the old farmhouse steps.

Two British soldiers, seated behind a table on the porch, handed out leaflets for each colonist to sign. An *Oath of Loyalty*. Once they repeated the oath, they signed their name in the book for the Crown of England.

Jeremy listened to a dirty, toothless old man recite the words. He shook his head, wondering how sincere the old geezer would really be toward the British Crown.

Jeremy trotted his horse toward the Heaton barn just in time to catch a glimpse of Katherine. He slowed the horse to allow his ever-increasing interest to take in the view. She gracefully led the stallion out of the barn.

A slight quiver stirred within him. *Foolish man*. Yet, he couldn't help but notice how charming she was, even in her simple cotton skirt and short jacket. Her hair, tied back with a yellow ribbon, sparkled in the late afternoon sun.

He observed her smooth fluid movements when she mounted and straddled the horse as easy as any man he knew. With a slight kick in the flanks, her horse cantered in the opposite direction.

Now, where do you suppose she's off too in such a hurry? Lost in the scene, he failed to notice the man strolling toward him from the house.

“Captain...Captain,” Norton hollered, hot on his heels.

“Yes?” Jeremy’s impatient tone showed his resentment of the interruption. Not waiting for Norton to catch up, he dismounted and walked his horse toward the barn.

“Do you have a moment?” Norton asked, running to catch the barn door before it closed in his face.

“My moments are few, Mr. Norton,” Jeremy stated. Without a glance in the obnoxious man’s direction, he proceeded to unbuckle the saddle strap.

“I assure you it’s of interest to your colonel.”

“And, what makes you think so, Mr. Norton?”

“Sir, it has to do with James Heaton.”

Horrified, Anne watched three relentless British soldiers search through her home. Their huge shadows bounced off the walls while they pushed their way past her with repugnant, glaring eyes.

Anne grabbed her long nightgown tight around her quivering body. She begged, "Please, sir. Please, we haven't done anything...my husband is..."

The flushed-face, angry soldier ignored Anne and ordered, "If he's here, I want him found."

"Please," Anne persisted, fear engorged her pounding heart. "My husband isn't here."

"Your husband is dead," stormed the furious soldier.

His cold words impelled a forceful shock rippling through her like a bolt of lightning. Uncontrollable tears streamed down Anne's cheeks.

"Unless you reveal where he's hiding, we'll hang you for treason in the name of the Crown." His hard glare demanded an answer.

Unable to speak, Anne's mind raced. Daniel...dead. Who? James! They want James.

"We'll find him." The impatient soldier shoved Anne to the floor.

A water veil covered her eyes. Another Redcoat disappeared down the hallway. Anne's terror increased when the next second she heard her daughter's panicked scream.

"Mother!"

Infuriated, the soldier dragged the struggling girl down the hall, and then effortlessly thrust the

small, weightless child to the floor. "No one else is here, sir. Just the woman and the girl."

Through tears of grief, Anne hurried to encircle protective arms around her crying daughter.

"What do they want, Mother?"

Anne did not answer, but waited with contempt for the soldiers to finish rummaging their home.

Then suddenly the huge angry man turned and stepped toward her.

Terrified, Anne stared at the ugly gleam in his beady eyes.

"Rip this place apart," his harsh voice shouted. "The colonel wants him found."

He grabbed Anne's arm—

"Mother. Mother. You're dreaming, wake up." Katherine stroked her mother's forehead.

The tender voice flowed over Anne's senses. She opened her eyelids to the candlelight flickering shadows over Katherine's concerned expression. At first, confusion took over until she realized she had been asleep. "A dream?"

Katherine nodded in silence. Worry creased her forehead.

Anne took in a disturbed breath and gave her a slight smile. "I'm all right, dear, go back to bed."

Katherine leaned down and studied her mother's face before she gently kissed her on the forehead.

Anne looked into her green eyes filled with sympathetic compassion, and to alleviate her own troubled mind, she reached up and touched her daughter's cheek.

"Really, dear, I'm fine."

Pulling the covers around her shoulders, she watched her daughter step to the door, glance back one more time, and then, close the door.

In order to shutout the thoughts haunting her night, Anne pulled the covers over her head. A deep sigh escaped her lips. If only the dreams would stop.

Yet, the reality of the nightmare could not be forgotten. Oh, how she missed Daniel.

Anne rolled over gathering the thick quilts up around her shoulders. His vision appeared in her mind. She missed him so much. Without his strength, life had been exhausting.

Oh, Daniel, there's a bounty on your son's head. He's involved with an underground organization called the Sons of Liberty and their secret meetings. We hardly ever rest our eyes on him. His sole purpose for living is to revenge your death.

Then, there's your little girl—a woman now. You should see her, Daniel. She is your high-spirited daughter, a stunning, headstrong young woman, and like you, full of passion for living. James is the most important person in her life—she's so devoted to him. I fear, more often than not, passion rules your daughter's heart and not her head. She's a worry. Oh, Daniel, Daniel.

Anne rolled her face into the pillow and let the tears flow.

The cold, wood floor creaked beneath Katherine's bare feet as she made her way back to her bedroom. Since dawn approached, she decided against the warm comfort of her bed, and instead, slipped her bare toes into a pair of thick, wool-knitted socks. A good strong cup of coffee would help sooth her disturbed emotions.

A shudder surged through Katherine's body. She hugged the thick, cotton robe tight around her, more from memories than cold. Making her way along the narrow hallway, she pressed her lips together, drew her brows, and blinked to keep the tears back. Even though the nightmares were never discussed, Katherine knew what her mother dreamed. It had been a nightmare for her, too.

Frowning, she hesitated, and then tiptoed past

the door of the officer's bedroom. When were they going to leave?

Katherine entered the cooking area quietly, grabbed the poker, and stirred the ashes in the hearth. Within seconds flames ignited, hungry for the extra logs. She tossed in a couple and stood back to watch the sparks lick and nibble at the firewood until it came to life.

Thoughts of her father spread a smile over her lips. She recalled her younger days, riding bareback alongside him while he searched for cattle gone astray. Oh, what cherished memories of those special days when they fished in the old duck pond.

Like James, she helped on the farm alongside her pa. She learned how to ride a horse before she could walk. Of course, her mother reprimanded her for not wearing a hat to keep her skin creamy white. Her father always got the blunt end of her mother's scolding because he didn't insist. It didn't matter; she loved the life she had with her father and brother.

Katherine hung the pot on the hook over the fire, added the coffee grounds, and then poured water from the pitcher into the old pot.

The heat from the fire soothed the chill from her cheeks. She folded her arms against her chest as the warmth sank through her thick gown into her bare skin beneath. With a deep sigh, she lingered close to the large, opened hearth.

Orange flames gnawed away at the wood, spreading heat throughout the kitchen. Visions of her father materialized causing her mind to drift. The night the Redcoats killed him had been the most traumatic time in her life.

She would never be able to forget the panic she

felt that night. Now, her pa was gone, James had to hide out for who knows how long, and Paul—if it wasn't for him would they have survived? Sometimes, he, too, disappeared for weeks at a time, but he always returned with news about James.

The boiling, black liquid brought Katherine back to reality. After a couple minutes, she grabbed a cotton pad and carefully lifted the old iron pot from its hook. The strong coffee aroma drifted to her nose. Hmm, this should wake her up. She hurried, poured a cup, and hung the container back on the hook before the pad absorbed too much heat.

Katherine sipped the much-needed drink, aware of its steamy liquid gliding down her throat. Its warmth spread all the way to her toes. A deep sigh raised her chest and escaped. She stared into the hearth, slipping into a trance. The flames licked away at the logs splashing the walls with dreamlike silhouettes.

Things weren't easy, but they weren't bad either, especially with Paul's help. Placing the hot mug on the counter as she reminisced, Katherine turned to reach above the cupboard for the wooden box.

Bending down near the fire, she touched a round wooden flint stick to the flames. It burst into a sizzling bright yellow. She cupped her hand around the flickering flame, walked over to the kitchen table, and lit several candles.

Stepping around, she caught her breath when a tall dark figure stepped into the kitchen.

She stared, following his dark sultry gaze trail over her rumpled hair, down her nightshirt to her heavy wool stockings. She wiggled her toes. He made her feel naked.

Her heart flipped shooting a quivering stir deep within the pit of her abdomen.

“Captain. You do have a quiet way about you.”

“My apology, I didn’t mean to slip in on you.”

Katherine stepped back and tossed the flint stick into the hearth. Breathing deeply, she slowly glanced back. His eyes lingered on her.

She grasped her steamy mug, looked at him, and asked, “Would you care for a cup of coffee?”

“Please, it smells good.” His low smooth voice flowed to her senses.

Katherine heard him step near—close enough to hear her heart pound. She poured his drink, and then turned slightly, keeping her focus on his hand when he reached out for the cup.

Absorbed in the new sensations churning inside, she lifted her head. His intense gaze, shadowed by the firelight, pulled at her body. Her muscles tightened.

Jeremy stepped back.

His movement broke the trance she had tripped into, yet, all control of her body hovered on the edge of complete collapse. Unable to remove her eyes, her study followed him when he squatted in front of the hearth and stared into the flames.

The loud crackle of the firewood echoed through the silence. He appeared sad.

Her gaze traveled over his handsome face. His thick dark hair, pulled tight in a leather tie, hung down his back. Equally thick, long eyelashes hovered over expressive blue eyes. A picture she would not soon forget.

Heaven help her, she could not deny the attraction growing within, though he represented the enemy.

Suddenly he stood to his full height, took a long slow drink, and then handed her the empty cup. Before she could say anything, his hand rested against her shoulder. Ever so gently, fingers ran down a strand of her hair.

Katherine froze. Mesmerized, she tingled from his touch. Her body swayed. Lost in his seductive

draw, she looked up, but her vision could go no further than his lips.

A tiny voice deep within her soul warned, but she had no control. The foreign passion sent a thrill through her body ignoring the caveat signals striking somewhere in her brain.

His gentle hands covered her shoulders, and without much effort, closed the space between them.

The warmth of his lips fueled her desire, weakening her further. Lips liquefied, sweeping her into an ebb tide of no return.

When he pushed her arms-length away, Katherine's eyes flew open.

He dropped his hands and stepped toward the hearth. "*That* should not have happened."

His low voice, barely audible, left her speechless.

Jeremy faced the hearth. He stared into the fire, head hung low. Slowly he swung his head toward her and let his gaze roam over her.

For a moment, Katherine thought she would drown in his longing expression.

She stared at his lips and knew her wanting gaze pleaded for his touch and the desire of the excitement he created. Now, she didn't care. Her body wanted him to control her.

Katherine's muscles locked in place to keep from moving closer.

Then, just as quickly as he had ended the kiss, he appeared indifferent, and with an unreadable expression, he mumbled, "I didn't realize your mornings started so early. Is everything all right? You appeared to be deep in thought when I entered."

Shaken by his sudden change of attitude, she forced an uninterested tone. If he could pretend the kiss never happened, she could too. "Things are as right as they can be at this point."

Katherine strolled to the table and set his mug down. "The rightness of it would be if the British soldiers were to leave."

She stared back into the shadowed face of her enemy. Oh, God, why couldn't she dislike him? When he smiled, she melted.

"You're right, Katherine, we should leave. However, I'm only a little man in this army, and my word doesn't count. Please, Katherine, be careful, things are heating up extremely fast. King George's demands will be carried out, and I'm a soldier."

She squared her shoulders. "You are, Captain Burke. That you are. You need not remind me again."

Jeremy walked over to the back door, lifted the latch, and pulled it open. Without another word or a glance, he stepped through and disappeared into the early morning dawn.

Katherine stared at the empty space. Dampness flowed in from the autumn coolness of the morning air. A captivating, gray, ghostly sheet of ground fog blanketed the land as well as her heart. She wasn't sure how to deal with the gnawing craving inside—a want she'd never experienced before.

A deep sigh escaped her lips. She picked up her coffee and drew the warm mug against her body. Stepping out onto the porch, she gazed upon the rolling hills beyond the creek. Frost-covered trees held a mist of wonderland. Dazed, Katherine listened to the resonance of the early morning farm.

The misty curtain of fog began to rise to the performances of a wakening earth. A large, stocky, black crow swooped from out of nowhere to identify himself in a familiar hoarse *caw-caw*. In the distance, a rooster announced the arrival of the sun, soon to peek over the fields in the horizon. Small birds chirped *good morning* and took their merry flight to the heights of a new day.

The creaking sound of the heavy barn doors drew her attention across the yard. Her heart quickened when Jeremy walked his saddled horse out of the barn. He shut the large doors, and then

mounted his horse and rode off. He didn't even bother to glance her way.

The sweet music of dawn usually made her feel peaceful, but not this morning. Emotionally confused, she wanted to cry. Squeezing her fingers around the mug, she pressed her lips together.

How did this Redcoat...this soldier, this...this Brit...this enemy find a way into her heart? He couldn't. He wouldn't. She would not allow this unfamiliar pleasure to continue. Such sensations stirring within her body could not happen.

Swallowing hard, she admitted how frightening she felt, but, excited, too. Oh, dear God, it's dangerous. She had to be on guard and make sure there would be no more intimate contact with the handsome Captain.

Katherine closed her eyes. She could still feel his lips, the touch of his hand, and the look in his eyes. Could she be strong? God help her.

"What are you doing out here?"

Startled, Katherine swung around to find her mother's phantom figure standing in the doorway. Shadowed by the bright fire in the hearth, Katherine noticed a swirl of steam drift up from the cup held in her hands.

"Mother, come—the fog's lifting. It's really somewhat magical if you watch it rise to nature's music. Listen."

Anne stepped onto the porch and glanced around. A soft smile spread across her lips while she watched the feathery fog float upward. She too, listened for a moment to the musical morning sounds.

"My dear Katherine, only you would take the time to hear nature's beauty no matter the time of day." Anne glanced at Katherine. Yes, she had grown into a young woman of unusual beauty, sensitive and vivacious.

Oh, Daniel, she may possess my green eyes, but her passion of facing issues head-on happens to be a code of her father. She has your trusting resilience.

Smiling, she touched Katherine's long satin hair, thinking how pretentious she could be at times. Even though she dressed extremely tidy, simple and modest, her personality beamed through, like wearing her hair down instead of swept up and covered with flower straw hats like other young women wore. Occasionally, she even wore a ribbon in her hair in place of a hat. One thing was for sure, Katherine had a mind of her own. Regardless of the proper fashion or riding astraddle a horse, Katherine did what came natural.

Anne inhaled a deep breath of crisp air, placed her arm around Katherine's shoulders, and gave her a quick hug, thankful for her and James.

She missed her son, but she was grateful Paul was able to keep her informed. Poor Paul—in love with Katherine—but her daughter's feelings were another matter.

"Come on, dear, let's get breakfast started; Paul's coming soon to finish plowing the back field. If we can get the chores done early, we'll hitch up the wagon and make a trip to town for a few supplies."

"Mother."

"Yes, dear."

Glancing at her mother, Katherine studied the petit woman and knew how strong-willed and protective she was of her family. Her strawberry blond hair, always worn properly swept high in a figure eight, was now in disarray, a tell-tell sign of her disturbed sleep.

"What is it dear," Anne asked. Her tender hand touched Katherine's arm.

"My thoughts of Pa made me feel a little down this morning. I miss him and James."

“Me too.” Anne took a sip of coffee and stared out beyond the field.

“I remember how much he loved you, Mother. The way he could look and smile. He showed you love in so many ways. I remember. How you must miss him. How do you go on? You appear so in control of your emotions.”

Katherine knew it had to be her upbringing. Her mother was born and raised in England where society demanded women to be proper ladies. She was taught by her own mother. No emotional outbreaks were permitted in public by women. Suddenly, Katherine wondered how hard it had been for her father and mother to make such a bold move to America when they were so young.

“I do miss your father, dear. Sometimes more than others.” Anne interrupted her thoughts.

“Me too, mother.” Katherine glanced out over the field with the sun creeping its way over the furrows.

She hugged her mother’s shoulder and said, “I love you, Mother.”

“Why, Katherine dear, I’m so proud of you and James, and Paul. Hmm, dear Paul always comes around when we need him.”

“I loved Pa so much, and yet, some days I can’t remember what he looked like, then other days, the memories hurt because he’s gone.”

“I know, dear, but he wouldn’t want us to be sad.” Turning, Anne headed into the house.

Katherine’s eyes rested on the refreshing glow of the rising sun. The warmth of the bright yellow star spread across her face, reminding her of the earlier encounter.

She had to admit that finding Jeremy standing in the shadows had startled her at first, and then excited her. Dazed, she touched her fingers to her

lips. She'd never experienced her body aroused in such a strong disturbing way. Inhaling the fresh morning air, she released a long slow breath.

Biting her bottom lip, Katherine squeezed her eyes shut to rid herself of the memory, shook her head, and stepped into the house. Joining her mother in the cook area, she focused her thoughts on more pressing matters, of another busy day.

Katherine entered the quiet, humble church through the large, wooden front doors. She hesitated. When the town reverend, standing behind the pulpit with an opened Bible in his hands glanced at her, he immediately nodded his head toward the back room. Afterward, he continued to concentrate on preparing his Sunday sermon.

Katherine rushed by him and entered an opening. She stopped just inside the spacious room, puzzled. The room was empty. Suddenly, from behind, a hand covered her mouth. She caught her breath when the door slammed shut with a loud bang.

“Why are you here?” James’ stern voice filled her ear.

When he released her, she whirled around to face her brother. She grinned. “It’s pleasant to see you, too.” Still, she couldn’t help but let a sigh of relief escape her lips.

“You could’ve been followed.”

“Actually, they wait for you outback. They were quite pleased when I told them where their precious rebel could be found.”

James stared into her eyes, which she knew mirrored his. A worried look transformed into a rare sweet grin, full of his old charm.

“All right, but, you put yourself at risk.”

Katherine cocked her head sideways, fluttered her eyelashes, and framed an innocent appeal. She sweetened her tone, “Please, James, I’m just an

innocent, little church-going lady. No one would find my visit with the preacher curious. Besides, the colonel left for a few days to meet with General Gage.”

“Boston?”

“No, somewhere between here and Boston.”
Laughing, she nodded. “So the table turns.”

“Ah ha, I’m onto your little game now, sis. Since *they* invited themselves into our home, my little sister thinks who is she to argue if it plants a potential informant by pure coincidence. And, I might add, a stunning young woman they can’t resist.”

“Save your flattery for the tarts, dear brother. He left this morning before I could find out much more. And so far, his captain has spent most of his time with the troops out at the Robinsons’ farm.”

“I’ll be glad when they decide to move on.”

“From their conversation at supper last night, that won’t happen anytime too soon.”

James frowned. He didn’t like the situation. “Just stay clear of them but within earshot.”

“Are you in need of anything?” She noticed the dark circles under his eyes. His rebel life in the last few years had taken a toll, making him appear older than his twenty-four years.

His lips drew into a thin smile, and eyes softened, giving a hint of his still youthful age. “Thanks, but Paul brought ample supplies and ammunition.”

“I thought maybe he had...and you’ve also ordered him not to let me out from under his protective wing.” Katherine pouted in disapproval.

“I don’t have to order Paul to do anything where you’re concerned. Besides, it’s best a man lingers near the farm—just in case.”

“I can take care of myself,” Katherine said, a little miffed.

Gently, James took her by the shoulders, and

with a slight squeeze, he confirmed his statement, "So you believe."

"I am not a child."

"Right." He tenderly kissed Katherine's forehead and gave her a quick hug. "I'm glad you came."

"James, do you think the troops are stationed around the area because they've heard you're back?"

"Who knows? My informant hasn't had a hint. Are you sure you didn't hear Harrington say anything of importance?"

"No. Mother did say she overheard the colonel tell his captain he'd be gone for three days, and I overheard them say Gage would in due course move to New York...has to do with the Indian trouble in the west."

"Yeah, well...old news."

"Oh, James, they talked about capturing all those involved with the Sons of Liberty and shipping them off to England for trial—to be hung. If they find you...maybe you should think about leaving."

"Don't worry. I'll not go to England. Besides, right now, it seems the British have more important issues on their mind than to search for me. Things are heating up fast."

Katherine turned to leave, stopped, and glanced back, "Oh, I almost forgot. We also heard there'll be a warrant out on Adams because of his articles."

Laughing, James declared, "Old Adams should keep the newsletters circulating for a long time. His articles keep everyone on fire against the British and ready to fight for their independence. Now, you better get home. Send word through Paul if you need help." He circled his arms around his sister and gave her a tender hug. "Tell Mother I love her."

Katherine stepped through the heavy wooden church doors and glanced around the commons, relieved when she didn't see any suspicious person. Calmly, she mounted her horse and turned toward the farm. Smelling the sweet autumn air, she

studied the sky with the sunset's orange colors filtering on the western horizon. Its warmth spread through her thin cotton dress. She settled into the saddle, slowed the spirited mare's gallop, and relaxed her hold on the reins. She let her mind drift.

James had looked tired. The old worn brown wool coat looked tattered; he definitely needed some warm winter clothes. She'd see to it. Oh, God, keep him safe. They couldn't take chances while the Redcoats were so close.

In no time, she found herself back on the farm, refreshed and excited from her visit with James. Stepping up her pace, Katherine entered the house and glanced around, searching for her mother. Excitement spread across her lips. "Mother," she hollered.

Silence. She hurried down the hallway and up the hardwood stairs to the second level. A quick glance in the bedroom proved it empty. Where did she go? She couldn't wait to let her mother know how James was getting along. Unable to find her, Katherine turned back toward the kitchen.

A figure stepped out in her path.

Startled, she stopped; every muscle in her body grew tense.

He blocked the stairway.

She moved forward, noticing his tentative movement, but his broad shoulders filled the hallway. There was no way for her to pass.

Katherine took in a deep breath, demanding her heart to slow. Looking him straight in his eyes, she released the air from her lungs. To her surprise her voice sounded calm. "Captain Burke...I didn't hear you come in."

Silence consumed the house. Her vision locked with his. She observed his seductive blue eyes roam over her face in a caressing manner. Katherine stood her ground but experienced a surge through her body when his focus rested on her lips.

“I didn’t mean to alarm you.”

Her heart accelerated. Heat flushed her face. A need to put distance between her and this attractive man dropped her gaze to his chest.

“If you’ll excuse me, I need to find my mother.”

“I believe she went into town.” Jeremy’s gentle voice flowed to her senses.

“To town?” Her gaze trailed back to his, soaring into hers.

“Yes, with the man that watches over you all the time.”

“Paul?” Katherine asked. Overwhelmed by his magnetic pull, she self-consciously glanced down the staircase.

“I believe so, yes.”

“Please excuse me, Captain. I need to prepare supper.” When she pushed to move beyond him, he didn’t move.

“Katherine,” he whispered, “You are the most beautiful woman I’ve ever known. You have no idea, do you?”

His low seductive voice wrapped around her heart. It tugged at her sanity, pulling her gaze to his lips. She couldn’t move. Her thumping heart wanted his lips on hers.

The moment her gaze scurried from his lips to his eyes, she remembered his indifferent attitude after they kissed. Defensively, she forced aside the building desires, and with determination, she held her head high and looked directly at him, meeting his intense gaze.

Harsh, soft words declared, “Sir, I dare say you do not know me in the least. We might have exchanged a kiss, but that by no means indicates you have an understanding of who I am.”

Katherine pushed to squeeze past him but froze when she unintentionally brushed against his hard body. A chaotic lapse of her good judgment sent the palm of her hands flat against his chest. She bit her

lower lip and took a short breath through her mouth to control her racing heart. God help her, the overwhelming desire to circle her arms around him contradicted her level-headed thoughts. This officer wasn't going to be that easy to deny. She stared into his eyes, challenging him.

Jeremy caught his breath at the touch of her hand. Captivated with her closeness, he remained stationary. He would not lose the first opportunity to speak to her without that man, or her mother, hovering over her.

Those jaded green eyes were so expressive and full of energy and life. Her spellbinding aura made him want to absorb every inch of her. He curled his fingers into a hard fist to keep from touching her hair, to feel its softness. Drawn to her green pools staring into his eyes, he sensed her discomfort.

Jeremy ordered himself to think logically. He stepped aside and allowed her to rush past. His gaze followed her movement when she bolted down the steps toward the kitchen.

A deep disturbed sigh escaped. Whew, he knew she had no idea the power she had over him. Satisfied and amused, Jeremy smiled to himself and continued to his room for papers he'd nearly forgotten.

Once safe in the cooking area, Katherine occupied her thoughts with the evening meal preparations. Irritated with herself, she grabbed a knife and gripped it tight to keep her hand from shaking.

What's the matter with her? To ever consider a possible attraction toward a British officer can, undeniably, not happen, again...ever...never. James would shoot her. *Stupid girl, you're just infatuated. Get over it.* She took hold of a cabbage head and with a hard forceful slice, she cut it in half.

“Hi, dear.”

Katherine jumped, whirled, and flashed her mother a harsh frown. Pointing the knife, she demanded, “Mother, where have you been?”

Anne glanced at her daughter and raised an eyebrow at her reaction. “I’m sorry. I couldn’t find you to let you know where I was going. I rode over to the Bennett farm for some fresh vegetables.

“Oh, Mother, I saw James,” she whispered.

“When? Where?”

“He’s—” With a glance over her shoulder, Katherine clamped her mouth shut. Jeremy entered the kitchen and stared straight at her. She turned her back to him and continued to slice the cabbage into small pieces.

“Ladies,” his polite voice noticed the interruption he’d caused.

“What can I do for you, Captain Burke?” Anne smiled.

“I need to ride over to the Robinson farm to give some papers to my lieutenant...and, I wondered if I had enough time before supper? I would hate to cause a delay.”

“Oh my, you have plenty enough time. Supper should be ready by the time you return.”

Huh, look at him...always the gentleman. A little irritated at his politeness, Katherine observed him as he bowed his head toward her mother. If he were more like his colonel, she could hate him.

Katherine released a heavy sigh. The day had been long and tedious. She dropped her knitting yarn on the settee and stood. Restless, she ambled over to the fireplace and stared into the dwindling flames. Its warmth touched her face. Absentmindedly, she bent, picked up a small log, and tossed it onto the sparks. Her mind wandered back to the quiet supper earlier.

During the entire meal, she made a point to

avoid his eyes but all the while felt his upon her. Their encounter in the hallway was impossible to dismiss from her thoughts. Gosh, when she flattened her palm against his wall of muscles, tingles awakened her body to new heights she'd never known. The touch of his solid chest and rapid heartbeat when she'd pushed him away played back in her mind—exciting and dangerous.

To scatter her unsettled thoughts, she shook her head and directed her feet over to the window. Sighing, she mumbled, "It's been an unusually warm Indian summer, longer than normal, don't you think, Mother? But when that sun goes down the temperature drops fast." With a quick glance at her mother, she turned her gaze out the window, again, and studied the figure working diligently in the wheat field.

"Uh-huh," Anne quickly glance at her daughter, frowned, and commented, "You know, the chilly evenings are signs. There's a cold winter ahead."

"I suppose that's a good reason why Paul continues to work relentlessly in the fields so late, especially these last few days?"

"Probably so; he wants to finish before the fair weather ends."

"I'll go take the water bucket out to him. He's probably thirsty; besides it's time to quit. The sun's beginning to set."

"That's nice, dear." Anne returned to her knitting. She shook her head.

Katherine slammed the back door and headed out to the field toward Paul. The sun, shinning its last little smile before it disappeared below the earth's horizon, left a pink hue on the clouds, drifting above. She moved through the field with a ladle in one hand and the water bucket in the other. The sweet smell of the orange-colored season filled her lungs. Oh, how she loved this time of year. Katherine scanned the autumn forest of multi-

painted shades and grinned.

An admirer watched from the front porch.

Jeremy leaned against the rail casual and content. The image before him captivated every part of his body. The scene imprinted on his mind as his gaze lingered on her long hair, shimmering in the setting sun. His eyes fixed upon her beautiful body. The soft breeze curved against her back and revealed a perfect form underneath the flowing yellow dress. Unable to pull his vision from the image before him, he observed her leisurely walk through the field toward another man.

Once in earshot, Katherine raised her voice and said, "Paul you've labored for us all day. Time to go home and get some rest."

Paul glanced up from his task, stopped, and leaned against the pitchfork. His eyes followed her easy movements through the rough ground. His heart skipped a beat when she flashed a bright smile.

"I said...you've been hard at work for several hours. You need to go home and get some rest."

Reaching up, he removed his wide brimmed black hat and returned her grin, and then rubbed his forearm sleeve against his moist brow. "Sounds like a good idea. I am a little tired." When Katherine handed him the water, he accepted the bucket but ignored the ladle.

She watched him raise the water pail and take a long drink, allowing an overflow of water to dribble down the sides of his mouth. His light blonde hair, tied back by a narrow leather strap, streamed down past his shoulders. It appeared damp from the physical labor. A good-looking man, like her brother, and she was amazed he had yet to settle down with one of the numerous females who constantly flitted around him.

“Thanks, I needed that.” When he handed back the bucket, his gaze shot past her toward the house. His brows pulled together in a disapproving frown. He stared at the Redcoat leaning against the porch rail, appearing content, and at home.

Curious, Katherine turned to follow his stare.

“I don’t trust him. I don’t like the way he eyes you.”

“You sound like James. Just because you help us out all the time doesn’t mean you can start acting like him. Paul, we do appreciate what you do for us, but you don’t need to worry about our guest.”

Paul’s gaze dropped down into hers.

“Really, Paul, we have everything under control.” She squinted at his unconvinced frown and added, “Don’t worry. Beside, most of the time the colonel is off on some trip, and the captain spends much of his time over at the Robinsons’ farm.”

Paul reached over and touched his hand along her cheek. He leaned closer.

Katherine pulled away.

Paul tossed the pitchfork into a wheat pile and readjusted his hat on his head. “Maybe you’re right.”

Katherine reached for the bucket. “Come on, it won’t be long before dark, and you know how cold the weather gets once the sun drops. You need a good hot drink...and some supper.”

She stood by waiting for him to gather several farm tools and a few other items before turning her direction toward the stable. “Would you like to stay and visit for awhile? I can fix you some leftovers from supper and a large cup of hot tea.”

“Thanks, but I’ll just take my leave and get home before dark sets in.”

Paul’s flat tone drew her glance up to his face, but his glare aimed toward the front porch. Frowning, he indicated his dislike for the man that watched their trek toward the barn.

Suddenly, he dismissed the soldier and gave

Katherine a quick smile. He wrapped an arm around her shoulders and in a lighter tone, said, "Who knows, you might hear some vital information without me hanging around."

After a hurried glance toward the porch, Katherine turned her gaze upon Paul. "I look forward to the day they leave. Mother and I find the situation very uncomfortable, sometimes."

Mixed emotions lowered her chin with the pretence of concentrating on her footing. Her steps covered the dirt ruts in the field while her body sensed the handsome captain's sky blue eyes focused on them. Once they rounded the corner of the house and were no longer in his sight, she let out a sigh of relief and relaxed.

While Paul replaced the pitchfork, shovel, and a few other tools in the storage shed, Katherine walked his horse through double barn doors and waited. He closed the doors and stepped near her.

She gave him an affectionate glance. "Please stay and have supper with us soon."

Paul seized the reins, mounted his horse, and then glanced down at her, and smiled. "Next time, I promise."

Katherine noticed his searching expression, which didn't tell her what she suspected he really wanted to say. Puzzled, she watched him ride off before she proceeded across the yard toward the back door. When she entered, she found her mother preparing a few items for the morning meal and another day of so-called volunteered hospitality for the Redcoats.

Thoughts of Paul's unusual manner made her question what he would have done if she hadn't pulled away. He had wanted to kiss her. But, why now? When younger, she would have welcomed his kiss, but throughout the years, he displayed nothing but a proper gentleman's approach toward her. So much so, she decided he only thought her a sister-

figure. Had she misread him? She must have. After all this time, why would he want to kiss her now? She loved Paul, but not like...like what? Katherine bit her bottom lip, knowing the true reasons stemmed from the strange sensations budding for another man.

Jeremy strolled onto the front porch. His fingers fumbled with his hat while his tense glare shot down the long dusty road at the rider heading toward the Heaton farm. Not once did his eyes stray from the colonel. A slight nag of regret stabbed his guts. The women of the household had been a little more relaxed with the absence of the man in his vision. He feared, once again, their guarded demeanor would return.

He pushed aside the disturbing thought and moved toward the edge of the porch. Once the horse and rider halted directly in front of the steps, he stood at attention, eyes straight ahead. With a sharp snap of his arm, he saluted the instant Colonel Harrington dismounted.

Frowning, the colonel greeted the captain with a hasty salute. He rushed up the steps two at a time and turned his long stride toward the entrance of the house.

Captain Burke traced his steps through the foyer toward the kitchen.

“Where’s Terrell?” Harrington’s rough voice demanded.

“He should be arriving any moment, sir.”

Jeremy followed his superior to the table in the corner of the cooking area and pulled out a chair to sit next to his scowling, temperamental commander. The journey must have been too long and unproductive. After glancing at the red-faced man, he accepted a rolled map shoved his way.

“Colonel—” Jeremy paused when Terrell’s loud boots stomped on the front porch.

Both men waited.

The lieutenant appeared in the doorway, hesitated for a split second, and acknowledged his commander with a stiff salute.

Annoyed, Harrington snapped his hand toward the chair and motioned the man to be seated. The second he opened his mouth to speak, his gaze shot toward loud laughter entering from the back door. His wrinkled brow deepened.

Anne’s and Katherine’s carefree sounds caused Jeremy’s heart to react. He envied them. Could he ever let go and take pleasure in the simple joy of just living? Regretfully, he watched the smiles on their faces freeze when their gazes turned in the direction of the table.

Anne hesitated inside the doorway.

Katherine’s sparkling green eyes briefly fixed on his before shifting to the colonel’s. Her smile faded, and from her grimace, he knew her peaceful frame of mind had come to an end.

“We need to start dinner, gentlemen,” Anne said with a slight lift of her head.

With a slight demeaning smirk, Harrington waved for them to proceed. “Fine, but we could use a drink...a good, strong drink.” He barked an order, rather than requesting it, before he turned his attention back.

Katherine nonchalantly listened to their conversation while she reached for the bottle of homemade brandy. Filling the glasses, she strolled over and placed the drinks on the table. A quick glance toward Jeremy told her he noticed her interest in their discussion.

“Do we move our men to a new location, sir?” Terrell inquired.

“General Gage thinks we would be at an

advantage to remain at such a central location as this one.”

“Then we’ll need to make arrangements for a temporary route of communication between the general and ourselves,” Terrell stated.

Nodding, the colonel glanced at Jeremy, indicating the map. “Captain,” he said and motioned toward him.

Standing, Jeremy threw a glance in Katherine’s direction before he leaned over the table to roll out the large broadcloth.

Unnerved by his intense glance, Katherine busied herself. Hurrying, she tied a white apron around her waist and pretended to focus on the task of supper.

Harrington studied the map. “We’ll have to fix a route between here and Boston. Gage believes the disturbances are created by those bloody Sons of Liberty for a diversionary tactic for a much larger rebellion.”

“What does he suspect?” Terrell questioned.

“Who knows? The damn rebels—they’re mad, I tell you.” Harrington took a drink, and then darted his beady black eyes toward Anne. “The good widow makes a remarkable apple brandy.” Raising his glass toward Jeremy, he said, “You should try some, Burke.”

Katherine’s gaze darted toward Harrington. He eyed her mother with his repulsive gawk. His evil squint trailed over her mother, stopping on her breasts.

“I’ve certainly enjoyed your home, my lady. A perfect place. Quiet. Comfortable. Cozy indeed, not to mention the two most beautiful ladies in this god-forsaken country.”

An uneasy tremble vibrated through Katherine from the comments. After a glance at her mother, she tried to concentrate on her task and ignored his ugly insinuations.

Jeremy cleared his throat. Changing the subject, he leaned over the map, and said, "Colonel," as he outlined a route with his index finger and commented, "The most efficient way to send a scout is down the river to Albany, then through Marlborough and on to Boston."

Katherine listened, focusing on the major colonies mentioned. She locked them in a compartment of her brain, so later she'd remember to give Paul the information.

"Maybe," Harrington said, gulping his drink. Emptying his glass, his sleazy gaze rolled toward the women.

When he gestured toward Katherine for a refill, she blatantly ignored him.

"Well, well. Appears our feisty little host has overlooked the fact that my cup has run dry. Brandy, woman."

Terrell chuckled.

Jeremy curved his lips in a slight smile.

Katherine squeezed her eyes shut. She hated the man's tone and manner in which he treated them. The movement of her mother's steps drew her eyes open. When she started toward the table, Katherine quickly turned and grabbed her arm.

"It's all right, Mother. I'll do it," she mumbled and approached the table before her mother had time to object.

Katherine reached out to retrieve the disgusting soldier's glass when suddenly she felt the colonel's tight grip. Glancing down at his hand wrapped around her arm, she pulled away, but he jerked her against his repulsive body and forced her onto his lap.

"Let go," she shouted. The look in his face frightened her.

"Let go." This time her frantic voice vibrated with fear but went unnoticed. Struggling against her violator's painful grasp, Katherine shot her panicked

expression straight to Jeremy.

“Surely the lady has more to offer than mere brandy,” Harrington smirked.

His rough fingers fumbled her flesh beneath her cotton dress. “Nice,” he announced.

Terrell reached over the table and grabbed the bottle of brandy out of Katherine’s hand. He pushed back his chair and stood. Once he refilled his glass, he dropped the bottle on the table and slowly stepped toward Anne. He easily cornered her when she darted forward. Terrell’s firm grip held her at bay while she watched with eyes wide with terror for her daughter’s safety it seemed.

Jeremy slowly stood, clenched his fist, and shifted away from the table.

Breathing heavy, he took a firm stance. “Let the lady pour you a drink, colonel,” he said with noticeable force in his tone. He stepped forward to intercede but hesitated and pulled back slightly.

Katherine struggled against the assault, while her mind registered his foul-mouthed grin. Frightened, her chest tightened; her short, choppy breath made her feel lightheaded. Brutal hands grabbed her breast, shooting pain through her upper body. Horrified and with little strength remaining, she pushed against his tightening grip.

Before she could anticipate his next move, his vicious hand snatched her chin and roughly locked lips onto hers.

His rank, smoky breath smothered her. She held her breath for the duration of the kiss until blackness consumed her mind.

Harrington dragged Katherine to her feet and remarked, “Why, gentlemen, this little mare is most hospitable toward her houseguest.”

Somewhere in her disjointed awareness, Katherine heard a voice.

“Sir,” Jeremy’s stern voice addressed his commander, “We have issues needing our attention,

right at this moment.” He watched the man’s heinous look slither over Katherine’s body.

Jeremy took a solid stance against his commander’s inappropriate actions.

Harrington chuckled. “Oh, on the contrary, I think nothing requires my attention other than to break in this feisty little mare.” His large cruel fingers continued to grope. “She needs to know what it means to quarter officers of the crown.”

Jeremy’s jaw muscles flexed. Holding back, he pulled air into his lungs, as if to hide his anger.

Katherine rolled her gaze up to Jeremy’s, praying he would do something.

Gasping, she panicked, thrashed about, but unable to free herself. When she spotted her mother held back by Terrell, the icy blood of a nightmare suddenly switched to fury.

Gulping in a large amount of air, Katherine released the building fire within her body. In one swift movement, she whirled, threw her arms above her head, and scratched her adversary across the face.

Her unexpected reaction took her enemy off guard. She took advantage of his shocked surprise and rushed from his grasp.

She didn’t get far before his snake-like hand gripped her arm in a vice while his other hand touched his cheek.

Katherine stared at his bloody red fingers and raised her gaze to his face. His enraged temper had turned the ugly face scarlet. Before she had a chance to turn her head from his fury, he slammed a backhand against her jaw tossing her across the room.

Katherine stumbled backward, like a rag doll, falling hard against the hearth. Her limp body fell into an abyss of blackness.

An evil grin spread across the colonel’s

expression.

“I’ll teach you, you little wench.” Livid, Harrington unbuckled his jacket and belt. Blazing hard eyes on his trophy moved him toward her slumped body with a malicious expression.

“No,” Anne screamed, struggling against Terrell’s tight grip. “No.”

In a hasty move, Jeremy stood between his commander and the motionless body. He reached out and took a firm grasp of the man’s arm.

His deep, controlled tone vibrated on the verge of unrestrained anger. “She’s had enough.”

“Out of my way, Captain.”

Jeremy tightened his grip.

“Damn it, Burke. I’m your commander.”

“Sir, I tell you if you cause the people in this town to feel their safety is in jeopardy, you risk a rebellion.”

Jeremy didn’t take his eyes off him as the colonel stepped back and took a controlled breath. After several seconds, he released the colonel’s arm.

“I know Gage, sir. An action of this type would trigger an outbreak, and he’ll have us all answering for it.”

Stern, steel blue eyes turned and gave an unspoken order to Terrell.

Terrell unlocked his arms from around Anne to allow her to run, sobbing to Katherine.

Still furious, Harrington buckled his belt, straightened his uniform, and growled, “Get her out of my sight.”

Jeremy moved toward Katherine, but Anne stood protectively in front of him.

“Don’t worry; I’ll not let harm come to her.”

Anne’s heart pounded, scared, uncertain. She stared into the captain’s concerned expression and hesitated. Trusting her instincts, she stepped aside.

Jeremy flashed an assuring glance toward her, and then reached down and gently lifted Katherine

into his arms. His soft voice of conviction whispered to Anne, "She'll be safe."

Still shaken, Anne grabbed Jeremy's arm. "Please."

"Ma'am, I give you my word, no harm will come to her," he promised. Loud enough for the colonel, he stated, "I'll take her outside. The fresh air might help."

"Well, aren't you the damn noble one?" Harrington retorted with a bitter twist to his words.

The chilly night breeze brushed against Katherine's eyelids, pulling her out of the void that had darkened her senses. The light floating sensations soothed her troubled mind. She felt secure and out of harm's way.

Jeremy carried her across the yard toward the barn and kicked the door open enough to squeeze through. He hesitated, and then directed his feet toward the far corner. With tender care, he lowered her onto a soft bed of hay. Swiftly, he returned to close the door.

A relieved sigh escaped his lips as he turned back.

His gaze skimmed over Katherine's form, stopping him in his tracks. He stared down at the beautiful creature. Long dark lashes closed over green jewels that could stare back with mixed expressions. His gaze slid over her long auburn hair spread out against the dry, yellow hay. The struggle with Harrington left her dress torn at the top, exposing a creamy soft shoulder. Desire grew within his very soul.

He knelt beside her, reached out to touch her soft bare skin, and quickly drew back. As a soldier of the King, he couldn't afford to get involved with a patriot woman of the colonies. Impossible.

Keep telling yourself, and maybe you'll listen.

Katherine's eyelids fluttered open. She stared back into a pair of seductive blue eyes probing deep into hers. Dazed. A moment elapsed before she realized...she gasped.

Shrinking back in panic, she trembled, recalling the painful hands of this man's colonel. She pulled her gaze from his and took a glance around the barn. They were alone. This could prove even more dangerous.

A powerful force of strength shot through her muscles. She scooted away from the Redcoat, ready for flight or fight. When he grabbed her by the shoulders, she reacted, setting off a flurry of arms flinging in all directions to land against him with all the power she had left.

"Whoa! Whoa! Wait a minute," he pleaded. With ease, he gripped her hands against his chest.

"Let me be."

The captain's strong hold stayed firm but not forceful, allowing her to lash out until she could no longer move. Exhausted, Katherine slumped in a heap against him.

"Just calm down. I'll not harm you."

Breathless, she whispered, "Why should I believe you?"

"I brought you here to get you away from Harrington."

"Why, so you can violate me yourself?" In a surprised rush, Katherine pushed away, raised her arm, and flattened her hand across his face in a solid, hard slap.

He sprang forward, pushed her down, and pinned her body to the ground.

The hay ground into her back with the weight of his body on top of her. Connecting with his gaze, she detected a gleam of desire rather than anger. Taken back, she suddenly didn't feel frightened. Instead, a throbbing sensation stirred inside her.

Unable to pull her vision away, she wiggled to get free. No way would she give into this temptation—yet, the beat of his heart against her breast excited her blood. Emotions rattled her mind, confusing her. Her inner-self battled to keep from drowning in the depth of a hunger she'd never faced before. Engulfed in silence, she discovered this man stimulated a thrill she didn't understand.

To contain this increasing craving, she had to think. *Think Katherine, get control.* She sucked in a deep breath and allowed her body to go limp.

When she wiggled beneath him, it left her mind at the mercy of her body. Again she wiggled slightly, creating an arousing ripple. Oh, God. All thoughts of fighting or fleeing dissolved when Jeremy's form pressed into hers.

Her gaze slid from his beguiling half-closed eyelids to his lips. She didn't dare struggle, squirm, or breathe. If she did, she wasn't sure she'd be able to stop. Her tongue did a quick sweep over her bottom lip before biting down.

As if invited, he touched her moist lips.

She whimpered.

Now, the soft kiss wasn't enough. She wanted to taste more. Her arms circled his neck. Her mouth parted to a contact detonating an explosion through her body. An involuntary reaction of her hips pushed against his, igniting a combustible pleasure so intense she thought she'd black out.

Her body riveted beneath his while his mating tongue drove her to a peak she'd never climbed, awakening an arousal untested.

He pulled away.

Her eyes fluttered open, and her gaze met his seductive dark pupils. When he buried his face against her neck, his quick short breaths brushed her searing skin.

"Katherine, Katherine." Jeremy's throaty voice awakened her brain.

“Your courage and spirit astonishes me.”

Her body quivered, and then stiffened.

He backed off.

Katherine searched for strength to control her emotions, and in a deliberate cold tone, her aroused mutter asked, “What is your will anyway? Would you have me believe you are any different than the others? The crimson of your uniform is the same shade as those who enforce the tyrannical whims of your king.”

She paused, letting her words sink in, until she recognized the conflict in his eyes. “You would partake of my flesh as you have of my home in the name of your *Quartering Act*. You, sir, are no different.”

Jeremy’s face illustrated the weight and truthfulness of Katherine’s words.

“I, sir, fear neither you...nor your colonel.”

“Harrington’s a dangerous man, self-serving and ambitious. I’ve seen him do much worse to others. Tonight, I convinced him otherwise. Next time you may not be so fortunate.”

She pushed against him. “You can get off me, now.”

Jeremy rolled from her body. He held her arm, stood, and pulled her to her feet.

Katherine took a deep breath and hoped to appear calm, as she pretended to brush the hay from her dress. Then, in a start, she jerked free and quickly headed for the barn door.

Instantly, she felt the tight squeeze of his grip.

“Ahh,” she whimpered.

Jeremy yanked her against his chest and whispered in her ear, “I can help.” He shut his eyes and touched his face into her hair.

“Let go.”

“Not until...”

“You’re hurting me,” she whispered hoarsely. In truth, his grip didn’t hurt, but his warm intimate

breath near her ear shot tingles through her body.

Jeremy admitted, "I know about your brother." He dropped his hands to his side and glanced away.

Katherine froze. "I...I don't know what you mean."

Jeremy met her gaze. "No use to pretend, Katherine—it's only a matter of time before Harrington learns James is hiding in the church. He'd make a fine prize for General Gage, and Harrington will stop at nothing to boost Gage's favor."

Katherine shuttered, pressed her lips together, and forced her jittery nerves to calm down. She wanted to scream. Her mind raced. She had to warn James. What could she do? Finally, she gazed into Jeremy's face.

"You mean to tell me the colonel doesn't know." She searched his eyes for the truthfulness of his statement.

"I'm sure our informant will tell as soon as he hears Harrington's back.

"Who? Who is this person?"

Katherine witnessed the conflict in his expression. Daring to go with her instincts, she melted a softened gaze into his, and purposely, turned on sweet, seductive charm as she reached out for his hand. "Please, Jeremy, if there's someone we cannot trust, I must know."

Jeremy looked deep into her worried eyes. His gaze dropped to her lips. "Mr. Norton...the informant is Mr. Norton."

Katherine's flash of disbelief turned to a troubled frown. "Norton? Why would he?" Uncertain, Katherine studied Jeremy's handsome face. She released his hand and stepped back to put space between them.

He appeared earnest. Still weary of trusting this British soldier, her questioning expression stared back. "Why? What reason would you risk-ah, yes,

you expect me to repay you like a faithful doe?"

He stiffened. "My intentions, Katherine, are not to deceive you. If Harrington had this information, your brother would be in custody awaiting summary execution as we speak."

Jeremy stepped closing the gap between them. "Think of what your disbelief could mean to your brother."

Katherine's resolve weakened as her mind raced.

"You still have time."

"Paul...Paul lives just down the road. He could make it."

"Then go. Now," he urged, returning her direct stare.

"I'll be here when you get back. You must hurry."

In no time, Katherine walked a horse out of the nearby stall, and with Jeremy's help, mounted bareback, and then directed the horse through the doors at the backend of the barn. Before riding off into the night, she glanced at him.

"Just go," he ordered. "Harrington will be suspicious if we're gone much longer. He'll expect you in my company when I return to the house, as will your mother. Hurry."

Katherine kicked the horse's belly and galloped off into the misty night, praying the man she felt so deeply attracted to could be trusted.

Chapter 6

Armed with loaded muskets, Harrington's troops exploded through the church doors in a furious rage. The preacher, startled by the loud intrusion, looked up from the pulpit where he'd been praying. A harsh glance from the British commander caused the man of God to raise his hand toward the ceiling.

After an unsuccessful search through the small community church, Harrington glared at the minister who glanced at the Bible in his hand, and thoughts of interrogating the man of God were dismissed. The enraged colonel gestured a hand, signaling his men to take leave of the premises.

"Split up. Search the area." After a swift mount onto his horse, he growled, "Report back to me at the farm." Turning a scowl on his officers, he demanded, "Captain, you and Terrell, come with me. I promise I'll make it a personal goal to find the Heaton renegade and have him hung."

The short return to the Heaton farm did not settle Harrington's temper. The commander stomped up the porch steps and through the front door. His loud boots echoed on the wooden floor of the foyer announcing an aggravated disposition as he entered the kitchen. He dropped his heavy body down on the chair.

Jeremy eyed the colonel. He glanced at Terrell who appeared uneasy, as if wanting to avoid the colonel's wrath.

"How dare he make a fool of me," Harrington

stormed as he banged a tight fist on the table. "I want him found. Lieutenant, put our best men on the search."

"Yes, sir."

"The bloody bastard...he'll get more than he bargained for," he vowed. A knock at the door interrupted his tirade.

Before either could respond, the commander jumped up, clomped to the backdoor, and pulled it open to face a young soldier.

"Sir, ah, sir," stuttered the young man. His eyes widened staring face to face with the commander. The timid boy hesitated, stood attention, and saluted the colonel.

"Sir, ah, sir..."

"Good hell alive, boy, speak up."

"Sir, General Gage sent me with a message for you, Colonel Harrington, sir."

Harrington demanded, "Put that damn hand down, and give me the damn message."

Shifting uncertainly, the soldier mumbled, "Yes, sir." He dropped his hand and held out a letter.

Quickly, Harrington scanned the message, crumpled it between his hands and without a second glance, slammed the door shut, and headed back to the table. The room filled with silent anticipation.

The hushed tension in the air brought Katherine to a sudden halt when she entered the kitchen. Harrington's eyes narrowed when he looked her way, but not a word spilled from his foul mouth. Actually, she'd been thankful he had had very little to say since his assault.

With a determined tilt of her head, she carried her bundle of sackcloth across the room toward the cupboard. All the while, appearing to concentrate on placing the clothes in the drawer, she listened for any vital information.

Jeremy followed her movement to the counter

and pulled his gaze back to the colonel. "Are we to move the regime, sir?"

"No, Gage is in Boston, now. He wants to meet with me, again." Frowning, the colonel took his seat at the table.

"Rebels?" Terrell questioned.

Harrington nodded. "Appears there's a discontentment rising. Obviously, a few more obstinate Sons of Liberty must dangle by the neck before the bastards realize they cannot defy Britain."

Katherine's body stiffened. Straightening to her full height, she curled her fingers into a fist and took a deep breath to control her escalating hatred toward the man. She dared to take a quick glimpse at Jeremy, but he avoided her eye contact.

"Their numbers are increased, and their propaganda is strong." Terrell's statement brought a nod from his commander.

"Even so," Harrington said, "They could never be strong enough to lead an attack against our foes. We would simply crush them."

Katherine couldn't help but think how the colonel's arrogance would one day overshadow his confidence. The Sons of Liberty would, she prayed, win.

Terrell chuckled. "I can see it now—mad farmers against the strongest army in the world."

Harrington's laugh ricocheted off the walls.

Jeremy quickly focused on the matter at hand. "Sir, how long will you be away?"

"Gage doesn't say, but I'll take my leave at once. Terrell, I want some of our men to accompany me."

"Yes, sir."

Standing, Harrington stated, "Burke, you know the drill."

"I assure you there won't be any problems, sir," Jeremy said. Straightening, he glanced across the room at the woman listening to their every word.

Katherine poured a cup of strong hot tea thinking maybe she would do some prying on her own. The commander had been gone for several days, and she hadn't heard any news of importance to pass along to Paul. The captain said very little at the supper table. Maybe with some encouragement, he just might talk to her and let something slip.

She made her way to the front porch. Smiling, she displayed her best behavior.

After James' narrow escape from the Redcoats and Norton's hurried departure from town, no one had further news, one-way or the other. She didn't even know the whereabouts of her brother.

Katherine's determined lips pressed together as she pulled open the front door. Its sharp creaking drew Jeremy's attention. She hesitated when his clear blue eyes held hers at bay, softening. She moved toward him.

Smiling, she extended the cup, "I brought you some tea."

With raised brow, Jeremy took it from her hand. "Thank you."

Katherine strolled over to the banister, her mind racing for a matter of discussion that wouldn't make him suspicious. Suddenly, an overwhelming shyness came over her. Clearing her throat, she pulled her shawl closer to her body and glanced out over the field toward the thick forest of trees. The countryside painted with its gold, orange, and rustic autumn colors shimmered hypnotically in the late afternoon sunlight. Delicate fingers of a gentle breeze traveled across the field to sweep her hair away from her face.

Jeremy sipped the tea, acting oblivious of the stretching silence. His gaze glued to her causing her legs to become rigid.

Tension swelled within her. She leaned against the post, slowly turned her head, and stared back into adorable eyes with bold intentions.

“I thought you would like to know...I have not revealed the source of my knowledge of Norton’s betrayal. I also want to apologize for how I’ve treated you.”

A little self-conscious, she lowered her fluttering eyelids.

“You needn’t,” Jeremy replied.

“You saved my brother’s life. I can never repay the debt.” Sincerely, she glanced at him, wanting him to see in her eyes how genuine she felt.

“You owe me nothing.”

“Why did you do it?”

Jeremy flinched. After a moment, he stood and directed his gaze out to another place and time.

“Forgive me if I sound intrusive,” her voice softened. She stepped a little closer. “I can’t imagine why you weren’t indifferent like so many other British soldiers.”

As his elusiveness continued, Katherine became more intrigued. Daring to be a little more aggressive, she decided to go a step further.

She touched her hand to his sleeve. “Jeremy, I can’t deny there has been an attraction between us...ah, a connection. Or, am I wrong?”

Startled, Jeremy’s gaze turned into hers, and he probed her earnest expression. He felt breathless so near, free to scan every inch of her creamy complexion. Her charming, seductively naïve way forced him to restrain his arms from circling her body and kissing every inch. He loved the way her cheeks blushed to a soft pink hue.

“I apologize.” Katherine glanced away from his unyielding stare. “I didn’t mean to be so forward.”

“You never cease to amaze me with your honest, forthright approach to...to everything. I’ve allowed this to go too far.”

His gaze touched her lips, remembering.

“I beg your pardon.” Katherine raised her

eyebrows, "In other words, you're sorry you kissed me."

"I should never have allowed it to happen...not the first time, nor the second. Especially, the second time."

"But, it did, Jeremy, it did. Is that why you helped? Why you gave me a chance to warn James? Just to gain my confidence and take advantage?"

Jeremy touched his finger to her chin and lifted it. "I would never compromise you, Katherine. Never. I can't deny I want you. I have from the moment I set eyes on you, but those kisses we shared can go no further."

Jeremy gripped the porch rail, pulled away his gaze, and glanced down at the silver ring on his right hand. Conflicting emotions stirred on how much of himself he should expose. "I know what it's like to be concerned for a brother," he said, remorse flowing from his low voice.

"I would risk everything for James. I'm sure that sounds strange to you."

"On the contrary, I would have given my life for my brother."

Katherine gently touched his arm. "Would have?"

"He's dead. Killed."

"Oh, Jeremy, I am so sorry," she whispered, drawing her hand back.

"Ned had his share of difficulties, but in the end I couldn't help." Jeremy's voice drifted off to another time. "Huh, he was such a rotten gambler-the game caught up with him."

Suddenly, Jeremy stood straight and tall. He stiffened. He didn't say another word, just stared out toward the road with a blank expression. Frowning at his sudden mood change, Katherine glanced beyond the porch.

A rider approached. Paul.

Their conversation had ended. With a slight

moment, she turned, took the cup from his hand, and gazed into his eyes. "Captain."

Her satin voice brought his gaze to hers.

"I believe there's more to you than just being a soldier. Supper will be ready soon."

Katherine noted the slight strain between the two men sitting across from each other throughout the evening meal. The tension had been less with only Captain Burke present, but tonight, at her mother's insistence, Paul had decided to stay.

Katherine knew Paul disliked the soldier immensely. He worried for her safety with this Redcoat living under her roof. Little did he know. After what she'd experienced with Jeremy in the barn, she wasn't sure she'd ever see him as an enemy again.

After clearing the supper table, dishes cleaned and placed back in the cupboard, Katherine followed her mother to the sitting room. Before she settled down near the window to read, she lit several candles illuminating a warm glow throughout the room.

"Nice to have Paul stay for dinner," Anne's quiet voice commented. She took a seat near the fire and reached down into a basket for her sewing. She pulled out a quilt and began her needlework from the point where a rip had started.

"Hmm." Katherine said, looking down at the book in her lap.

Anne smiled and turned to Paul when he entered the room. "Come have a seat and visit before you leave."

Hearing her mother's comment, she glanced up and gave Paul a polite smile. Releasing a slight sigh, she turned her head and stared out the window.

The tall, dark figure strolled across the yard and disappeared through the barn door.

On impulse, she slammed her book close, rose

from the settee, and quietly said, "I'm a little restless, Mother. I think I'll take a walk before I retire."

She leisurely walked over to her mother, kissed her cheek, smiled at Paul, and said, "I won't be long."

Puckered brows, Paul stood. He turned to follow her toward the hall. "Where are you going?" he asked, curious.

"Just...for a walk."

"I'll come with you."

"No. I'm sure you're tired. Stay and visit with Mother."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes." Her flat voice stated, a little stronger than intended. Smiling, she glanced at him, softened her tone, and said, "I won't be long."

Before he insisted, she grabbed the shawl from the wall peg, flung it over her shoulders, and stepped through the door. He'd been disappointed, she knew, but she couldn't help herself. He was not the man she wanted.

Paul turned back into the room and ambled over to the settee. Reaching down, he picked up Katherine's book, and his quiet voice mumbled to Anne, "Your daughter certainly has a mind of her own."

A little upset with her, he glanced out the window. "I'm worried about her, Mrs Heaton. She's moody these last few days."

"She's concerned about James, and perhaps she feels a little smothered."

Paul's eyes followed the object of his affection as she walked across the courtyard. Evening settled over the valley, but he could detect Katherine's light color dress and wrap as she entered the barn.

He turned back to Anne. "What do you mean? Smothered?"

“Both you and James protect her too much. You always have. She yearns for more freedom, not often allowed women, and it goes against Katherine’s nature.”

Reaching up he rubbed his brow and stared down at the book in his other hand. He read the title, and then sat down with a deep sigh displaying that Anne’s words were no comfort to him.

Katherine’s heart thumped louder than her hushed stride as she stepped through the opened barn door. For a moment, she hesitated. Restraining from making a sound she held her breath when she laid eyes on Jeremy who was unaware of her presence. The stunning man’s gentle hand stroked the animal’s long neck.

He seemed unusually relaxed with his uniform unbuttoned at the top, revealing a hint of tan chest beneath the wool material. His thick, dark hair tied back just at the neckline, accented his long eyelashes. He appeared deep in thought and sad.

It frightened her to realize she no longer saw a captain of the King’s army, but a man-Jeremy.

When she pulled the creaking wooden door closed, he turned with a glint of warmth in his eyes.

A little embarrassed, she darted her glance toward the animal, then back, and commented, “She’s a beauty, isn’t she?”

“Yes, she is.” His vision trailed from her hair, skimmed over her lips, then down her body.

She averted her gaze while warmth spread over her cheeks from his subtle compliment.

Katherine moved toward him. “You haven’t been around the farm much these past few days.”

“I’ve had to spend much of my time training troops.”

Slowly, she strolled alongside the stalls until she closed the gap between them. Avoiding Jeremy’s gaze, she turned, tilted her head and studied the

horse's gentle round brown eyes. Unconsciously, her hand fingered his beautiful mane while her body smoldered within wanting to blaze with Jeremy's touch. Instead, her velvet voice murmured, "Ah, the discipline of military life. Doesn't it drain you?"

"The discipline?"

"Well, yes." Katherine gazed into his face. "And all the commands and guidelines your superiors demand, as well as being watched all the time. No freedom to follow your soul's desires."

On the verge of losing control of her emotional needs, her gaze ricocheted off his lips before glancing back at the animal. She rubbed the quarter horse's long flowing neck, while Jeremy's rich, enticing voice imprinted in her brain for life.

"Discipline has always been a major part of my life."

Resting her back against the stall, she felt at ease and content in his presence. "Is it so in England?" she asked and grinned when the horse's velvet nose nudged her shoulder.

Jeremy nodded and followed her hand as it gave the horse an affectionate pat. "There's a freshness and charm about the colonies, but in all due course, I think there's a huge separation of what was left behind in England and what you have here."

He slid his hand down the horse's neck and briefly made contact with her hand in the process. He pulled away.

Jeremy bent over, grabbed a hand full of hay, and held it out for the animal's eager, nibbling lips.

"Your time here hasn't made you happy?"

"It's been a responsibility." His glaze turned upon her eyes, and then her lips. "Some experiences will be a lifetime memory."

Katherine studied his smooth facial features.

"When my brother died, his duties as heir to my father's title became mine. The freedom I enjoyed for so long suddenly disappeared. My life can never be

less disciplined, again.”

“England’s society demands so much?” Katherine gazed into his eyes. His nearness was...

Jeremy stepped back.

“Did I say something wrong?”

“No...no, I try not to think about my family obligations. I’ve allowed my sense of duty for my country to overshadow them.”

“It wasn’t my intention to open any wounds.”

“You didn’t. I’ve been over here so long I sometimes forget.”

“So, once your duties are over, you’ll return to your family obligations.”

“In part. My father still lives but grows old and expects me to assume his duties before he passes.”

Katherine straightened from the stall when she sensed the subject matter too depressing. “Tell me, what do the ladies of London wear? I only know what my Aunt Elizabeth says. She lives in Boston but loves her travels to England.”

Jeremy smiled. On impulse, he raised his hand and tangled his fingers in the thickness of her auburn hair hanging down over her shoulders, “For one thing, the women don’t wear their hair like this or ride astride a horse.”

“Sir, do I detect a reproach in thy tone?”

“By no means do I chastise you. On the contrary.” His seductive gaze swept over her head before overpowering her uninhibited green eyes. “I often questioned why one would want to cover such beauty.”

Mesmerized, they shared a long knowing look.

“They-” Jeremy cleared his throat, took a couple of steps back, turned, and walked to the opposite stall. “They even wear powdered wigs.”

“Oh, Aunt Elizabeth told me all about the wigs worn high with ribbons, flowers, and pearls. So, they really wear them?” Katherine asked, aware of the barn smells along with the essence of his masculine

scent.

If he hadn't stepped back, she wasn't sure what she would have done. The desires he stirred dominated her body with a power she couldn't control.

"Some wear tall wigs with curls."

"Oh my, how do they put on hats?"

Laughing, he shook his head. "You're asking the wrong person."

"I can't imagine a society placing so much social bearing on clothes. I noticed you don't wear a wig."

"Special occasions, only, and if I'm forced." Jeremy grinned. "I think I've been in this New World so long I've acquired some of your ways."

"Would that be so bad?" Katherine questioned, thrilled by the grin he so seldom displayed.

She closed the gap between them. An emotional tremor surged through her veins when his look trailed to her lips. "You intrigue me, Captain Burke," she whispered, touching his hand.

Unable to resist her burning contact, Jeremy's hands circled her waist and pulled her tightly against him. The physical charisma flowed so strong he felt her body melt into his. He leaned forward, buried his head in her neck, and nuzzled the softness of her silky hair. Squeezing his eyes shut, his willpower weakened.

A deep shattering breath pushed from his lungs. God...he wanted to taste her. When he raised his head, he stared into a gaze of surrender. Most of his fellow comrades took what was offered in the New World, then left. He couldn't. God help him. He'd fallen in love with a colonial woman.

Jeremy dropped his arms. He stepped away. Before he gave into his own selfish desires, he quickly turned and walked from the barn, head hanging in shame. This ever-increasing passion for the Heaton woman had to be smothered before it

could flare any further, or he'd pain her in the end.

Paul stared out the window. Thoughts of going to the barn to talk to her entered his mind, but she hadn't wanted him. She had been emphatic.

He flipped through the pages of her book, jittery nerves edged on impatience. Again, he glanced out the window. This time he noticed the tall shadowy figure stroll from the barn. Burke.

The soldier's long legs led him around the corner of the house.

Standing, Paul paced in front of the window, positive Katherine would soon exit. Stopping, he stared, tapping the book on his thigh, waiting. His body stiffened. She stepped out, wrapped the shawl close to her body, and crossed the yard heading toward the house.

His gaze swung toward the door, and he listened. She entered the house and paused in the hallway to hang her shawl on the wall hook. He waited for her to appear in the doorway with full intentions of finding out what the hell took place between the two.

Paul gave Anne a quick glance and frowned. She was busy threading the needle thought the material on her lap.

Katherine passed by the door.

"Katie?" Paul's flat tone stopped her.

He hurried out into the foyer just as she headed up the staircase.

Katherine sighed, irritated. "What?"

"Katherine."

"Paul," she hesitated. "Go home," she quietly stated without facing him.

She continued to climb the steps, entered her bedroom, and slammed the door shut.

Exasperated, Paul walked back into the sitting room and shot Anne a deepened frown, "See what I mean?"

Jeremy inhaled the damp morning air mixed with the barn aroma of dry hay and horses. He released a heavy sigh. A deep frown wrinkled his brow as he grabbed a blanket, swung it over the smooth back of his black horse, and positioned it in place. His gloved hand shot up to cover a wide yawn. Thoughts of Katherine invaded his sluggish mind the entire night-arousing sensations.

An impossible situation. He couldn't get involved with a patriot woman, let alone the sister of a wanted man. He belonged to the King of England. A soldier with orders—his life wasn't his for the taking.

In a slow smooth move, Jeremy stepped back to the rail, lifted the brown leather saddle, and heaved it over the horse. Cinching the straps, he set the bridle, and then grabbed the reins to lead the animal out of the stall. The day hadn't even started, and already his body was drained from the lack of a good night's sleep. Determined to focus on military issues, Jeremy forced his thoughts on the training sessions with new recruits that had just arrived from England. They were so young, not fully understanding the gravity of their situation. Not an easy job.

"Captain. Captain...can we talk?"

Jeremy stopped short, dropped his forehead against the horse's neck, and squeezed his eyes shut. Damn, he hadn't heard the barn door open.

Let it be an illusion. He'd sworn not to think of

her the entire day. Not a good start.

“Jeremy, please. Talk to me.”

He opened his eyes, and his brows came together in a deep furrow. Finally, he glanced in her direction. Jeremy swept his gaze over her entire body. She stood near the stall gate, her arms rested on the top rail.

“Miss Heaton, the morning is late; I must see to my troops.”

“Your troops are an excuse.”

“No. I have duties to attend.”

“Oh, right. Duty. A suitable armor against unwelcome sentiments, and, to think I almost believed you were more than just a British uniform.”

Jeremy exhaled a deep, flustered breath, dropped the reins, and jerked open the latch. Stepping through the gate he forcefully grabbed her shoulders.

“You don’t understand, Katherine. It’s not as simple as you would like it to be.”

“Not simple? *You simply* won’t let it be!”

Jeremy stared back, memorizing every inch of her creamy smooth complexion and large eyes filled with desire. The weight of despair struggled within him. Pressing his lips together, he took a deep breath through his nose.

Receiving no response, she faltered. “But, Jeremy, I know you-”

The moment Katherine pressed her palms against his chest he knew the physical connection had grown to a dangerous depth of emotional need. If allowed, there’d be no turning back.

With a heavy sigh, his sincere voice softened, “Katherine, there can be nothing between us.”

“You’re damn right, there can’t.” Paul’s raging voice thundered. “Who do you think you are? You bloody Redcoat.”

Jeremy never saw him coming; his body crashed to the ground the moment Paul’s bare fist connected

with his jaw. Not a chance to fight back or get to his feet before Paul smashed hard knuckles into his face, punching, repeatedly.

“Paul! Stop. Stop it,” Katherine screamed. “Please.” She struggled to pull Paul away.

“Stay out of this, Katie.”

“Get off of him. What are you doing? You’ll kill him. Paul!” But, all her hollering fell on deaf ears.

“You bastard.”

“Stop it!” Katherine screamed.

“If you so much as lay a hand on...” Paul punched Jeremy, again.

“Paul, stop it...stop...please, he’s the reason James is alive.”

Paul’s fist stopped in mid-air.

The hesitation gave Jeremy a split-second advantage of one solid punch, flinging Paul backward.

Jeremy sat up, pain shooting through his jaw.

Katherine dropped to her knees and lightly touched Jeremy’s beaten face. “You’re bleeding.” Tears streamed down her cheeks. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.”

Paul stared, with wide eyes.

“Tell me what you said,” demanded Paul. He grabbed Katherine’s arm and pulled her several feet away from Jeremy.

Katherine jerked in his grasp, but he didn’t let go. “You’re hurting me, Paul.”

Paul shook her hard. His husky, rough voiced demanded, “What do you mean he’s the reason James is alive?”

“All right. He’s the one who told me Norton betrayed James,” she said with a concerned plead.

Paul released her and stepped back.

“He’s why I was able to get to you in time. Don’t you see? He saved James’ life.” Katherine looked at Jeremy as if ashamed she’d given in to Paul.

“Why? Why? So he could get to you?”

“No!” She stood between the winded men and faced Paul. Hatred for Jeremy spilled from his tense glare.

Paul rested his gaze upon Katherine, took a deep controlled breath. His fingers curled into the palms of his hands. He seemed angry that her reactions were more protective of Jeremy than himself.

His hard scowl turned on Jeremy, and then back to Katherine. He turned and stormed out the barn door.

Katherine whirled back to Jeremy. The blood oozed from the gash around his eye. “I...I don’t know what got into Paul. He doesn’t often show such temper.”

“Katherine, he’s in love with you. Why else would he be so jealous?”

“Paul? No, Paul’s always been like a brother to me. We’ve known each other all our lives, grown up together-my brother’s best friend.”

“Trust me. He loves you.”

“Jeremy, he’s a patriot, you’re a British soldier. He’s just being protective.”

“Believe what you may.” He bent, scooped up his hat, and stepped to the stallion. Without hesitating, he grabbed the reins, led his horse out the barn, mounted, and rode off.

Panic bubbled in the pit of her stomach. What to do? Talk to Paul, make him understand, and explain. Explain what? All her thoughts dwelled on a certain captain of the British Army. Oh my, she just admitted something a little frightening. *Don’t think, Katherine, just act and let fate take its course.*

A quick sweep of the courtyard failed to see Paul’s horse. He was gone. In a fleeting second, she ran back into the barn and saddled her mare.

Minutes later, Katherine arrived at the Bennett farm just after Paul. Her quick knock went

unanswered. She stepped inside. "Paul?"

No answer. Too impatient to wait, Katherine ran up the stairs, two at a time. Her unwavering disposition pushed onward to confront him while his temper fumed. She found Paul in his bedroom stuffing clothes into a carpetbag.

"Damn." He cringed when he accidentally banged his bloody knuckles against the bag.

Politely, Katherine knocked. "Paul, we need to talk."

He ignored her persistence and continued to pack without a glance in her direction.

"Please, Paul."

Strong-minded, Katherine barged in, determined to get things out in the open—to resolve it now.

"Get out of here, Katie."

"What are you doing?"

"I'm headed to Boston."

"Why?" she asked, not understanding. Then she knew. "You've heard from James, haven't you?"

His furious glare bounced off her and back to the clothes he shoved into the bag.

"You have. You weren't even going to tell me?"

A cold glower turned on Katherine. "I didn't think you cared."

"You're a liar."

"I refuse to discuss this."

"Then I'm coming with you."

"Absolutely, not."

"Why? Because you have no faith in my ability to take care of myself?"

"No, because you're the reason I'm leaving."

Stunned, she stared. All of a sudden, Katherine realized how badly she had hurt him. Jeremy was right. Instinctively, she reached out and touched his arm.

Shaking her hand free, he stepped to the window and stared out. His calm, quiet voice

ordered, "Leave, now, Katherine."

Katherine, not *Katie*. She stumbled to the door, and closed it behind her.

To keep her mind from dwelling on her sadness, Katherine stayed busy the entire day. All the natural backbreaking chores helped to delay pondering over the earlier episode. She harvested the last few vegetables from the garden, pulled weeds, hoed the furrows, and prepared for next spring's plant. Physical labor had been good; even the barn stalls were spotless.

Sadly, by the end of the day, despite all the work she had accomplished, she knew nothing had changed. She and her mother had a quiet supper without much conversation. Tired and exhausted, Katherine meandered into the sitting room, strolled to the hearth, and let her mind drift to James and Boston. Well, at least he'd have a friend there.

In her disheartened state, she stared into the smoldering flames. Reaching down, she gripped the poker and disturbed the logs just enough to give life to a new blaze. Turning, she stopped short, startled to see Jeremy sitting, long legs stretched out, in the far corner of the room.

From the dark shadows, his soothing voice flowed to her, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to startle you."

"No, I...no, it's all right," she stuttered. "Why aren't the candles lit?" she asked.

Her heart drummed in her chest. She stepped to the shelf and grabbed a flint box. More for something to do than really wanting to light the room, she moved to light the candles on the table near him.

"I find the darkness peaceful."

"Right now I think light would be more comforting."

He stood and headed toward the hallway. "I'll

leave you alone. It's late."

"Please...don't go," she whispered. "I really don't feel like being alone right now," she confessed.

Jeremy planted his feet as if he were unable to take another step.

"Just for a while, please."

Katherine dropped her head, turned, and strolled back to the hearth. The heat baked into the cotton layers of her clothing. Closing her eyes, she inhaled a deep breath, and allowed a heavy sigh to escape her lips.

Reluctantly conceding, Jeremy returned to the chair. He observed her in dim light of the flames. The crackling logs echoed through the room as the silence spread.

"We missed you at supper," she said without turning.

What could he say? After the confrontation with Paul, he wasn't in the mood to sit at the table with the woman they had fought over.

Then he heard her sad tone. "Paul left town."

Uneasy, Jeremy remained silent.

"He's gone, because of me."

Leaning forward, Jeremy rested his elbows on his knees and rubbed his forehead. "I'm sorry."

When she heard the compassion in his voice, she turned.

His swollen bruised face looked up at her.

Katherine moved toward him and slowly knelt at his side. She noticed his slight shift. On impulse, she touched her fingers to his puffy, discolored eye, outlining his shadowed face.

Her gentle touch caused his heart to race out of control. The firelight from the hearth played softly against her body. She smelled of lavender. Her long silky hair gracefully draped over her shoulder. He became lightheaded with her closeness.

Dazed, spellbound, a temptation he must resist.

Jeremy murmured, "Katherine—"

Her delicate fingers slid over his lips, plunging a tingle through his body from their tender caress. Unable to obey his mind, Jeremy suffered her stimulating fingers when they glided to his chin.

He watched her dreamy eyes follow her fingers on a journey down his neck. Her touch feathered against his skin as they slithered along the opening of his unbuttoned white shirt.

Lost in her sinuous caress, he couldn't deny his own fingers from tangling in a handful of her long thick hair. He waited until her feverish eyes connected with his, bringing them both to a heightened awareness.

Consumed by weakness, he caught his breath when her opened palm rested on his heated chest. Interrupted only by the crackling burning logs in the fireplace, he leaned forward and tasted her moist, sweet lips.

Overwhelmed, Jeremy savored the genuine, enticing sincerity of her warmth through and through. She crinkled his shirt in her tight-fisted hand. She responded to the play of his lips. Her passionate hunger matched his, promising more—needing more.

A log rolled from its perch, sizzling to his consciousness. Jeremy made a great effort to pull free, and yet, all he wanted was to quench his thirst.

Breathlessly, his whisper vibrated into the glowing room. "God...Katherine. We can't do this."

She pulled back and shook her head. "But we did. I'm glad. I wanted it. I want you, Jeremy—"

Abruptly, he stood and moved away from her to the fireplace. "This morning...in the barn...I should have told you—" He paused, unsure of how to tell her.

Katherine pulled herself onto the seat he deserted. "Jeremy?"

Shaking his head, Jeremy stared down into the

flames. Unable to face her, he said, "My colonel sent word. We're to join him in Boston."

"I see," she murmured, glancing down at her hands folded in her lap.

"We head out in the morning."

Nothing further to say, Jeremy studied her with a sad heart one last time, stepped back a couple of feet, whirled around and took his leave.

Chapter 8

James leaned his shoulder against the doorframe of the Green Lantern Tavern. He rubbed his hand over the bushy, light brown beard. He wasn't used to the full-face beard, yet, but it made a good disguise. A heavy sigh escaped his lips as he reached into his pocket and pulled out a small wooden pipe and pouch. Stuffing the pipe with the tobacco leaf, he shoved the pouch back into his pocket and retrieved a small flint stick.

While scanning the snow-covered street, he struck the flint against the wooden doorframe and held the flame to his smoke. He took a long, slow drag and watched the hordes of carriages and people rushing about...Brits and colonists intermingling. "Huh," he smirked and shook his head.

In its earlier days, Boston had been an uncultivated outpost for Puritans, but now, almost a hundred years later, it was an active economy. Undeniably, more and more people were drawn to the thriving center.

Without moving his head, his eyes trailed across the dirt road and glared at the British soldiers stepping out of a shop. A little further, across the way, a Redcoat conversed with the blacksmith who continued to make a loud clanging sound every time he pounded a hammer against a metal object. Hatred spilled from James.

More and more troops continued to sail into the Boston Harbor daily, like red and white ants going about their King's business. Their occupation and

disruption of the colonies was oppressive and threatening. James suspected currency remained the reason they wanted to keep control.

England knew the city on the Atlantic had expanded into a diversified society with a flourishing business district. Even the small farms of bygone years had been replaced by trade in fishing, shipbuilding, and production of furniture, shoes, and clothing for export. No wonder the English were worried about the success of the changing city.

James pushed away from the doorway and sauntered into the smoke-filled tavern. He made his way through the crowded bar of locals, as well as soldiers drinking, chewing, and playing cards. He strolled over to the table in the back and pulled out a chair.

“Gentlemen.” He grinned at Paul and nodded in the direction of Samuel Adams and Hancock sitting across the table. James motioned his hand toward the bar and hollered above the noisy room to the saloon girl, “We’ll have another round over here.”

“Why the long face?” James queried, dropping in the chair next to Paul.

“Ah, a little discussion about the Townshend Acts—depressing.”

The attractive saloon girl approached the table with a pitcher of beer, smiling at James.

Flashing a wicked grin, he winked.

“I heard rumors about its repeal. Do you suppose it’s true?”

Paul turned to Adams, inquiring. “Cost has got to be the only reason they created the act in the first place.”

“Well, I don’t care what the reason. You read my article. It attacked the Parliament and their persistence in taxing the colonies without anyone to represent us. We need unified resistance.” Adams, proud of the commentaries he had written a little over a year ago, didn’t want them to forget.

“Yeah, well, I remember your words,” Paul said, nodding.

“Whatever,” James declared. “I’m bored stiff with everything and anything connected to Parliament. Words have been drifting over the waters from the old world about the final repeal on the stupid act. Now, they want to exclude tea.”

“Exclude tea, what are they thinking?” Paul mumbled.

“Yup, from my sources, the price of tea’s reached sky high. Huh, I just might become a smuggler. Hell, we should smuggle in Dutch tea, sell it at a low price, and make a greater profit than the legal way. I guarantee it would be a lucrative business.”

“Hey, James, you have a point there.” Adams chuckled. He reached over and slapped the arrogant Hancock on his back, and added, “You know how beneficial, don’t you old man? Even though they seized your ship and charged you with smuggling, you still managed to make a fortune on the illegal imports.”

“Hey, you can’t blame a man for trying. You know, the Brits just want us to pay their governing the colonies, anyway,” retorted Hancock, red-faced.

“Right. We don’t need a king’s control.”

Hancock, dressed in his narrow, gold-braided trimmed waistcoat and shirt with its sheer frill down the front, nodded. “We are making some headway. The boycott on English goods has reduced their profits some. Let’s hope it’s enough to cause serious results.”

“Hell, a repeal on the act isn’t because Parliament’s bowing down to Patriot demands; they’re just losing money.” James resentful tone flowed over the table.

“So what do we do about the retention of the tea tax?” Adams’ glance shot toward James. He raised an eyebrow.

“Don’t you think we’ll have to motivate them?” James replied with a grin.

Hancock laughed. “More than the boycotts?”

“Use your imagination, Hancock,” jested Adams.

“I’m sure if we put our heads together, we could think of something.” Adams glanced over Paul’s left shoulder at a drunken soldier approaching their table.

The inebriated man glared at Adams with bloodshot eyes. He slurred, “Hey, you son of a bitch...you’re Adams.”

Dead silence muted the pub as the patrons turned to focus on James’ table.

Adams took a long guzzle of beer and ignored the drunk.

“You think you’re so damn clever,” the drunk garbled. “Everyone knows thish ish where you hide.”

“I think you’re about to have a problem, sir,” James intervened.

Adams raised his arms, clasped his hands behind his head, and tilted his chair back on two legs. Smiling eyes locked with James. “He’s yours.”

A shaky finger pointed to the men around the table. “Yeah, thish whole fucking colony’s got problems. And you’re all of it.” The drunken soldier stumbled over his own feet, and losing his balance, bumped James’ shoulder.

James tossed an amused look toward Adams and stood. Towering over the drunken man, his low voice vibrated, “Would you care to say that again?”

“Yeah, say it again. Yeah,” chanted a few patrons.

“Fuck you!” muddled the dull-eyed man. He swung a staggering fist toward James and practically fell over himself.

Laughing, James lifted his leg, pressed his boot against the man’s backside, and sent him sprawling into the next table.

Laughter echoed throughout the pub.

The coach bounced along the tree-lined Boston Post Road, cutting its way through the thick wilderness like a long curvy snake. Occasionally, a horse and buggy passed on the narrow, bumpy road, but most of the trip wheeled onward without another human being in sight. Two other passengers shared the stagecoach on Katherine's long journey. They were silent and unfriendly. She didn't mind. The thrill of this new adventure she had undertaken kept her mind occupied.

Her lungs sucked in the freezing air. Another chill scurried down her back. Katherine pulled the wool hood over her forehead, closed it around her face, and then wrapped the cloak tighter around her legs. It seemed winter arrived overnight. Wings Falls didn't have snow yet, but the closer to her destination they traveled, the more the white cover appeared.

Think, Katherine, keep your mind off the cold. Both James and Paul would be upset with her for traveling alone. She knew there could be danger around any curve during the three and a half day journey. Not only were there robbers and ruffians to worry about, Redcoats were everywhere too.

Katherine pressed her lips together, thinking about the six dollars for the stagecoach pass—a lot of money. Her mother's concern for James and Paul probably overpowered her reason to allow her to travel such a distance.

God knew how much she loved her brother, but her mind couldn't stop spinning with thoughts of Jeremy. She wasn't sure how she would contact him when she arrived or even how long it would take to get word to him.

Katherine closed her eyes. She envisioned his image, the passion in his beguiling eyes, heard the gentleness in his voice, and could feel his caressing hands. An unexplainable force deep within her

emotional needs overruled her logical thinking. She had to be with him, to complete the incredible bond they formed the night their lips united.

Katherine bit her lower lip. Was she crazy? Could she be sure he also felt this deep tie between them? She had to know. God help her, he owned her soul. The man occupied her heart. Her every waking moment drifted to his presence. She had to find him. How could such wonderful sensations feel so right, and yet, be so wrong. No, not wrong, but according to him, forbidden.

The stagecoach rocked sideways when its wheel dipped into a rut and out again. Katherine's head bumped the backboard, jerking her awake. She held the front of the hard seat, and stiffened her legs against the plank floorboard to keep balanced.

In the pitch black of night, the stagecoach rolled to a stop at a tavern inn somewhere in the wilderness. Finally, the never-ending day had ended. She glanced around the simple, crude inn of four walls and a fireplace. Katherine had no idea where she was except on the road to Boston—all so fascinating and a little scary.

Shortly after arriving, she found herself laying on a hard, plank bed in one large room where minutes before the passengers had shared a hot bowl of meat stew in silence. It didn't matter. After the long day of being jostled around in the stagecoach, her weary body welcomed the quietness and stillness of the hard bed. The piercing heat from the logs blazing in the hearth melted into her chilled body.

The next two nights were no different from the first—the same unfriendly people, a supper of meat stew, and a hard bed. Katherine couldn't believe she'd been on the road for three days and slept for two nights with two traveling companions that never made any attempt to communicate. At this point, she didn't care. Exhaustion from the cold and the

constant motion of the coach had worn her down. Her saving grace was the welcoming sight of a roaring fire in a large hearth each evening.

On the final night of her journey and in the last, gloomy inn, she met a young woman about her age, she guessed. Or, she could be younger but looked older than her years from living in such harsh land. When Katherine smiled at her, large black eyes full of sadness and sorrow stared back.

She couldn't imagine how the young girl endured such hardships deep in the wilderness, confronted with the comings and goings of strangers, without ever getting to know anyone. Silently, the woman fed them a tasty, hearty meal. She made them as comfortable as possible to help prepare them for their final approach to Boston.

The short, restless sleep by the warm hearth ended far too soon. In the wee hours of the morning, Katherine stood in the bitter air with the other passengers, waiting to board the stagecoach. A cloud of misty breath flowed from her mouth. She shivered as she took her seat inside the coach.

Katherine snuggled into her wool cloak and pulled it tight around her body for protection against Mother Nature's cold winter. For the last stretch of the trip, she settled in, her body accustomed to the jerking motions as the team pulled their load. Curious, she peeked through the slit of the heavy canvas covering the open window. The silhouettes of thick, tall trees rolled past the coach on its final destination—trees so thick, they blocked her view. Miles and miles of trees. The snow-covered forest turned her thoughts to her brother.

King George made the patriots' blood boil when he ordered the colonists not to cut trees for personal use. The tallest trees along the coastal shores could only be cut to build masts for the British Navy vessels. Such a law infuriated James and gave him another reason to rebel.

After what seemed like hours, Katherine noticed the gray shadows of the thick, dense forest give way to smooth slopes of snow-blanketed hills. The brilliant, radiant blue sky, almost blinding, was deceiving. The warmth of the blazing star bounced off the piercing cold earth. Frozen crusted snow sparkled like crystal diamonds from the reflection of the sun.

Before mid-afternoon the team pulled its coach and passengers around a bend to reveal the panoramic view of the city by the water. Katherine stared out across the Boston Bay and marveled at the view. Her widened eyes followed the curve of the land out toward the ocean horizon. Never in her entire life had she ever seen so much water.

The stagecoach wheeled into the outskirts of Boston along the waterfront. Fascinated, Katherine scanned the large sailboats and ships of all sizes. Wide-eyed and awe-struck, she stared at the huge, magnificent ships. Passengers scurried down planks, disembarking the beautiful schooners to visit relatives, friends, or complete their business along the seaboard. Or perhaps they were returning home from some far off mystical land. She grinned realizing her imagination was in full bloom, and then wondered if she'd ever have the opportunity to sail.

Katherine wrinkled her nose when the fishy smell registered. Her gaze landed on a man screaming orders to others as they unloaded merchandise from a ship. Multitudes of fishermen laughed in conversations over large cods dangling on hooks.

Forgotten were the two travelers across from her in the small quarters. She was too busy focusing on every sight the coach rolled past.

Loud clinking noises drew her attention to the blacksmith shop with an overhead sign that read "Leavitts Blacksmith." Another shopkeeper pounded

away on a kettle, surrounded by hinges, chains, and other items hanging from wood rafters. Children playing tag darted in front and along-side the coach. Hectic activities continued all along the road as the coach approached the inn.

Excitement replaced the fatigue in her body. Her body swayed to the momentum of the team rolling to its final halt. No sooner had Katherine stepped down from the coach than a large black man stood beside her.

A gap showed in his toothless grin. "Missy Heaton?"

"Yes." She nodded. She smiled recognizing his description of the person her mother said would be waiting.

"I'm here to take you to Missy Elizabeth," he stated.

Glancing down, she pointed and politely said, "These are my bags."

His large, strong hand gripped the handles and lifted. He shuffled over to a buggy. Once he dumped her belongings in the back, the happy-faced man turned, rendering a smile. He reached out his hand to help her into the buggy, and without a word, he carefully wrapped her feet in a wool blanket.

"Thank you," Katherine mumbled. She marveled at the few spoken words she'd heard since the start of the long journey. Like the couple that'd just spend over three days in her company...they just walked off as if they'd never set eyes on her.

The black, burly driver grabbed the leather reins and in a quick snap, the animals clumped down the center of the Boston Commons.

In her first close-up of the bustling town, Katherine glanced from side to side, looking for a familiar individual in the massive crowd of people and many, many Redcoats. Her concern intensified as she realized how hard it would be to find Jeremy.

Rolling past the State House near the center of

the Commons, Katherine observed the formally dressed men in their tailored waistcoats and dark breeches. They stood conversing on the steps of the building, which appeared to be the main hub of government issues in Massachusetts. She darted a quick glance at the Customs House across the street before it disappeared just as another building came into her vision. One building after another continued all along the center street with numerous alleyways leading off to other buildings.

Shop after shop lined the street, fascinating her. At the far end, her driver directed the horse and buggy beyond the old South Meeting House. Built in the middle of the Commons, the old church faced an inner city of tents where British soldiers lived, and, most assuredly, Jeremy. Biting her bottom lip, Katherine's large eyes took it all in, overwhelmed by the number of people living in one place.

The lively town simmered down when the buggy turned at the edge of town onto a street of residential homes. Passing several marble-pillared mansions, the buggy slowed with its approach to a large, imposing Colonial house.

"Whoa." The driver pulled back on the reins, and the horses slowed.

Katherine took a hurried scan of her aunt's house. Although covered in snow the grand estate looked glorious with a white-washed picket fence surrounding the front yard. A lovely porch set off the beautiful house with its large windows, dressed with dark, rich-colored curtains, welcoming one inside.

Katherine smiled and stepped down from the buggy without taking her eyes off the beautiful house. Her Aunt Elizabeth stood in the front doorway, waving to get her attention. Katherine grinned and raised her hand to acknowledge her aunt's welcome.

The small, rounded woman with her mound of gray hair motioned for Katherine to hurry out of the

cold. Once inside, her aunt did not hesitate to give her an affectionate hug while the patient butler stood in the hallway, holding the door.

“Come, come, my dear,” she said, and scurried her into the warmth.

Aunt Elizabeth bubbled. “My dear girl, it’s so good to have you here. Was the trip terribly long? Of course it was, how stupid of me to ask.”

Katherine stood still while her aunt slipped off her gloves and rubbed her hands between her tiny wrinkled ones. “You’re freezing, my dear...those coaches have no protection from this fretful weather. Whatever possessed you to travel in the middle of winter?” Her aunt rattled on not expecting an answer to the questions she tossed into the air. “Boston has changed so much since you last visited. Of course, you were all too young to remember.”

“Thank you, Aunt Elizabeth. You’re so sweet to let me come for a visit. I’m anxious to see everything.”

Elizabeth took Katherine’s arm, and with a slight turn toward the butler, she said, “See to it my niece’s things are brought to her room.”

Following her aunt’s lead, Katherine entered the large room and immediately embraced the heat from the oversized, beautifully decorated hearth.

“Please, sit.”

Obediently, Katherine took a seat in the high, winged-back settee near the fire.

“I’m so glad to hear your mother’s well...but I am sorry to hear your brother’s become a protégé to...oh, you know who I’m speaking of...the arrogant propagandist Adams.”

Smiling about allegations in respect to her brother, Katherine sat close to the hearth and took a deep, relaxed breath. The heat penetrated her cold body. Glancing at her aunt, she politely said, “I take it James made the society pages?”

Before her aunt could answer, an energetic

young girl in her late teens rushed into the drawing room.

“Katherine,” she shrieked in excitement. The blonde, bouncy girl promptly gave her a huge hug.

“Hello, Allyson,” Katherine warmly returned her cousin’s greeting.

Allyson’s baby blue eyes shined with delight while her blonde curls leaped about as rapidly as she spoke. “I’m so thrilled to see you. I just returned from this horrid party where Andrew Yates was talking about—”

“Allyson, Allyson,” interrupted her mother. “Dear, I’m sure your cousin would prefer to get settled before committing to memory your social calendar.” She turned to face Katherine. “Come, my dear, let’s get you to your room. You may change into clean clothes and refresh yourself before teatime.”

Once again, taking Katherine’s arm, her aunt directed her out of the drawing room to the staircase.

Katherine followed her aunt up the large, wide stairs. She glided her hand along the oak banister while glancing around the impressive house. “Your home is beautiful, Aunt Elizabeth. I don’t remember it being this large and elaborate.”

“Course not, my dear, you were just a baby the last time your mother and father made the trip to Boston. Oh my, I didn’t mean to mention your father. Such a tragic death.” Elizabeth clicked her tongue and shook her head.

Katherine didn’t respond. The thought of her father sent a pang of sorrow through her. She followed her aunt into a bedroom.

“Oh my goodness, Aunt Elizabeth, I’ve never had such a luxurious room,” she exclaimed.

Her gaze studied each piece of furniture, magnificently carved and polished to its perfection. She even had her own settee with a polished table and two cloth-covered chairs.

“Oh, my, and there are drapes around the bed.” Turning, she gave her aunt a wide-eyed look. “I do so appreciate the use of such a room.”

“Of course, dear. This room is yours for as long as you stay.” Waving her hand toward the bed, her superior tone announced, “All our canopies are adorned with heavy curtains to keep out the draft. Winters are dreadful.”

“But the fireplace...it’s so huge,” Katherine remarked, wondering how she could get cold with the warmth of a fire in her very own room.

“Yes, yes, yes, there’s one in every room.” Elizabeth grinned with pride.

“Do they all have brick chimneys adorned with massive hand-carved mantles like this one?” Katherine asked. She couldn’t keep her hand from touching the smooth wood mantle. She felt like a kid again.

“Yes, they do. Each is faced with imported tiles from Holland.” Chuckling at the amazed expression on Katherine face, Elizabeth turned to leave the room. “Now, you just wash up and return to the drawing room for tea. I’ll expect you in a few minutes.”

After her aunt closed the door, Katherine whirled to take in her very own room for the length of her stay. She was certain about one thing—she’d never seen such an elaborately furnished place with its imported rugs, curtains and mirrors. The entire house happened to be so much more than to what she was accustomed.

In just moments, Katherine washed her face, neck and arms at the washstand, changed into a tidy wool dress, threw a wrap over her shoulders, and headed out.

Well, Lady Heaton, it’s time for afternoon tea in the drawing room. Now, why do you suppose she called it the drawing room? Giggling, she all but rushed down the stairs.

Tea, served everyday, was another luxury Katherine wasn't familiar with, but surely she'd get in the swing of such a new style of life in Boston.

"My dear, do come in." Elizabeth swept her arm in a curving way. "You look refreshed. I do apologize, Katherine. We're the only ones for tea today. Mrs. Revere had made plans to come, but four of her eight children are down sick, and your cousin Allyson just took off with that no-good Andrew."

"I don't mind; besides, we'll have a chance to talk. You can give me all the family hearsay and I can tell Mother when I get home."

Elizabeth nodded at her niece, grinned, and handed Katherine a dainty China cup and saucer, trimmed in pink flowers.

Katherine rubbed her finger along the smooth edge of the silver tray. "Your tea set is lovely, Aunt Elizabeth." Her eyes widened with delight from the special foods placed on the shiny platter. Sugar, molasses, and spices were luxuries uncommon to the Heaton family.

"They are lovely, aren't they? All my silver is handmade by Mr. Revere, a silversmith here in town. His shop's located on the Commons. He's next door to the dressmaker's shop where I plan to get you some fashionable clothes."

Frowning, Katherine glanced at her aunt, and then, self-consciously down at her simple grey wool dress. Uncertainty about whether or not she had dressed inappropriately for Boston or teatime, weighed on her thoughts.

Elizabeth continued to babble on about her silver. "Look, dear," she said, pointing out a teaspoon. She handed it to Katherine. "It's engraved and monogrammed. Mr. Revere is our famous blacksmith, known from all around. He marks his work with *REVERE* or *PR* in italics or block letters."

Katherine carefully examined the spoon. "He does excellent work, perfect. I can't imagine what it

cost.”

“Yes, yes, he is a perfectionist, and more. About seven years ago, I bought six of his teaspoons for nine shillings. This lovely teapot set with its unusual wooden handle, set me back ten pounds, sixteen shillings and eight pence.” Grinning, Elizabeth looked at her niece and waited for a reaction.

Katherine didn’t dare ask how much the creamer cost or the current price on the tea set. “Mr. Revere must be a very wealthy man.”

“I’d dare say he has a lucrative business. Especially, since he’s a multitalented craftsman.”

“Oh, you mean, he’s makes other items, as well?”

“Most definitely. Besides printing money for the State of Massachusetts, Mr. Revere deals with a large range of customers, from the wealthy to the middling. In particular, he crafts small items such as buckles, rings, clasps, buttons, and beads.”

Elizabeth paused for a breath, shook her head and said, “Really, my dear, I’m surprised you haven’t heard of him. News travels throughout the colonies about his copper and silver items all the time.”

Refusing to apologize for being a mere farm girl, Katherine looked around the room. The entire house contained displays of glass, china, and silver in every room she was sure. Such wealth dazzled Katherine. To think she had a relative who actually owned such items.

Her father had made most of their simple furniture, even the pewter and wooden plates. Her eyes glazed over the stunning large dining table, adorned with an imported cloth. Their quaint, country home with homemade tablecloths and napkins was practical, but nothing compared to her aunt’s home.

Katherine continued the early morning routine she had from the farm. Her aunt and cousin, she discovered after a few days, were late sleepers. A

habit she couldn't afford to acquire.

Katherine pulled the wool scarf close around her shoulders and glanced around her room. Though her aunt insisted the housekeepers would clean her room, she wanted to put away her own personal items. She also preferred making her own bed each morning, a habit she felt she should keep. After all, once home again, things would return to reality.

Quietly, she made her way down the stairs and headed for the kitchen, where she'd find Abigail busy preparing food for the day.

Boston seemed a world away from Wings Falls. Here, in this social atmosphere, self-fulfillment seemed the main agenda from day-to-day. At home on the farm, each day was planned according to necessities. Accustomed to cooking, mending, washing, and making sure the candle supply would be sufficient to last through the long hard winter, Katherine couldn't afford to become lazy. Not many hours remained in a day after the soaps were made, the vegetable garden planted in the spring, or harvested in the fall. The list went on, and it would do her good to remember such a list waited once she returned.

Katherine entered the cooking room and immediately her face warmed from the heat of the huge fireplace. Its blaze shot upward to lick the kettle dangling from a steel hook.

"Good morning, Abigail. Hmm, smells heavenly."

Katherine sniffed the luscious aroma of meat roasting over the fire. She detected the divine whiff drifting from the Dutch oven and asked, "Oh, Abigail, do I smell fresh bread baking?"

Abigail bent over to baste the large hunk of venison that hung inside the fireplace. She glanced at Katherine and smiled. "That you do, my lady. How are you this fine morning? Tea?" Abigail asked, basting the meat one last time. She set the wooden spoon on the massive wooden table and turned to

fetch the old teapot.

“Yes, please.”

In the short time Katherine had ventured into the kitchen, she had come to respect the chocolate-smooth features of the woman, and her sincere attitude toward her. Abigail dressed neatly in a white Holland-style apron tied over her long, brown wool dress with its linen neckband. Katherine thought it sad her aunt only knew Abigail as an employee and not a person.

“You want a bite of bread?” she asked. “You’re too skinny; extra bread will put some fat on your bones.”

Giggling, Katherine shook her head. “No thank you, just tea.”

Abigail had become fond of the lady who came into her kitchen each morning. She had spirit. A worker too. Abigail could tell from the color of her tanned skin and her pretty hands, working hands.

“Here you go.”

Katherine took a whiff of the steamy, strong tea. “Hmm, smells good.”

Smiling, Abigail turned back to her duties. The first time this lady of the house entered her kitchen, she served tea in a China cup but quickly learned different. This one wasn’t a Bostonian society lady of town, but nonetheless a lady.

“Thank you. And, how are you doing this morning, Abigail?”

“Got up this mornin, God’s good. You best stand by the fire, chilly over there.”

Katherine turned and glanced out the window. She stared at a hunk of ice hanging from the side of the house.

“You so used to waking early, you can’t sleep in, Missy?” Abigail asked with a grin.

“Hmm.” Katherine glanced back and nodded.

“Well, if you don’t mind me saying, it’s a better

habit for one so young to be up early and working than to sleep most your life away.”

“Once I return home, life will go back to normal. I can’t get too spoiled during my visit.”

“Yeah, we call that real, down to earth living. Like most.”

“I know. People are different in Boston. What’s important to them seems to contradict what’s going on with the colonies and the British. Social events are the priority. Sometimes I think they forget our country’s on the verge of war.”

Abigail glanced at the young lady, nodded absently, and scooped a large cup of flour from a bag. She sprinkled the fluffy powder on the top of the moist dough and punched her brown fist into the soft ball to beat out the air bubbles. Without saying a word, she continued to knead until the perfectly shaped bread dough was ready for the brick oven.

“How could they forget with all the Redcoats encamped in the Commons?”

“Now Missy, you can’t worry yourself about such. No need to get yourself in a tether. Get over by the fire and warm yourself.” To soften the order, Abigail grinned.

Katherine moved toward the huge fireplace. Her gaze studied the painted blue trimmed bricks and the wooden mantle where an array of utensils, iron pots, pans, and other sundry items hung from pegs. Her gaze swung upward to the wooden rafters adorned with dried herbs hanging in rolls.

She took a deep breath and sniffed lavender. Its scent smelled the strongest. Abigail’s spinning wheel, pushed in a corner, waited its turn to hum its wheel of spun thread. A couple of rockers sat next to the edge of the fireplace beckoned her to take a seat. Sipping her cup of hot tea, she strolled over to one.

The back door swung open, and a freezing gust of air swished over her. A slight shiver ran down her back as she gave the big, burly black man a warm

smile. She'd liked Isaac since the day he met her at the coach inn.

He returned her smile with a wide grin. "Mornin."

"You be sure to knock all the snow off before you come in here," ordered Abigail.

Obligingly, Isaac stomped his boots in the doorway; his large frame and arms full of firewood blocked the winter air. He kicked the door shut, and then walked over to the huge hearth and dropped the wood in a box.

She'd been here a little over a week, and it felt good to settle in a small routine of visiting the kitchen each morning. At first Katherine offered to help cook and stir the concoction of candle wax, but Abigail would have nothing to do with it—said her lady would beat her. The two friends always made her feel welcomed.

She watched Isaac help himself to a large pewter cup. He poured the steaming coffee from the old pot and moseyed over to the rocker opposite her. Taking a seat he sipped at the liquid, connecting with her gaze.

With a heavy sigh, she smiled. "How are you this morning, Isaac?"

"Good."

"Good," she replied.

"You seem a little down, Missy."

"Isaac, now don't you go and get noseey. Hear me?" demanded Abigail, darting a glare across the room.

Isaac ignored the order and leaned forward placing his elbows on his large knees. Holding the cup in his huge hands, he asked, "You need help?"

Round black discs embedded in yellowish-white eyeballs stared back. The benevolent friendship she felt for these two told her she could trust them with her concerns and desires.

"I'm not...I'm not sure how to...to...find

someone.”

“Your brother?” Abigail asked, hesitating for a moment while she worked the dough into a soft mass for baking.

“No. Yes, him, too.” Katherine stood and stepped to the hearth. She placed her hand on the warm mantle piece, wondering how to ask.

“Just tell old Isaac; he’ll find him.” Abigail’s tender voice put hope in Katherine’s expression.

She glanced at the gentle, burly man.

He stared back and nodded in affirmation.

“Any time, little Missy. Just let me know.”

Glancing out the window, he stood. “Looks like sun’s up—time to get to work.”

“My dear, you must wear a bonnet, your skin is far too brown from the sun. Not attractive, my dear.” Aunt Elizabeth clicked her tongue and shook her head. “No, no, no, not good, dear. You must learn to take care of your skin and protect it from the elements. From here on, you’ll be careful. No more sun on your skin. You don’t want to look like a mere farm girl, now, do you? Ladies have white skin.” Her aunt rattled on, not expecting an answer or comment.

Feeling somewhat chastised, Katherine slipped into her cloak and gloves for another weekly trip to town. Never in her life had she shopped so often.

The cold breeze brushed against her cheek during the short buggy ride to the main street. As always, her eyes searched the crowded streets for a familiar face.

Katherine finally met the infamous Mr. Revere and found him a perfect gentleman. His intriguing store contained hundreds of beautiful items on display. Much to her excitement, she purchased a beautiful set of teaspoons, which Mr. Revere expertly wrapped. A gift her mother would cherish since each spoon had his famous *PR* monogram.

She followed her aunt and Allyson into a dress shop lined with tables of bright-colored ribbons. Katherine's gaze widened at the mounds of cloth on each table set up in all kinds of patterns and colors. Hesitating at a stand full of ribbons, she gently reached out and touched the satin yellow softness. She'd rather wear this in her hair instead of the bonnets her aunt expected her to wear.

"Katherine, dear, look what I'm going to purchase for you, today."

Turning, her eyes rested on a small silk hat with a narrow brim in her aunt's hands. Now, she realized there would be no getting out of wearing one while in Boston.

"Oh, look Allyson, don't you think Katherine would be adorable in this yellow-flowered skirt. Look how wide the support panniers are."

"Oh, yes, Mother. Katherine, you would be stunning in this color, and look, the neckline's low and square. Mother, look at all the petticoats made from the same fabric. Oh, look at this—"

Allyson's contagious excitement turned Katherine's attention to the simple high-waisted white muslin dress. The stunning, fashioned dress caught Katherine's eye. She'd never owned anything so elegant. "Really, Aunt Elizabeth, I couldn't. It cost too much."

"Nonsense, dear, I have a right to indulge my niece while she's visiting."

"Huh—" Allyson whispered, "Katherine, she wants to, so let her. Besides, look, the dress has a little fitted jacket. It flares below the waist." Giggling, Allyson held it up. "This will show off your tiny waist, Katherine. I love it."

Embarrassed, she could say nothing, but to go along with Allyson. Her aunt truly spoiled her with all the things she purchased.

"Mrs. Hunter, I'll take this," Elizabeth said,

holding up a mustard-yellow skirt trimmed with two bands of silk fabric.

“Look Katherine,” bubbled Allyson, “the bodice has a high waistline and is lined with linen fabric. How charming.”

“Oh Mother, this skirt’s darling. It’ll look great on Katherine, especially the way it gathers at the waist with a drawstring at the center back.

Katherine’s arms were loaded by the time they exited from the millinery shop. Her aunt just couldn’t resist purchasing the white linen chemise with a single button closure for her, especially after noticing the hand written sewn label inside the dress. Charlotte Huntington, No. 5, meant nothing to Katherine. Nor, could her aunt resist the embroidered woven Kashmir shawl of Paisley design. Katherine thought it almost sinful the way her aunt and cousin spent money. Never had she ever been around anyone who spent so freely.

Armed with packages, Katherine admitted she had fun and discovered how easy she became caught up in the thrill of shopping for personal items. She handed her packages to Isaac and turned to climb into the carriage. When she glanced across the street, she hesitated. Squinting, she studied a man leaning against a doorframe of a place called Green Lantern.

At first, she thought he looked like her brother. She wasn’t sure, but the man had a strong resemblance to James, except for the full-face beard. Before she could ask Isaac to find out, the man turned and disappeared into the pub.

Chapter 9

Paul tugged the wool scarf tight around his neck. The cold March wind whistled through the long, narrow alleyway as he rounded the corner and emerged onto King Street. A loud commotion from a small crowd in front of the Customs caught his attention on his way to meet James at the pub. He slowed his steps to watch the vociferous squabble between citizens and soldier.

A gangly black boy stepped near the sentry on duty and hollered insults in the Brit's face.

Angered, the red-faced soldier threw up his arm and knocked the lad with the butt of his musket, sprawling him onto the frozen ground.

The kid howled, long and loud, until an unruly crowd gathered.

Paul heard the church bells down the far end of the Commons. The clanking sound rang out to draw people from their establishments.

In no time, the Brit found himself in the mist of an angry mob. The soldier stood his ground.

To get a better view, Paul took a step up onto the walkway. Before long, he recognized a relieved expression on the sentry's face when his superior approached with six guards.

Paul's brows pulled together. *Bout time*, he thought. For a moment there, he feared the mob would attack the soldier.

The captain halted in front of his abused soldier, pivoted, and pointed his gun into the crowd.

He shouted above the noise, "Return to your

homes. Disperse! In the name of the King!"

In answer to his orders, several young boys hurled snowballs and large chunks of ice at the soldiers. Then, out of the mob, a large, aggressive mulatto man strolled forward until he was within inches of the captain's fixed bayonet. The man's huge black eyes dared the Redcoat to fire.

Silence fell over the crowd.

"Damn you Redcoats, go home, go home," shouted several men from the crowd. In the next second, a solid icy snowball hurled through the air at one of the guards. At the same moment, someone else struck another soldier with a club.

"Hold your fire," the captain's voice hollered above the swarm.

In all the confusion a shot rang out followed by another, then another. Panic-stricken, the once jeering civilians lost their nerves, and began to flee like flies in every direction.

Paul fell against the post, wondering how the situation got out of hand. He'd heard the captain's shout for them to hold their fire, but in all the mayhem, the angry patriots probably heard *fire*.

A gray cloud of gun smoke floated upward from the area. He stared at several men sprawled out on the street in blood-splattered snow-dead. Sickness swelled in Paul's abdomen while a strange weakness surged through his body.

His vision became fuzzy, and without warning, his legs crumpled beneath him until he slumped against the post. His hand touched a painful spot on his arm. The wet, moisture turned his fingers red. Funny, he hadn't known...

At the sound of the first gunshots, Captain Burke headed for the Commons bracing himself for trouble. When he ran upon the scene, his quick glance took in a terrified crowd scattering. His steps came to an abrupt halt when dead bodies, strewn throughout, reached his sight.

With wrinkled brows, he scanned the repulsive picture before him. Turning, he took a closer look, focusing his gaze on a form slouched on the walkway. The furrow in his brow deepened when he recognized the man.

Without hesitating, Jeremy rushed to his side and hooked the wounded man's good arm around his neck.

Paul's glossy eyes looked into his, not comprehending what'd actually happened.

Without a word, Jeremy heaved him to his weak legs and dragged him toward the Green Lantern. He let out a puff of air when he crashed through the doors. A hush spread over the lively group. Each noticed the British soldier's struggle with the dead weight of the unconscious man.

Jeremy lowered Paul to the floor, knelt down to hold his head just as a man's voice lifted from the curious crowd, "Get James."

In no time, James ran down the backstairs toward the two men surrounded by intrusive onlookers. He eyed the Redcoat with suspicion. Working his way through the crowd, he yelled, "You son of a bitch, what did you do to him?"

Jeremy ignored the accusation and released Paul to a man kneeling beside him. "He's been shot...needs a doctor's attention."

James tossed a fuming glance at him before he shoved him aside. He gathered Paul into his arms and glanced up, ordering, "Get the doc. Now!"

A clamor of hands rushed to get Paul's body lifted and laid on the bar, allowing Jeremy to back toward the doors. Unseen, and in a quick smooth move, he ducked out of the tavern.

Sitting at the breakfast table, the ladies ate in silence. Unbeknownst to her aunt, Katherine has already indulged in several cups of tea during her early morning ritual visit with Abigail. Therefore, by

the time her aunt and cousin were ready to rise, she was famished. The amount of food she put away gave her aunt the impression she consumed large amounts of food, and yet, remained far too skinny.

“Huh!” Elizabeth slammed down the *Boston Gazette*. “I can’t believe he’s called it the *Boston Massacre*.”

“What?” Allyson’s inquisitive expression looked up from her breakfast plate to bore into her mother’s eyes.

Elizabeth’s thumb and index finger gently lifted the fine China cup, and before explaining, she took a sip.

“Several nights ago some vagrant workers attacked a few British soldiers, and now, they are calling the incident the *Boston Massacre*.” With an exasperated shake of her head, she shoved the paper toward Allyson.

Katherine jerked her head when she heard the mention of British soldiers. She leaned closer to Allyson, desperate to read the article in her hands.

Clicking her tongue and shaking her head, Elizabeth’s disgusted tone made another point. “And, of course, that Adams man is the rebel in this whole issue. He makes it appear they’re justified in their barbaric insubordination.”

“What does it say?” Katherine’s rapid heartbeat increased.

“Well, let see.” Allyson scanned the newspaper. “A clash between the soldiers and a few colonists on March five...blab, blab-caused a crowd to gather at the Customs House. Several boys harassed the sentries on duty. Blab, blab, blab...same old thing, you know, name-calling, insults.”

Allyson skimmed down the page. “Let see, something about people throwing snowballs and attacking the guards...muskets fired, and when things settled, eleven colonists had been shot. Oh, it does say five are dead. And, unsubstantiated rumors

of a few other bystanders hit in the crossfire.” Allyson glanced at Katherine.

“Who were the men?” Katherine asked, struggling to suppress a growing panic. She knew James wouldn’t hesitate to get involved in a skirmish of this type.

“Don’t worry, my dear. I would’ve told you if James had been one of them.” Elizabeth took a sip of tea, becoming quite bored with the subject.

Katherine ignored her aunt and asked, “What about the soldiers?”

Once again, Allyson scanned the article. “Huh...oh, the soldiers fired directly into the crowd at unarmed civilians—if you can believe anything written in this paper.”

Eager to learn more, Katherine impatiently reached for the paper. “May I read the article?” Her eyes searched for names.

“Katherine dear,” Allyson insisted, “I feel this incident has rattled you somewhat. Please tell us what you’re reading.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Katherine glanced at her cousin. “It states the five dead are Crispus Attucks, a mulatto man from North Carolina, Samuel Gray, and James Caldwell, mates on a harbor vessel. Oh, also, a seventeen year old youth, Samuel Maverick. He died later.”

“Any wounded?” Allyson inquired.

Katherine too, only wanted names. “Christopher Monk, seventeen, John Clark, Edward Payne, John Green, Robert Patterson, Patrick Carr.”

Standing, Elizabeth smiled at the girls, “Thank goodness we aren’t acquainted with any of them, except of course, Mr. Green. It’s too bad, he was a good tailor.”

“He’s not dead yet, Mother.”

“Well, for heaven sakes,” Elizabeth mumbled. Waving her napkin toward the paper held in Katherine’s hand, her disgusted tone demanded,

“They said five were dead, but they only give four names. So, which is it? Four or five dead.”

Katherine stared at the bold black letters insinuating others had been wounded—who?

Katherine stroked the velvet-soft nose of the old, chocolate-colored, quarter horse. Turning, she looked to Isaac with anticipation. Jittery, she bit her lower lip, unsure of how to ask him. The need for a liaison was obvious since her aunt never allowed her to venture too far from the house alone.

Inhaling a slow deep breath, she followed her heart, trusting him. “Isaac, I need a favor.”

“Anything. What is it you need?”

“You heard about the massacre and the killings?”

“Yeah, too bad.”

“The paper named the dead and some of the wounded but didn’t mention who the others might have been in the crossfire.”

Hesitating, her shaky hand reached into her dress pocket and pulled out an envelope. “I need you to deliver this letter to a Captain Jeremy Burke at Faneuil Hall.”

Katherine held out the letter and waited for Isaac’s response.

He studied her for a moment. “A British officer?”

“Yes, will you deliver it for me?” Skeptical, she waited for his answer.

“Sure, anything else?”

“Yes, please. Could you find out...I mean, can you check and see if my brother James is safe...and...and, a friend from home—Paul Bennett? Please. I know you won’t come by the information easily since he’s wanted by the Brits, but I thought maybe you’d-.”

“I’ll try, Missy.”

Rushing down the stairs, Katherine entered the

warm cook area to the welcoming aroma of fresh baked bread. Her quick glance furrowed her brow. No Isaac. Disappointed, again.

She hadn't seen him for several days, not since the afternoon she'd given him the letter. Questions filled her head. Why it was taking so long to find Jeremy? Unless...he'd been relocated...or, heaven forbid, killed.

"Good morning, Missy."

"Good morning, Abigail."

"Why the long face?" The neatly dressed woman handed Katherine a hot mug of tea. "Something wrong?"

"No. I had hoped Isaac would be here this morning. Have you seen him?"

"Yeah, you just missed him. All ready gone to the stables."

"Do you mind if I borrow your coat, Abigail?" Katherine placed the cup on the table and without waiting for an answer, grabbed the woman's coat from the peg and hurried her steps out the backdoor. She couldn't ponder any longer.

Katherine pushed open the stable doors wide enough to slip through and searched around. She didn't see Isaac anywhere. Frowning, she strolled close to the stall, and absentmindedly, stroked the horse's nose. He nudged her hand, expecting a treat. A heavy sigh escaped her lips while gazing into the large raven eyes of the animal.

"Where is he?" The velvet black nose nudged her hand as if in answer to her question. Saddened, Katherine looked down to the floor, tears blurring her vision.

"You'll catch a death of cold in here, Missy."

Katherine jumped at the sound of Isaac's deep, gruff voice. She whirled to find the intimidating man near the far end of the stables, supporting a pitchfork.

"Oh, Isaac," she cried, brushing a teardrop from

her eyelash. "I need to know if you were able to deliver the letter."

"Sure did, Missy. The man said he'd get in touch."

Katherine hurried to him and followed him into an empty stall. He shoved the pitchfork into a pile of hay.

Isaac darted a glance in her direction, noticing her raised eyebrows. "You have to wait. Time will come. Your friend said the other man's injury was minor. Just wounded."

"Wounded? Who...James?" A chill ran through her. Katherine reached out and touched Isaac's arm, requiring his full attention.

"No, Missy, a gentleman named Bennett."

"Paul." Her hand rose to cover her mouth. "Oh Isaac, are you sure he's alive? Do you know where he is? What about James?"

"He didn't say. The Bennett man will live...all I know."

"And, the captain, did he...did he say when he'd let you know?"

Isaac studied her. "You'll know, Missy, you'll know. Now, get back into the house before my lady finds you out here."

Dear God, how long did she have to wait? Katherine folded her underclothes and placed them carefully on the settee. Turning, she picked up the warm wool robe she'd placed in front of the hearth and slipped it over her silky nightgown, another present from her aunt. She strolled over to the enormous bed and pulled aside the heavy quilts.

Tonight, she had excused herself from the drawing room earlier than usual. An entire week had gone by and still, she hadn't heard anything from Isaac. The nights were the longest. Now, she worried.

What if Jeremy didn't want to see her?

Frowning, her distraught body strolled toward the fireplace and dropped down on the cushioned chair. She covered her face with her hands, praying.

Leaning back, she reminded herself Isaac said to wait. How long? With each passing day, more doubts crowded into her thoughts. Maybe he'd changed his mind or found someone else. After all, countless numbers of beautiful, social women lived in Boston. The kind accustomed to his type of social upbringing. Not like her, a simple farm girl.

She closed her eyes.

Katherine's eyes flew open, trying to distinguish the sound that woke her. Then, she heard it, again, ever so lightly—two knocks on her door. She must've dozed off. Standing, she glanced at the clock on the mantel and realized how late it had become. Katherine opened the door to find Abigail nervously wringing her hands while waiting.

The brown-skinned woman glanced behind her into the empty hallway, stepped through the door, and in an urgent voice whispered, "Come, he's in the barn. Isaac says to be quick."

"Who, Abigail?"

Shaking her head, she lifted her shoulder, her lips pressed tight. "Just hurry."

"But, I have my nightgown-I need to dress—"

"No Missy," Abigail grabbed her arm, "you don't have time. If my lady finds me fetching you, she'll have my hide."

Katherine closed her door with a soft click and silently followed Abigail down the stairs to the kitchen and out the back door.

Holding the long, wool robe tight around her body, Katherine pushed against the strong gust of wind as she hurried toward the barn. Her heart pounded against her chest as she stepped inside. She searched the area, but didn't see anyone, not even Isaac. Frowning, she took a deep breath.

Jeremy's silent steps carried him through the door behind Katherine. His hands fumbled with his hat as he stared at the bright blue ribbon draped through auburn hair. Caught up in the moment, he froze.

His intense gaze drank in the sight of her as she slowly turned back toward the door.

Her gaze met his.

An undeniable gleam of pure joy glowed in her face. Her remarkable eyes pinned his, mesmerizing him.

"I never thought I'd see you again. You're beautiful," he whispered. Instinctively, he started toward her, and then stopped.

"Jeremy, Jeremy, I lost my heart to you months ago."

Her low voice beckoned him to move near, so he might touch her.

Before he could take a step, she glided to him and without wavering, reached out and touched his cheek.

His senses heightened to the warmth of her fingertips and the tone of her velvety voice—all so tempting. He gazed directly into her passionate green eyes.

Jeremy caught his breath. His strength drained. He forced his feet to step away from Katherine's touch. Twisting around, he stood firm, stiff, and ridged. *Stay in control.*

The lanterns, hanging from the stall posts, flickered throughout the wistful quietness of the barn. The cozy, intimate setting smelled of hay mixed with horses, and the harmonious sounds of katydids chirping in the darkness beyond the walls played havoc with his emotions. Drawn back to her, he whispered, "You shouldn't have come, Katherine."

"If you didn't want to see me, why did *you* come?" her composed voice demanded an

explanation.

“You don’t understand. I wanted to see you. Katherine, my situation is dreadfully complicated. There are parts of my life—”

Katherine grabbed his hand. “It doesn’t matter. How we feel about each other is the only thing that really matters.”

“It does, Katherine, it does. I’m haunted with matters you can’t possibly comprehend.”

“Jeremy, it’s *now* that counts.”

When she bit her bottom lip, he felt a quiver shoot through his groin. His jaws tightened.

“It’s your brother, isn’t it?” she asked.

His gaze traveled to hers for a moment then swung to the ground. He released a heavy sigh.

“Ned’s been on my mind a lot, lately. He was foolish. Huh, not even a good marksman, and his challenger knew so.” Jeremy studied the silver ring on his right hand. Absently, he twirled it around his finger, thinking about his life before coming to this strange New World.

As she listened to his vibrant, rich voice, Katherine’s heart pounded. Sadness spread over his tanned face. Her emotions swelled. She skimmed his thick, dark hair pulled back by its leather strap, enhancing his looks.

How wonderful to set eyes on the man who had captured her heart. He had no idea how his physical appearance and presence tugged at her heart—stirring emotions bubbled to the surface. She filled her lungs and slowly released her breath, biting her bottom lip.

She squeezed her hands together. It took all her will power to stand motionless. When his sky-blues looked deep into her eyes, they revealed a poignant depth of love. She knew she’d made the right choice.

“My family took the news of Ned’s death hard. He held the strength I do not possess. His death

consumed me with rage.” He hesitated, swallowing hard before he looked at her. “I loved my brother, Katherine, so much so...I killed the man who took his life.”

She didn’t care. The only thing that mattered now was how she felt. Moving to him, she touched his arm, drawing his gaze. “You are a strong man, Jeremy. You *are* good.”

“No, I killed a man for vengeance, then ran...and joined the British Army. Oh, Katherine, don’t you see? I was relieved when they shipped me to the colonies. I wanted to leave it all behind.”

“Jeremy, you risked everything to save my brother, and you did so even before there were feelings between us. Nothing could convince me you are not an admirable man.”

His sad expression dropped to the silver ring on his finger. He tugged it off and glanced back into her eyes. His gentle touch lifted her hand and placed the ring lovingly in her palm.

“I fell in love with you the first day I laid eyes on you. You stood in the setting sun by a chestnut horse and never once gave me a glance.”

“Oh, Jeremy,” Katherine’s voice whispered. She stared down at the ring, clutched it tightly, and raised her gaze to his.

Leaning forward she kissed his cheek. When she brushed her lips against his skin, he hitched his breath.

He squeezed her arm, as if to keep from grabbing her.

She smelled his deep woodsy scent, and closed her eyes. Her cheek pressed against his cheek, and the slight stubs of whiskers poked her skin. Sensations exploded.

Tenderly, she glided her lips down his cheek until they rested on his lips. Then, she stepped back and took his hand. Positive of her wants, she placed it over her breast.

Breathless, Katherine sensed the power of his compelling need. He tossed his hat aside, slipped solid hands down around her waist, and jerked her against him. A hot, heavy sigh escaped his mouth as he claimed her parted lips. He teased until a whimper ripped from her throat in a demand for more.

Excitement soared through her body when his tongue feathered against hers. Tasting his tonic of magic potion pushed all her senses into a high state of arousal.

She pulled away slightly and allowed her gaze to consume every inch of his face. Resting on his heated gaze staring at her lips, she smiled and took his hand. Turning, she led him to the corner of the stables near a bed of hay.

When she returned her gaze, her heart flipped at the burning desire in his expression. Now, the battle of denying their feelings had ended. No longer able to refuse the love they so richly deserved, she completely surrendered her heart and soul to this man. She quivered, anticipating his loving touch.

His hands reached behind her and slowly untied the ribbon. Her hair plummeted down. He touched her cheek in a sweet caress, took her in his arms, and buried his head against her neck.

When he nuzzled her ear, Katherine thought she'd die. She closed her eyes, allowing a moan to escape her lips when he bit her earlobe shooting an uncontrollable tremble through her body. Hot breath from his mouth brushed her neck. Katherine opened her eyes to his affectionate blues as he pulled up within inches of her face.

His low seductive voice whispered, "You have to be sure."

Cupping her hands aside his head she gazed into his eyes. "I've never been surer of anything."

A hungry need to taste him made her pull him back to her lips. Nothing existed but the love she

had for this man. She curled her fingers in his thick, dark hair, answering the call to his passionate kisses.

Entwined in Jeremy's strong arms, moist hungry lips connected to his, and her body gave way to weak knees. They tumbled down to the bed; his body crushed her, pressing her back into the pile of hay. He trapped her with his weight, ravaged her mouth, and consumed her entire being.

A soft whimper slipped from her mouth, only to be caught by the rushing power of his tongue, stimulating explosive sensations inside her trembling body. Her skin tingled under his warm, supple fingertips, while lips nibbled her throat, and then hovered over her closed eyelids, kissed her cheek, and her chin. Slowly, ever so slowly, he trailed his tongue down deep in the neckline of her gown. Her breath caught.

Her hands urgently explored his head, shoulders, and neck. A burning need to touch his skin quaked inside her. The intimacy of his mouth and body dared her to tickle his earlobe with her tongue. She withered in excitement when his quick intake of breath linked the heat bursting inside his flaming body. Hard-pressed against hers, tender kisses melted into heated passion.

Charged with intense power and a thirsting crave, she wiggled and stirred beneath his pinning stiffness, until the rush of pleasure surged through her body.

Jeremy leaned on his elbow and gazed down at her beautiful form, silhouetted by the soft lights from the glowing lanterns. Fire kindled within him like he'd never felt before. Hopelessly lost to this woman possessing his heart, he touched her soft full lips. His hands demanded more as they slid her gown up. His palm detected warm flesh beneath her silk garment. Jeremy shivered.

A groan escaped his throat as his hand stroked her smooth torso.

She didn't move. Her large dark eyes drowned him when he gazed into her dazed expression.

"Katherine?" he whispered.

"Jeremy, I'm sure."

Her warm sweet breath cascaded over him, resulting in a growing stiffness that begged to be released.

He rubbed her thigh with feather softness and made a path up her hip to her breast. Her eyes widened when he cupped a full, satiny breast in his hand. While he nibbled her shapely, soft lips, his thumb and finger captured her nipple until she squirmed beneath him. He wanted to touch every inch of her body. His hand skimmed along her ribs to her abdomen, over her hip and down her thigh. Slowly his fingers slid between her legs and gently touched her feminine core. She let out a whimper.

Claiming her lips, he possessed her mouth commanding her to respond. In a quick smooth move, Jeremy pulled her robe from her shoulders and slipped her nightgown over her head. Standing, he unbuckled his belt, slid his pants down, and knelt to touch his skin to hers. His hand slid behind her bottom to fill with the soft flesh. He lifted her to accept him.

She caught her breath and grabbed his shoulders.

The pressure of her hands pushed against him. Inhaling, he released a long breath, and pulled back to gaze into her face.

Her wide eyes stared into his. When she bit her bottom lip at the unexpected pain, he kissed her. Burying his head in her neck, he didn't move. He waited.

When she wrapped her arms around his neck, he sank deeper, knowing her pain would dissolve from a passing awkwardness into a steady

increasing rhythm of flesh meeting flesh, becoming
one.

Chapter 10

Twilight hovered outside the Green Lantern Tavern, while inside at a secluded table James scanned through the *Boston Gazette*. Paul, absorbed in the so-called *Boston Massacre* story, frowned. He glanced at James across the table.

He released a heavy sigh, not from any pain in his bandaged arm, but from his observation of a rough paper sketch held in his hand. With a shake of his head, Paul tossed the drawing down on the table. "Revere's interpretation is incorrect." His flat statement dared James to dispute the facts.

James lowered his paper, reached over and picked up the picture. After several seconds, he commented, "Oh, come on, Paul, it's what they call 'poetic freedom'."

"Well, I can tell you, it's not at all the way it happened." Disgusted, Paul leaned toward James and pointed a finger at a spot on the picture. "Look, there's a blue sky. There's no blue sky at nine o'clock in the evening. And, look, there's no snow and ice on the street."

James lifted a shoulder and mumbled, "Minor little alterations to make the sketch appear more attractive."

"What's *pretty* got to do with a scene that portrays murder? See the dead man next to the soldiers? He's a black man. Revere's painted him white."

"I guess the picture's to endorse a certain point...point being...to stir up anti-British

sentiment, which he's accomplished by highlighting the massacre."

Paul shot James a smirk and snatched the picture from his hand, and then he leaned back in his chair with a puckered brow.

"Despite the apparent short-sighted accuracies you've pointed out, his political propaganda's moved fast through the colonies."

"I'd say, a little more than short-sightedness," Paul grumbled.

"Not to change the subject, but I just received a letter from Mother."

"Finally!" Paul mumbled, focusing on the sketch.

"Well, it did take awhile to get to me. You know, by way of the unauthorized means. But, listen to this—it appears my little sister's been in Boston for over a month."

Paul's eyes widened, straightening, he landed on all four-chair legs and gave his full attention to James. "Katie. Here? Why hasn't she come to see you?"

"I don't think she knows I'm in the city."

Paul quickly glanced away before returning his attention to James.

"What's wrong?" James stared at him, took a long swig of beer, and waited.

"She knows you're in Boston. I told her before I left," he admitted, but not ready to tell all, he shifted his gaze to the sketch in his hand without seeing it. He hadn't forgotten the skirmish leading to his departure from Wings Falls.

"What happened?"

"We...we had a little disagreement. She wanted to come along, but I wouldn't hear of it."

"You know her, Paul, she's bullheaded and usually gets her way."

"Related to her big brother, I'd say."

A grin spread over his lips. "Anyway, she's staying with my Aunt Elizabeth."

“Why would that keep her from finding you?”

“My aunt,” James explained, “is a Tory, she hates me. To her the creatures that slither in the depths of the harbor have more redeeming values than do I.”

Amused, Paul asked, “Are you going to try to see her?”

“Yeah, as soon as I can figure out how. What about you? Don’t you want to see her?”

Saved from having to answer, Paul’s eyes zoomed in on the tall frame of Samuel Adams as he entered the pub. Paul nodded to indicate his presence.

James turned his eyes toward the door.

Adams hesitated only long enough to spy their table, and with a tilt of his head, he made his way through the smoked-filled room with Revere close behind.

Adams pulled out a chair to take a seat next to them. He jostled Paul, slapped him on the back, and bellowed, “So how’s the lucky goat feeling after being rescued by a Redcoat?” Laughing, Adams nodded at James.

“When?” questioned Revere.

“Why, hadn’t you heard? Our friend here got shot during the massacre the other day.”

“You were there?” Revere raised an eyebrow.

“Yup,” Paul answered, aware of the heat rising up his neck.

One side of James’ mouth lifted. He interrupted, “The damn fool got himself shot. And, managed to have a bloodback drag him into the pub.”

“You’re joking.” Revere shook his head.

“Hey, the last thing I remember is walking out of an alley.”

“That’s a likely story,” James retorted, triggering a hearty laugh from the others.

Revere noticed the paper in Paul’s hands and asked, “So, what do you think of my sketch?”

“I think it’s...its nice, Revere.”

James’ eyes enlarged with an evil grin before laughing at Paul’s statement.

Katherine bounced down the stairs heading toward the kitchen. She could hear the clicking sound of the treadle’s rhythmic thump as Abigail pressed her foot on the beater to spin the wheel, creating the woven fabric. When she entered, Abigail glanced up and flashed her pearly white grin toward Katherine.

Smiling at her friend, Katherine waved before she helped herself to a cup of steamy tea. Restless, she left Abigail to her business and strolled out the back door. Accustomed to being outdoors more than she’d been since arriving, she had excused herself from afternoon tea with an apology of having a headache. Frankly, she just wasn’t in the mood for small talk.

Katherine strolled along the path lined with soon-to-be white-blooming heather. She settled herself on a secluded wooden bench among the tender green foliage. Surrounded by mounds of newly scented herbs, her senses awakened to the soothing fragrances of sage, thyme, and marjoram.

Relaxed, she glanced around and recognized several other aromatic plants of rosemary, basil, and parsley. A reminder of her mother. To be sure, Anne Heaton would be fussing over her garden and the tender sprigs peeking through the still cold ground. She missed her mother and would have gone home long ago if it weren’t for Jeremy.

Jeremy. Her eyes sparkled. Her smile brightened. She couldn’t get enough of him. It was as if she were living for him. Katherine bit her lower lip. She filled her lungs with the scented air and released a heavy sigh.

She should not have allowed Jeremy to take her. She knew it was wrong. If anyone found out, she

would be ruined and even considered a lewd woman that no other man would want.

Katherine squeezed her eyes shut. She was hopeless. He made her complete. Their mystifying connection went deeper than any words could say. A timelessness of peace flowed between them. As far as she was concerned, their souls had joined.

What would Mother say...or, James? I can't think about that.

Katherine had to admit it made her nervous to think of James' reaction. Probably the reason she wasn't too anxious to see him. Eventually, she'd have too. Mother would never forgive her if she went home before finding out about him. Home. A slight guilty twinge stabbed her innards when she thought about her mother managing the farm without her. But, how could she go home when Jeremy was here?

"There you are. We've been looking everywhere for you."

Startled by the voice interrupting her daydreaming, she smiled up at her aunt, and then took a sip of tea.

"Katherine, you have a guest. Why didn't you tell me about your friend?"

Frowning, Katherine glanced beyond her aunt's round, plump body. Jeremy. Standing, her heartbeat increased at the sight. An undeniable warm glow spread through her being when her gaze met his fervent look.

"Why, Captain Burke, how lovely to see you."

The glint in his eyes smiled back at her formal greeting. "Miss Heaton," his deep voice responded as he bowed.

"Captain, do come, have tea with us in the drawing room, won't you." Elizabeth, visibly excited to entertain a captain of the British Army in her home, couldn't stop grinning.

"My dear Mrs.—"

"Oh, please, any friend of Katherine can call me

Miss Elizabeth.”

“Thank you, Miss Elizabeth. Perhaps another day.”

Katherine watched his charm sweep her aunt off her feet. “My time is short. If you don’t mind, could I please speak to Miss Heaton? With your permission, of course.”

“Oh, by all means. Please, Captain, come for tea, soon.”

Bowing, Jeremy kissed the back of her hand. “I would be most pleased to do so.”

After releasing her hand, Elizabeth waddled off toward the house, eager to inform her acquaintances of her new friend.

Turning his charming smile on Katherine, he stepped near, took her hand, leaned down, and touched his lips to the inside of her palm.

An exciting quiver tingled up her arm. Katherine glanced around. Relieved they were alone.

“How are you this fine spring day?” he asked while his direct gaze sparkled into her eyes.

“Happy.”

“Me too.” Returning to the bench, he sat next to her and reached into his pocket.

“I brought you something.”

“Oh, Jeremy, what?” She clapped her hands together in anticipation.

“They call it a little whiff of heaven.” He unwrapped the silver paper package and handed Katherine a small brown brick.

She raised it close and sniffed. “Chocolate...is it Baker’s Chocolate?”

“You guessed it. The famous Irishman and Dorchester’s chocolate.”

“I can’t wait to taste it. I love it.” Glancing at him, she whispered, “I love you.” Delighted, Katherine flung her arms around his neck in a crushing embrace.

In an instant, she dropped her arms and stepped

away, reminding herself to be more ladylike and cautious in case her aunt returned.

Jeremy's chuckle spread a smile on her lips. She experienced pure joy being in his presence, even over something as simple as sweets.

"Come, walk me to my horse."

"Do you have to go so soon? When will I see you again? I mean, now Aunt Elizabeth knows about you, there's no need to be so guarded. She took a deep breath. "Besides, you told her you'd come for tea."

"I will in due time. Now, I'm late. We'll talk later...tonight." His wink sent a thrill rippling through her body. She understood.

James left the Green Lantern Tavern and directed his horse down the road to the Pattinger Estate. With the evening on the verge of darkness, he decided to be a little spontaneous, and if he were careful, he might have an opportunity to see his sister.

Frowning, his thoughts turned to Paul. Something was wrong. He'd never known Paul to refuse an invitation where Katie was concerned. Later, he'd buy him a few beers and get to the bottom of things.

Aware of every shadow lurking within his range, alert at all times, James stopped short of the pathway and dismounted. Candlelight filtered from the windows of his aunt's home as he guided his horse to a nearby tree. A glance around the area proved to be quiet with no one in sight. He'd sneak around to the side and knock on the backdoor.

Cautiously, James's silent feet carried him close to the shadows of the house and around the corner. He stopped and pushed his back against the house. Squinting, his eyes searched the courtyard. Prickled hairs rose along the back of his neck.

The eerie sound of the creaking barn door

inching open drew his attention. He didn't move. Then, in the fading light of the evening, he recognized a British uniformed soldier stroll out into the yard.

James rested his hand on his gun but held his position. Never once did his eyes stray from the Redcoat, following him until the forest darkness engulfed him. James waited. He didn't move until the echo of the enemy horse's hooves could no longer be heard.

Curiosity piqued inside him. Were the British soldiers using his aunt's home for some reason? A quick survey of the distance between the house and barn showed no sight or sound of other Redcoats. Tight fingers wrapped around the security of his cold gun in its holster, as guarded nerves grew taut with anticipation. Without hesitating, he struck out across the yard to the stables. James pulled his pistol out before he peeked through the cracked door.

Shock ripped through his guts. Katherine stood in the mist of a bed of strewn hay. A few flecks of yellow straw clung to her tangled hair as she buttoned the front of her dress. Before he had time to contemplate what he had just seen, Katherine turned to walk out of the stables and practically ran into him.

The unexpected outline of the shadowy figure in front of her drained Katherine's face of color as her mouth formed to scream. In a swift move, James grabbed her arm with one hand and covered her mouth with the other.

Her frightened look dissolved when she locked eyes with him.

The moment he realized she recognized him, rage gushed through his blood. He released her so fast she almost lost her balance.

"James, oh, James, I'm so glad to see you." She smiled, touching his arm. "Your beard...it looks good on you. You look different."

His jaws tightened. He pushed her away. "Forget it, Katherine, I'm not blind."

Round green eyes stared back, "You...what do you mean?" she mumbled.

"Don't play innocent with me, Katherine Heaton. Who is he?"

Defiantly, Katherine responded, "I don't know what you're talking about, James."

Fingers snaked out capturing her arm in a coiled squeeze. "The officer, damn it."

Ignoring him with a determination much like his own, Katherine refused any type of confession. He took hold of both her arms in a hard jolt. "Look at you. Disheveled, like a common slattern!"

She jerked free from his grip and shot back, "Stop it, James. You have no right to question my judgments or treat me as if I were a child."

"Tell me! So help me God I'll kill him...I want to know who he is!"

She crossed her arms over her chest. "No."

"What the hell's wrong with you? He's British. He's out there burning down our homes and threatening our liberty." His hand shot into the air as he spoke.

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"I know he follows orders, Katherine. Hell, he gives the orders!"

Between short choppy breaths, Katherine scowled back at her brother. "Your so-called, unbiased patriot beliefs have made you narrow-minded in everything."

"Narrow-minded...narrow-minded?" He jerked her arm hard. "It's men like him who killed our father!"

"I won't listen to this. You're obsessed...*obsessed* with this cause; it's blinding you to madness." Pulling away, she turned to walk out.

James grabbed her arm and spun her to face him. "It takes madmen to build nations. Not the

weak ramblings of cowards.”

“Let me go,” she demanded, trying to jerk free from his grasp.

“Not until you’ve listened to all I have to say,” James charged.

“It doesn’t matter what you say, you’ll never understand.”

“What?”

“I love him,” she mumbled with a conceding sigh.

James shoved her arm away from his hand. Horrified with the words she used.

Her stance challenged him.

He stepped back, ran his fingers through his hair, and took a deep surrendering breath. Then, in a resigned behavior, his raspy voice reminded her, “You’ve betrayed everything I’ve ever taught you...everything. Father died for...the cause itself.”

Affected by James’ disappointment, she lovingly reached out and touched his arm.

He jerked away as if she had burnt him.

She looked straight into mirrored eyes of disappointment, and then he turned his back and headed for the door.

“James?”

His faltering feet stopped, but he didn’t turn. He replied through his disgust, “You’ve made your bed. I no longer have a sister.” Then, he disappeared into the night.

Sobbing, Katherine stumbled onto the bed of hay, and anguished tears flooded down her cheeks. James’ unforgiving tone ricocheted through her head, exploding her heart. His anger would have been easier to deal with, but his calm, cold manner felt too final.

Katherine took a seat on the secluded bench in her aunt’s garden. The cheerful sound of chirping

birds filtered through the afternoon air. For the first time since her arrival, not even the sunny spring day could lift her spirits. Nor could she focus on the well-groomed vegetables growing beyond the herbs or the perennials bursting with life in colors of asters, irises, roses, and all types of edible flowers.

Torn apart inside from her encounter with James, she managed to put on a happy front with her aunt and cousin during the past two days. They were too busy socializing to see beyond their wants.

From a distance, a melancholy Jeremy stepped through the garden gate and stopped for a moment to absorb the picture before him. The patriot woman he'd fallen in love with was more beautiful than the scenery around her. She belonged here, in this New World's natural surroundings, of which he'd come to respect and appreciate.

She glanced his way. Her saddened face brightened. Rising, she hurried to him and kissed him gently on the cheek.

She took his hand and squeezed it to her bosom. "I'm so glad to see you. I've been waiting for days to have this chance to talk." Katherine paused, gazed into his blue eyes.

He frowned, not wanting to impart distasteful information.

Alarmed, she asked, "What is it?"

Before he could speak, she addressed her fear, "The troops are leaving, aren't they?"

"No, not yet." Jeremy led her back to the bench and sat next to her.

"Then...what is it?" her tender voice questioned. Sitting closer to him, she touched his arm.

Shifting his body around, he faced her. His gaze roamed over her smooth complexion and passionate green eyes, wanting more than he could give. Every part of him craved to feel her satin skin against his.

He lifted his hands to the bright yellow ribbon

holding thick auburn hair in place. Untying the simple bow, he played with her soft hair falling over her shoulders.

Dropping his hands in his lap, he glanced down at the ribbon twined through his fingers, and a heavy sigh escaped his lips.

"I've received a letter from Mother. Father is very ill." Nervous muscles strained. Standing, he shamefully turned his back, clutching the ribbon in his fist. "Damn," he said, more to himself than to her. "I knew this would happen."

Katherine flew off the bench to stand near him. Her brow furrowed. "What's wrong, Jeremy? What are you telling me?"

"I must return home...for good. By the time I arrive in England, Father will have passed."

"I see," she barely whispered. Katherine turned and strolled to the edge of the garden. Her chest heaving, she pressed her hands together.

Jeremy followed her with silent steps. "You must hate me...I hate myself." Stillness fell over the garden, not even the birds were singing.

"What I feared has become a reality. We were fools...I was a fool."

Katherine's pounding heartbeat sounded so loud she thought she'd faint from the rush of blood pulsating through her brain. James, now, Jeremy. Misty-eyed, Katherine refused to believe the direction of Jeremy's words. A wave flushed through her body. She turned, flung herself against Jeremy, and squeezed her arms around his neck. "It can work. It must work. I'll do anything...I can go with you."

With a shake of his head, he pulled her arms down to her side and stepped back.

"You must understand. We are from too different peoples, from two different worlds. You would not survive, Katherine. I would never forgive

myself if I took you with me. The life I'm returning to would stifle you to death...you'd be trapped in a world you do not belong...never to be free as you are here."

"I won't accept what you're saying." Katherine's angry answer came across in a whisper.

"We have to accept it." An anguish tremble escaped his lips as he mumbled, "I'm sorry, Katherine. My ship sails with this evening's tide."

Unable to control her crushed emotions any longer, warm tears slid freely down her cheeks. "Jeremy, please, I love you, and...and you love me. We can find a solution." In a panic, Katherine grabbed his jacket sleeve feeling a desperate sickness build deep inside her soul.

"I love you Katherine, but this can never be." His glistening eyes locked on her reflection.

He pulled her free.

Jeremy leaned on the ship railing and stared out at the never-ending ocean, shimmering in the brilliance of a sunset. While Katherine's yellow ribbon tangled around his fingers, his blank stare aimed out toward the horizon while the ship sailed east. His throat burned from the unshed tears he held back.

“Katherine, dear, are you sure you should be leaving?”

Yes. Katherine wanted to scream at her Aunt Elizabeth. Weeks had passed, and still she couldn't believe Jeremy was gone for good. God help her, she could no longer pretend to be happy, and especially in the condition she now found herself.

“Oh, Aunt Elizabeth, you are a sweetheart. You've been wonderful, and I've enjoyed visiting your home.”

“My dear, you're so pale and not quite yourself. If you wait a few weeks, you might feel better.”

“Thank you, but I'm afraid I'm needed at home. You know, it's a busy season on the farm. I should get home before harvest time. Mother will need my help, and I do miss her so. Besides, I've overstayed my welcome.”

“Oh, Katherine.” Wringing her hands, Allyson's watery eyes showed how much she'd truly miss her cousin.

Katherine stepped forward and gave her a kiss. “I promise to write. You've been so fun, like a sister.”

Hugging her aunt and cousin goodbye, Katherine stepped into the coach bound for home.

How long had they been on the trail? Four...five hours? Katherine squeezed her eyes shut and wondered if she'd make it. Maybe, she should have taken her aunt's advice and waited.

She rested her head against the backboard of

the coach and smelled the dusty warm breeze stirred up by the rotating wheels. Her hollowed gaze stared out the coach window. She felt like an eternity had passed since she stepped into the rattling, jerking coach. Her head throbbed, her back ached, and the small cramp in her abdomen wouldn't stop. She prayed the tiny pain wouldn't get worse.

Then, catching her breath, her jaw muscle locked. *Oh, please God, no!* Grabbing her stomach, she doubled over. With each jolt, her body screamed in twinges of pain, getting worse with each roll of the coach's wheels. Then, once again, the pain subsided. Biting her bottom lip, she leaned back and sucked in a deep breath, thankful for being the only passenger on the coach.

Katherine leaned back, breathed in several long deep breaths and tried to relax her muscles. She wiped her forehead against the sleeves of her dress and closed her eyes, exhausted. Burning tears stung against the darkness of her eyelids.

How could she live? Jeremy, gone—gone six weeks, now. She would have left Boston sooner, but hope against hope toyed in her mind that, maybe, he hadn't really left. But he had. So had James.

By then, she had to leave. Aunt Elizabeth, so worried about her weight loss, had begun talking about fetching in a doctor.

At first, she thought the illness had to be nothing more than emotional sickness, dealing with Jeremy's departure...and James. As the weeks lengthened, her appetite dwindled, and the never-ending queasiness plagued her, until she knew...she was with child. She truly needed her mother's help.

Tight abdominal muscles contracted, shooting spasms through her body. The confining corset trapped the piercing pain, pleading to be free. She held her breath so long it brought her near the brink of darkness, and then, the pain subsided. Again. Weary and worn-out, she didn't know how much

more her body could take.

This journey was different. Her trip to Boston had been cold from the winter dampness, but her spirits had been high with anticipation. Now, a lifetime later, a despondent woman headed home in the warm breeze and long summer days. So much had happened.

Again, the pain. Katherine covered her mouth to keep from screaming as the sharp spasms ripped through her abdomen. Leaning over, she slowly crawled to the floorboard, clutching her stomach. She rocked with the rhythm of the coach, letting the motion lull her to sleep.

“Whoa.”

With a jar, Katherine awoke, realizing the team of horses had pulled into the stage station. They came to a halt.

Thank goodness. Fatigued, Katherine pulled her weak body up onto the seat. Twilight hovered over the dark forest. Summer days were longer...lasting forever. She very much needed to be still and rest, and hopefully, feel somewhat better. Looking through the coach window, she identified the inn, the one where the large black-eyed young woman lived, married to the aged man.

Katherine waited until the driver opened the door. She stepped down from the stage and steadily put one foot in front of the other. She moved toward the cabin door then stopped. God help her...she couldn't make it. She grabbed her stomach and suddenly felt wetness run down between her legs. Something was terribly wrong. No, she couldn't lose Jeremy's baby.

Clenching her jaws, she bit her bottom lip to stifle the surfacing scream and struggled for control. She swung her hand behind her and curled her fingers into the folds of her dress.

Katherine backed toward the rear of the coach. “Excuse me,” she barely managed to say to no one in

particular before rushing behind the cabin.

Digging into the depth of her strength, she forced her feet toward the darkness of the forest. Sucking in short, choppy gulps of air, her eyes burned until hot tears spilled down her cheeks. With no sanity in the path chosen, she headed into the thickets to find a protective place, a secluded haven to die.

Somewhere, as if in another time, she remembered the scriptures of childbirth pain being God's way to punish Eve and her descendants for disobedience. This...this pain had to be a sign of the divine retribution for her sins, an infliction of punishment for loving a man—an enemy.

A whimper spilled from her lips. Her feet stumbled. Blinded with pain, the wrenching spasms intensified with each tormenting sharp stab.

She tumbled over a log, and when she pulled herself up, she searched through the darkness. The trees were too thick and too many fallen branches hindered her way. Unable to go any further, she collapsed. Exhausted, Katherine hit the ground while her body twitched in a shred of piercing pain. Her mind wouldn't allow her to scream loud as the flood soaked her clothes.

Katherine's eyelids fluttered opened and then closed. Inhaling, she filled her lungs with air. Released slowly. Her body no longer felt the horrendous pain. Had she fainted? Blinking, she squinted to focus better. She was dead.

A beautiful light hovered above. An angel swooped down. "Shush, I can help," the heavenly being whispered.

The young woman set down the lantern, wadded a hand full of Katherine's long dress, and ripped away the blood-stained undergarments. Tossing aside the soaked bundle, she tore away part of her petticoats and rolled it tightly in a ball, and then packed the material between Katherine's legs.

Carefully, she tilted Katherine's head back and forced bitter liquid into her mouth, sweetly demanding her to swallow.

The young woman dropped the cup on the ground and gently rested Katherine's weary head in her lap. She whispered, as if she were a child, "Don't move. Relax. Breathe deep. Now, go to sleep."

Her soothing voice drifted through Katherine's confused, hazy mind, helping to block out the reality of what had just happened. Soft fingers smoothed back damp hair from her tear-soaked face.

Through the loud dark forest of katydids and crickets, Katherine heard the sweet angel's voice, "When you wake, everything will be all right. Trust me, it'll be all right."

"Katherine, dear, are you awake?"

Anne's tender voice brought her daughter's sleepy, drugged brain out of its safe environment. Loving fingers smoothed back a lock of hair from her face. "Do you feel any better today, my dear? I'm worried about you."

Rolling over beneath the soft secure bedding, Katherine opened her eyelids to see her mother's sweet concerned eyes. After a deep sigh, she smiled.

Her drowsy voice said, "Yes, Mother, I'm better. No need to fret about me. Blame it on the trip from Boston, dreadfully long and stifling hot. These past three days of rest have helped." Katherine also knew when she slept, she forgot.

Tossing back the quilts, Katherine crawled out of bed and gave her mother a hug. "Now, scoot, give me a moment to dress, and I'll be down to help in the kitchen. I know it's time to get started on winter supplies. If you'd like, I'll begin with the wicks for the melted tallow. We never seem to have enough candles during the long winter days."

"Well, I don't want you overdoing it."

Katherine watched her mother close the door.

She wished she could crawl back under the covers and sleep her life away. That couldn't happen. So, she'd just overexert herself so she wouldn't have to think. Living with such a disheartened mind-set for the rest of her life would never do. Thank goodness, no lack of work existed on the farm. Candles would be first on the long list, and then soap followed by all the preserves and pickling. The list went on.

Katherine drew in a lonely sigh, aware of her physical weakness and emotional heartbreak. There would come a time she'd want to tell her mother, but she'd think about that later. Her shattered heart needed more time to mend and to accept her fate. Ignoring the sickness in the pit of her tummy, she dressed and headed down to help with the chores.

Although, thankful that the officers no longer lived in their home, she missed the presence of Jeremy. She could remember his passionate gaze upon her and the touch of his hands-*stop it*. With a sharp shake of her head, she squared her shoulders, and set a determined goal to rid her thoughts of the one who had dismissed her so easily. The one who left her, alone, to deal with the loss of a miracle they had made together. *He didn't know. But, he would have, if he hadn't left.* Now, time to move on-no going back, life for her had changed forever.

Katherine swung her leg over the soft leathery saddle and slid off the chestnut stallion. Gripping the reins, she turned, and led him into the barn. "Come on boy, you deserve some fresh feed after our delightful ride."

Somewhat tired, but refreshed, she felt good to finally get back on a horse. It was a perfect, warm autumn day spent riding and shopping in Wings Falls. Certainly different from Boston's sophisticated and elegant styles compared to Mr. Galloway's little mercantile. The large city stores carried more, too. But then, where would farmers wear such

fashionable dresses?

Suddenly, she leaned against the stall feeling queasy. Inhaling a deep breath, she closed her eyes. It passed. Maybe, she had better take it easy a little while longer. Probably the musty smell of the barn. Pushing away from the stall, she settled the horse in and relieved the animal of its heavy saddle. After a quick brush down, she filled the tub with feed and giggled when the horse nudged her aside. "What's your hurry, big boy?"

Frowning, Katherine grabbed her stomach. Without warning, a sour taste gurgled up her throat. Her hand flew over her mouth as she turned and rushed out the back door in time to bend over in a choking cough. She could feel the veins in her face popping to the surface as she spewed yellow bile rising up from her stomach. Unable to stop the constricting muscles, she vomited until her guts wanted to explode.

"Are you all right?"

Breathless and embarrassed, she swung around to find the young black boy. He stood in the opened barn door with a concerned expression.

"Eli," Katherine whispered.

"You want me fetch your ma?"

She shook her head, pulled the hem of her dress up to her mouth, and wiped. Taking in a lung of fresh air, she released it slowly.

"No, I'm fine. I feel better now. I've been sick." Katherine dropped to her knees, and then, unexpectedly, tears streamed down her cheeks, and she sobbed.

The boy stepped toward her and dropped to her side. He waited.

Katherine grabbed his arm, held him tight as more tears of anguish flowed through her gasping breath.

Sucking in a long slow breath, Katherine looked down at her hand crinkling the hem of her yellow

dress. Pressing her lips together, she composed herself and wiped the tears from her face. She spread her hands over the light cotton fabric and recalled the young woman who had helped her recover from the miscarriage. She'd stayed with her all night, given her clean clothes, dressed her in the wee hours of the morning, and constantly made her drink more black vile stuff. Whatever the nasty liquid substance contained, it helped.

She pulled herself to her feet, squared her shoulders, and glanced down at the young boy. "Eli, don't look so sad; I'm truly getting over the sickness. I'm not dying. Thank you for being here and helping me." Katherine reached out and touched his arm. "Eli, please don't say a word to Mother, I don't want her to fret. I'm better now."

Drawing his brows together, he blinked, and with large round black eyes staring back, he nodded at her.

"Believe it or not, today's been one of my better days, even though you found me heaving. The ride into town took more out of me than I thought. Come," she said, taking Eli's hand, "Let's get some work done before the day's gone. I'll keep you company while you chop the wood."

Eli's head tilted up, so he could stare at her. After a second, a wide white-teethed grin spread across his face.

Anne tossed the potatoes into the boiling pot over the hot blazing fire. "Whew," she mumbled and wiped the perspiration off her face with the hem of her apron. She darted a glance toward Katherine. "I can't believe the hot weather we're having. You'd think it would cool off by now. For heaven sake, it's September." Watching her daughter slide the smooth round bread dough into the baking oven next to the sweet bread, she commented, "Hmm,

Katherine, smells delicious.”

“The cake will be done in about ten minutes. How about a drink of cool water and some fresh air out on the porch while we wait?”

“Good idea.”

Katherine poured two glasses of water before following her mother out to the old, wooden rockers near the kitchen door. “Mother, I need to tell you something.”

Anne’s brows wrinkled in a frown. She nodded. “Yes, suspect you do.”

“You know?”

“Honey,” Anne said, and reached over to cover her daughter’s hand, “Mothers can tell.”

“Oh, I love you so, and I’m truly sorry for what I’ve done.” A tender squeeze from her mother’s hand brought tears to her eyes.

“Captain Burke?”

“Yes.” Katherine admitted.

She glanced down at her hands wrapped around the water glass. Raising her gaze, she stared out toward the freshly plowed field. Her throat constricted. She pressed her lips together to keep the tears from flooding her eyes, but she was unable to keep back the trickle running down her cheek. Her lips quivered. “They,” she cleared her voice, “they reassigned him to Boston, he’s the reason why I needed to go so desperately.”

“Do you love him?”

Katherine pulled herself to her feet and strolled to the edge of the porch. With slouched shoulders, she stared out beyond the field toward the tall maple trees turning to a golden crown of autumn glory.

“I did. I do. But, it’s over. He’s gone.” Sitting next to her mother again, Katherine swallowed hard, not wanting to cry.

“Mother, I felt complete with him. He was all I wanted in life. When he smiled at me, I knew I had found everything any woman could ever hope for in

this world. As much as I love you and James, I would've gone to the ends of the earth with him."

"Oh, my dear, dear daughter. I once had the same kind of love with your father. I miss him. Losing a part of you, your life's joy, seems unbearable—"

"We were together while I stayed at Aunt Elizabeth's. Sometimes we'd meet in the barn. Oh, Mother—"

Deep anguish spilled from Katherine's lips. "I wasn't the daughter you thought, I gave into desires of love and allowed feelings to control me."

"Does he love you, Katherine?" Anne asked, patting her shoulder.

"Yes, I know he does, but..." Hesitating, Katherine wiped the tears from her eyelashes. "He...we're from two different worlds. He doesn't think I could live in his...and, his responsibilities are with his family in London. I begged him to take me, but he wouldn't."

"James knows this?"

Katherine gazed into her mother's sad eyes as she nodded. "You know how James hates the Redcoats. He said Jeremy, being British, murdered our father."

"My dear, the captain is a soldier of the King."

"Oh, I know, I know. Don't you think I've been all through this in my mind?" She swallowed hard against her dry throat. "Betraying my father by loving a British soldier is unforgivable."

"Not true, honey. If things are to be, God will work them out."

"Mother...James...he found me...with Jeremy. He isn't coming home because of me. I've destroyed our relationship. My brother has disowned me. He no longer loves me or respects me."

Unable to hold back, Katherine felt the hot tears open like a floodgate. Dropping on her knees, Katherine turned her face up and looked into her

mother's loving gaze. "I've lost Jeremy, and James is gone—I'm so sorry, please, forgive me."

Katherine hid her face in her mother's lap and let all her pent-up emotions burst, shaking her body free from the tortured journey of all that had happened during the past year.

Anne wrapped her arms around her daughter and comforted her just as she had done when she was twelve years old. She waited for the tears to subside. "My dear, you're wrong," her soft voice reassured, "James will never stop loving you. Family blood flows too deep. And, your love for the captain will find a special place in your heart for the rest of your life. The only thing you'll do is treasure it while you go on living."

A gentle hand patted her head. She looked out over the field and watched the wheat waving in the breeze.

"James will come. The Redcoats can't shatter the love he has for his sister."

Chapter 12

London, England

Docking took longer than expected, well after dark. Jeremy rushed down the gangplank, irritated and weary from the long and tedious trip, and impatient to be on solid ground. The journey back had been long with too much idle time to think and remember. Now, he must put the past in its place and forget. Demanding duties were ahead of him.

He glanced around at the familiar sights. In the time he'd been gone there had never been any type of homesickness. Never once had he missed the overpopulated city with its enormous stress of buildings, houses, and tenements. He'd forgotten about the massive amount of lower class people crammed in every square foot of the town.

Jeremy threw his hand up and hailed the first driver he noticed loafing near the docks. He stepped onto the carriage, and ordered, "To Lord Weatherton's Estate."

Sighing, he frowned at the rude tone in his own voice. *Change your grumpy disposition, Burke; it'll never do-get your mind off her.*

Releasing another deep sigh, he allowed his gaze to scan the damp, chilly city. Nothing had changed. He despised the hodgepodge of narrow passageways between residences and shops. After dark, one took a terrible risk of being mugged, stabbed, or murdered by lurking criminals in those unlit alleyways. Not only was the complex pattern of streets dangerous,

but the disgusting odors along the airless passages were unbearable from the city's decaying garbage, sewage, and decomposed corpses.

Memories of those smells rushed back. He immediately pinched his nose like he did when a young lad. Loud, obnoxious laughter drew his attention toward the front of the carriage.

Several drunken men stumbled out of a loud pub. In their discord and shouting, they were completely oblivious of their surroundings. Their rowdy, disgraceful mouths spat out vile words. The drunkards jostled around, pushing and shoving, until they suddenly bumped against the horse, startling the wild-eyed animal.

"Whoa," yelled the driver.

Jeremy shot forward, catching himself on the front board of the carriage.

"Get out of the street, you no goods," hollered the driver, pulling back on the reins to keep the horse from running.

Once the coachman regained control of the horse and started on his way, Jeremy settled back with a shake of his head. He turned his attention to the noise and hordes of people high on gin, hanging around the dark streets.

While busy observing the intoxicated men, a woman took him by surprise when she came out of the darkness and climbed into the carriage.

The repulsive woman snuggled against him and whispered, "Hey, handsom, wanna have some fun?"

His brows came together. His angry glare drilled into the lady-of-the-night. Jeremy took in her dirty dress, smelling of stinking pubs and strong gin. He almost gagged when he glanced at her black-toothed grin. The cake-haired, street woman reached down, grabbed him between the legs and rubbed as she moved in closer to his face.

Sickened, he took hold of her arm and squeezed. Gritting his teeth, his tight lips demanded, "Out."

With a forceful push, he threw her from the carriage.

"I'm cheap, just six shillings," she shouted.

His driver hurried the horse and carriage onward.

Jeremy securely placed a hand on his musket. Pathetic prostitutes. Nothing had changed, not even their begging, sweeping trade. He shook his head, feeling creepy and disgusted from the woman's touch. She, along with the rest of her kind, seemed to be trapped in such a life with no way out.

Jeremy couldn't imagine the chain of a prostitute's life from begging, preying on others, abandoning and selling their own babies, pick-pocketing to survive-the list went on. The rich could have anything, but the poor were ensnared in a world with no hope.

He released a heavy sigh.

So engrossed with his thoughts of the darker side of London, Jeremy didn't realize the carriage had made its way out of the city to the countryside of the family estate.

In a hurry, he stepped out of the carriage before it came to a complete halt. Dropping extra shillings into the driver's hand, he quickly hauled his baggage out of the seat.

"Sorry bout the mishap back there, sir."

"Not your fault," he mumbled.

Dismissing the driver with a nod, his vision turned to his parents' fashionable mansion. The moon's reflections on the old rock tower above him sent out welcoming vibes. Jeremy hesitated before lifting the large knocker on the massive, carved wooden door.

He turned his gaze to scan the surrounding ghost-like garden area. A beautiful estate. Lord Weatherton's pride. Home-hard to believe he'd returned.

The city seemed so black and white, enunciating the contrast between the wealthy and the misery of

those below the poverty line. Here, his parents lived where an ongoing urban improvement continued. Yet, in the nucleus of a saturated city of over seven hundred thousand, there existed a deteriorating quality of life.

He had never thought much about it before—did living in the New World change him? A quick sigh escaped his lips.

He turned and lifted the old, iron knocker. He'd been gone so long that he couldn't step through the door without announcing his presence.

An elderly, gray-headed butler opened the door. His eyes widened. "Captain Burke, welcome home." The old servant's frail voice gave a hint of warmth in its tone.

"Hello, Garrick," Jeremy greeted, stepping inside.

He quickly shed his cape and hat and handed them to Garrick while solemnly eyeing the ominous staircase. He looked around at the Great Hall. All appeared the same.

"Might I inquire of my mother's whereabouts?"

"Yes, sir. Lady Weatherton summoned me from Lord Weatherton's chamber earlier. If you would like to wait in the library, I will tell her of your arrival?"

Jeremy nodded. "I'll wait for her in my father's chambers."

"Yes, sir," Garrick said. Turning, he disappeared down the hallway to find the Viscountess.

Emotionless, Jeremy ascended the staircase, mentally preparing himself for the sight of his distraught mother. He quietly entered his chamber not wanting to startle her. He stared at the large postal bed and was taken aback to see it empty. He would miss his father.

"Mother?" Jeremy called out, looking around.

Walking out of the dressing closet, The Viscount Weatherton's eyes widened at the sight of his son. "Jeremy?"

"You're not...what are you doing out of bed?" Jeremy's gaze traveled over his father's face, not looking the least bit ill and dressed in formal attire as if ready for the night out.

"Son, this old, tired body has its ups and downs, but today I'm feeling one of my ups." Grinning, he hurried forward to greet his son with a warm embrace.

"You do me good to set eyes on you; been a long time since you were home. Gave your mother orders not to send for you, but she never heeds my words." When he pulled back and stared his son straight in the eyes, he mumbled, "Must say, I'm happy she didn't. Did you just get in, son? You look tired."

"Yes sir. Came straight from the ship. You look great, Father. Why the formal attire?" Pleased to see his father doing so well, and alive, Jeremy moved to stand near the warmth of the large hearth.

"Your mother insisted I attend the Weldon Ball this evening."

"In your condition?"

Before Lord Weatherton could answer, the door flew open with a bustling ruffle of undergarments. Judith, Lady Weatherton, barged into the room without knocking.

"Jeremy." She smiled at her son and strolled across the room. In her reserved excitement, she kissed his cheek.

"Hello, Mother," Jeremy said, lightly returning her kiss.

"You had a safe crossing, I assume."

"Long."

Skirting a glance at his son, Lord Weatherton seemed to note sadness flash across his expression before he covered it with a mask of happiness for his mother's sake.

"Well, then you must change your clothes, so you can go with us this evening." She took hold of Jeremy's arm and led him toward the door.

Her adamant tone put a frown on his father's brow. "Really, Judith. The boy has just returned. Let him spend his first night home in peace."

"I will do no such thing, Phillip. Jeremy, this is your sister's coming-out season. Like it or not, you've arrived in time to attend the most prestigious functions of the year."

Jeremy, slightly agitated, patted his mother's arm. Allowing a deep sigh to escape his lips, he begged her indulgence, "Really, now, my attendance will have no bearing on Meg's season."

"Well, you have to be there. And, my dear boy, do not forget you're the Weatherton heir. We must get busy and find you a suitable wife."

"Mother." This time Jeremy frowned to show some frustration toward her pressing control.

His father, slightly amused, said, "It's no use, Jeremy. Your mother made Ned's life a living hell until he decided to marry Colleen."

"And, then Colleen took over where mother left off," Jeremy jested, smiling.

Laughing heartily at his son's comment, Lord Weatherton doubled over in a coughing frenzy, so uncontrollable it concerned Jeremy.

"Father?"

"Phillip? Phillip? Are you all right?" His mother's face paled. She rushed to her husband's side to help lower him on the bed.

Jeremy watched his mother hand him a white linen handkerchief, which his father held to his mouth during the irrepressible coughing fit.

After several seconds, the spasm stopped. He took several deep breaths, handed the bloody cloth to his wife, and in a weak voice, he answered her, "Yes, Judith, I'm fine, now."

"Well, see what the two of you did? You say all these awful things about me, and then your father has an attack. And, he's been doing so well these past few weeks."

“You’re absolutely right, my dear. We both apologize.”

“Good,” she replied with a broad smile.

Lord Weatherton winked at his son, patted him on the back, and smiled in delight. “It’s good to have you home, son. I don’t mind telling you, I thought my time would come before ever setting eyes on you again.”

Eying his father closely, Jeremy grinned. “It’s good to be back.”

“All right, enough idle repartee, Phillip. Your son has to change into something more appropriate. And I have to send word to let Lady Weldon know our son will be attending.”

Jeremy entered the hall of White’s club and glanced around. He took in the fashionable social scene and its enormous gambling lobby, ridiculously extravagant in its décor of rich velvets and gold. Everything remained the same, as if he’d never been gone. London’s most prominent gentlemen crowded each large room, all of whom meandered around, drinking wine, talking, tasting the hors d’oeuvre, and standing near the great fireplace in deep conversations over some business issues.

Loud laughter drew Jeremy’s gaze toward the sitting room where several small groups of gentlemen were involved in card games. He squinted at the men making the loudest noise and recognized his old comrades. His stride headed in their direction.

Making his way to friends he’d known since his adolescent years, Jeremy, smiling, slapped one of the men on the back. “Leave it to the three of you to be the most obnoxious and raucous in the entire club.”

“Well, if I don’t live and breathe, it’s Burke,” shouted Arthur. Jumping up, he grabbed Jeremy by the shoulders, and gave him a rough squeeze.

Before Jeremy knew it, both Dashiell and John

were slapping his back and pumping away on his hand in a jubilant greeting.

Arthur's wide grin aimed at Jeremy. "Burke, old boy! I had no idea you were back in town."

"When did you return?" Dashiell asked.

"Few hours ago," Jeremy said, noting Arthur's invitation for him to take a seat.

"Well, old boy, tell us everything. What was it like over there?" John asked raising curious eyebrows at his lifelong friend.

Jeremy made his way to the other side of the table to take a seat next to Arthur. Looking around, he noticed the differences between the colonies and London's finest social club. "Nothing like this."

"Tell us, did you see lots of Indians?" Dashiell asked, inquisitive as the rest. "From what I've read they're giving Gage a wee-bit of a headache."

"Where did you hear that?"

"London Gazette, where else?"

"Never mind, Burke," broke in Arthur, eyeing his friend. "What we really want to hear about are those so-called traitors. You know-the ones called Patriots. Did you kill many?"

"Yeah," joined in John.

They all waited to hear the hands-on details of the New World speaking against King George III.

Arthur leaned over, wickedly winked, and then expressed the foremost question on their minds. "More to the point, old chap, what's a Colonial woman like?"

"Look fellows, I just got home. The last thing I want to converse over is the country I just left behind."

"Sorry," Arthur apologized before the others had a chance to throw more questions at him. "I guess seeing you...you know...someone that's physically been there, triggered our interest in hearing an actual participant, especially after news about the Gaspee incident in June."

“What are you talking about?”

“Oh, right, how would you know? After all, you were way out to sea, sailing home at the time. Dashiell, you explain it—you’re the one who reads about the goings-on in the colonies.”

“Sure.” Leaning forward, Dashiell placed his elbows on the table and gave his full attention to Jeremy. “Sometime in June, colonists attacked a British customs’ schooner named the Gaspee. Instead of killing the British crew, those patriot traitors sent them ashore before burning down the clipper. The whole incident happened in a place called Narragansett Bay—some hell of a name, huh.” Dashiell chuckled, glancing around the table at his friends.

“Last month, the crown sent a reward out for capturing any colonists involved in the incident.”

Shaking his head, Jeremy’s private thoughts were on Katherine’s brother. More than likely, he would have been involved.

“What if they’re caught?” He didn’t know why he cared, but he wondered what would happen to James if he were sent to England.

Dashiell grinned; excited he had more news than the captain. “They’re to be sent here for trial. Boy, that’s another black mark against those stupid American colonists. Can you imagine being sent to England for your own hanging?”

Chuckling, Arthur joined in, “Yeah, I can’t even speculate the number of people that would show up for such a display.”

Uncomfortable, Jeremy squirmed inside. He forced a smile and said, “Come now, let’s be sociable; after all I just returned home.”

“You’re right, Burke. We’re glad you’re back where you belong.” Arthur reached over and slapped his chum on the shoulder to reinforce his feelings.

“Sorry to hear about your father’s condition, Burke,” John said, obliging him with a change of

subject.

“Thanks, but right now he appears better than I imagined on my trip home.”

Pleased at his father’s much more improved health than anticipated, Jeremy looked around the table at his old friends permitting a thought to slip into his mind.

Would he have bothered to return if he’d known?

“I’m glad to hear,” John acknowledged.

Signaling a servant, Arthur pointed to his empty glass. “More cognac,” he ordered.

“You do realize Burke, now that you’re back, you’ll have to go with us to John’s country estate for the hunt. Surely you haven’t forgotten all the fun hunts we had in our day?”

“Oh, here, here,” John’s loud voice carried over the table. “You should see the steed Arthur purchased last week.”

“If memory serves,” Jeremy intervened, keeping the conversation light, “your knowledge of horses, Art, is matched only with your knowledge of ladies, which in fact concerns me somewhat.” Quickly taking a sip of his drink, he grinned at his friend. “After all, I’ve been gone for quite some time, and you still lack a female companion.”

“Nor, do I, Burke, detect a lady at your side. Maybe, perchance, you’ve lost your touch, old boy,” Arthur teased. “Ah, if I recall though, several know you quite well.”

“But alas, I lack your knowledge of horses,” Jeremy laughed, returning his jest.

Arthur’s teeth-grinning mouth showed how much he’d missed his friend. “Well, the latter is more important.”

“Welcome, Captain Burke,” greeted the Clayton’s butler. Jeremy handed over his topcoat to the servant and observed the elegantly dressed ladies in their formal garments. He realized, thus

far, another social event had caused him to appear in his own tight pants and formal wear.

The sounds of music and people gossiping drifted to his keen awareness of those present. He surveyed the hall of what appeared to be the entire aristocratic society of London, attempting to impress each other.

A young woman talking to his sister-in-law caught his eye. She was dressed differently from the other ladies. Instead of the wide hoop formal dress, like his sister-in-law wore, she was attired in a simple, high-waisted white muslin dress with a neckline cut very low. He liked the way the satin blue ribbons dropped from her bosoms and streamed down her skirt, flowing long and loose in soft, womanly folds.

The woman shivered.

He watched her drape a cashmere shawl loosely over her shoulders, being careful not to cover full, sinuous breasts. He had to admit, she was an appealing sight. Except, the lady's wig. The powdered wig was dressed high with side curls and decorated with ribbons and flowers to match the dress. On second thought, a bit much.

Jeremy studied the enticingly dressed woman, lost in the thoughts of another. Katherine, in her world, would be out of place with all except, maybe, the dress.

He couldn't imagine her fully clad in European style, wig and all. American's fashions were must simpler and more practical. Nor, could he imagine Katherine powdering, or covering her beautiful, auburn hair with anything except—shoving his hand into his pocket, Jeremy fingered the yellow ribbon.

“Colleen, dear, please tell...who's that handsome man rudely staring at me from across the room.” Olivia slowly reached up and dropped the shawl from her shoulders. “I've never seen him at any of

the socials. Do you know?"

Colleen smiled, recognizing Jeremy. Immediately she waved to get his attention and indicated for him to approach them.

"You do know him," Olivia whispered. Feeling pleased, she observed the attractive gentleman bow before shuffling through the crowd in their direction. "Without a doubt, he's the best-looking man I've seen since coming to London," Olivia mumbled in Colleen's ear.

"Jeremy, dear, it's so good to see you, again. I'd like you to meet a dear friend of mine. Jeremy, this is Lady Olivia Bertin, her father is the Duke of Sherwilliams; she's a cousin of Caroline Clayton. Olivia, this is my brother-in-law, Captain Jeremy Burke."

Bowing again, Jeremy accepted the lady's white-gloved hand, kissing the top. "How are you beautiful ladies this evening? Enjoying the social?"

"It's improving," Lady Olivia said, turning her eyes to his.

Jeremy's charming smile shifted to give Colleen his full attention. He leaned down and kissed her cheek. "How's my favorite sister-in-law?"

"Your *only* sister-in-law, you silly captain. I'm managing very well, thank you. Your family is so supportive since Ned's death."

"Have you seen Caroline? She's here somewhere," Colleen inquired.

"No, I just arrived. I'm sure I'll have a chance to speak to her before the evening's over. Now, ladies, if you'll excuse me, Arthur is waiting."

Gentlemanly as always, Jeremy bowed and took his leave. He moved away appearing to search for Arthur.

"Well," Olivia raised her nose in the air, "He's certainly more attractive than friendly, or are his mannerisms just tasteless by nature?"

Disappointed in his lack of attention, she watched the intriguing man make his way through the crowd. Many of the prestigious people appeared to know him. Taking note, she realized he was well established in the community and knew all the right dignitaries. Nor, did he seem to be lacking in friends happy to see him. Where had this man been?

“Captain Burke, yes, I do believe I’ve heard the name, and from hearsay; he’s got quite a reputation and one to be prized.”

Colleen laughed. “The future Lord Weatherton would certainly be a *prize* if one could seize his attention long enough for him to consider her worth marriage.”

Olivia turned her gaze from Colleen to study the man across the room.

“Not a simple task to accomplish-if that’s what you’re thinking.”

“I’m sure.” Olivia leaned over and whispered in her ear, “I heard he killed a man, in a duel.”

“You heard correctly. My husband’s murderer.”

“Oh, my dear, I’m so sorry.” Olivia slapped her gloved hand over her mouth.

Colleen nodded. “You didn’t know; besides, since he’s been to the Americas, I would wager he’s killed even more. Probably those Indians we read about in the *London Times*.”

“Oh my, do you think so?”

“Well, murderer or no, he would make a handsome achievement on the part of any eligible lady in London.”

“I suppose. Especially, since he’s wealthy, too.”

“Come, Olivia, there’s other eligible gentlemen you need to meet.”

Jeremy browsed through the *London Times*, instinctively searching for news of the colonies. He couldn’t believe he’d been home for several months now. Time dragged, but when he was in America,

the days ran into each other.

Yawning, he dropped the paper in his lap, took a sip of steamy tea, and glanced across the room. He rested his head back on the high top armchair and squeezed his eyes shut to block the memories of a lifetime ago.

With a heavy sigh, he opened his eyes and shot a puckered brow toward Colleen and Meg. The ladies, sitting with his mother, appeared to be in some serious discussion about the Clayton social event the night before. He listened to the gossip.

“How risqué, it’s beyond my understanding how she dared to wear such a thing,” Meg declared, with a coy glance at Colleen for agreement.

“Now daughter,” Lady Weatherton reprimanded in a sweet tone. “You really don’t know Lady Olivia well. I agree, she seemed a little flamboyant, but at the same time it took some courage to wear such a dress in public.”

“Well, maybe. However, there are limits, Mother. Her gown wouldn’t even be appropriate for the French Court.”

“Why, my dear Meg, you haven’t heard?” Colleen reached for her teacup with a smug smile across her lips, “Don’t you know who Lady Olivia Bertin is?”

Colleen’s questioning eyebrow lifted.

“Of course, she’s Caroline’s cousin.” Meg’s indignant tone didn’t go unnoticed.

“Yes, dear, but she’s also the niece of Madame Bertin of Paris. I know you mean well, but you might well be adorned in the same gown for future social events.”

“What do you mean?” Meg’s big eyes widened.

“Fashion, my dear, fashion. I just read about Madame Bertin, the most highly successful designer in Paris, and everyone wants her ideas of what’s coming out in the styles of the fashion world. Why do you suppose Lady Olivia showed off the gown, and whom do you think designed it?”

“Oh, my, are you jesting?”

“No, I’m very serious. There’s increased gossip about some kind of extensive plan to open her own salon in Rue Faubourg S. Honore next year. She’s so fabulous, I’m sure she’ll be crucial to all women of any social status who want to be considered stylish.”

“Well, I’ll have to take a better look.” Lady Weatherton glanced across the room at her bachelor son reading the news.

“Oh, Mother, come to think of it, didn’t the dress look far more comfortable than all the stays we have to wear, and the hoops that are so hard to get around in, especially when a young man wants to stand close?” Meg glanced at her mother and shyly smiled, and then turned her attention back. “Please, Colleen, tell us more about Lady Olivia,” she begged.

Catching his mother’s eye, Jeremy’s lips smiled back, and he wondered how, in the name of the crown, females could so easily switch directions in mid-stream. In the very same breath Meg voiced disgust with Lady Olivia for wearing such an outlandish outfit; then in an about-face, she was thinking about purchasing the dress.

Did any woman in his life have her own opinion? Slipping into the private compartment of his brain, Jeremy knew only one. A headstrong, independent woman named Katherine. Katherine...

A slight knock at the door drew him out of his trance. Garrick stood in the open doorway. “Excuse me, Lady Weatherton, but I have a message for the captain.”

“Yes, Garrick.” Standing Jeremy strolled toward the butler.

“This just arrived for you, sir.” Garrick held out a silver tray containing an envelop.

“Thank you.”

Garrick took a quick bow before leaving and closed the door behind him.

Jeremy opened the envelope and read the

contents of the letter.

“Jeremy, who’s it from?” His mother frowned, wanting to know everything in her son’s life.

“Harry,” he mumbled without looking up.

“Excellent. And what does my youngest son have to say?”

“Simply, he’s heard of my return and wants me to visit him at Oxford. Perhaps I’ll go next week.”

“I should say not.” Her shocked voice drew Meg and Colleen’s glance in his direction. “You have your duties to fulfill here.”

“Really, Mother. I’m not a child. If I choose to visit Harry, then I will do so,” he stated with an irritated edge in his tone.

“By all means, let him go,” Meg intervened. “If doing so places him in a better temperament, then I say he should go.” She turned to face him. “You’ve moped around here ever since you’ve been back, Jeremy. With every available lady in London wanting your attention, you’re not even looking. What am I supposed to tell them?” Meg asked, as if appalled her brother was such a drag at the social events since his arrival.

“I do not need your opinion, my dear sister, and it is none of the ladies’ business as to what I do with my time-social, or otherwise.”

“Mother,” Meg said, flashing a desperate look in her direction.

“She’s right son, you need to listen. Everyone speaks about how standoffish you’ve been since your return. How will you ever get back into the grace of our social order with such manners?” Reaching for her tiny tea cup, Lady Weatherton studied her son. “My heavens, how on earth do you intend to find a suitable lady worthy to be your wife if you don’t mingle within our society of eligible ladies? It’s time you settled down.”

Annoyed, Jeremy said, “Then everyone must be extremely bored if I am the most popular topic of

conversation around London. After the morrow, I suppose their tongues will wag more so.”

Appalled, Jeremy shoved the newspaper onto the table, and turned to leave the room.

“Why? What do you mean?” Lady Weatherton’s irritated voice demanded.

Aware of all eyes on him, Jeremy glanced back at his mother and stated, “I happen to be Lady Olivia’s escort to the Clayton’s dinner party,” he mumbled, wishing he’d kept his mouth shut.

“How wonderful.” She seemed pleased. “Oh, Jeremy, do let me know if things are progressing with Lady Caroline and Arthur.”

Ignoring the request and aggravated with himself, Jeremy’s long stride took him through the door and out, without another word.

He worked his jaw muscles while his boots stomped loudly across the Great Hall floor. He stopped near the staircase and rubbed his forehead. He knew they were right. Even his fellow comrades were inquiring as to his lack of feminine company at many of the socials. Hence, his formal invitation to Lady Olivia Bertin.

“I say, Burke, are you here to play cards or not?” Arthur asked, sensing something troubled his friend. Not only was he distracted during their weekly poker games, but also, he drank more than usual.

“Yeah, Burke,” retorted Dashiell, waiting for his turn to bid on his full house of cards.

Jeremy tossed the cards face down onto the table, “What’s the point, Art?”

“Honestly, I can’t think of any point. It’s just a game.” Frowning, Arthur eyed his friend.

Jeremy suddenly shoved his chair away from the table and stood. Darting an angry glare toward Arthur, he grabbed his drink and swallowed the last swig of liquor, and then slammed the glass down on the table. “I mean this whole bloody society.”

"I don't follow you."

"I've only been in London for a few months, and already, tongues are wagging all over town."

"Oh." John grinned, understanding. "You mean the entire meddling mothers and their eligible daughters setting their sights on you, huh?"

"Yes!" Jeremy dropped back in his chair, shocked his friends understood his plight.

"Well, Burke, everything you do, or say, from here on out will be under constant scrutiny. You're not alone," Dashiell informed with a lift of his shoulder.

"Buck up, old man. It happens to the best of us. You'll get used to it; we have." John reached over, slapped Jeremy on the shoulder, and shook his head.

"So what's the word about town?" Arthur asked out of curiosity.

"Apparently I'm standoffish. At least I was this morning. Presently I am a drunken gambler."

"No, actually, you're just drunk. You haven't played one decent hand all night." Wickedly Arthur smiled and flipped his card over to prove how badly he was playing.

"I never claimed to be a successful gambler."

"And rightly so."

"So, tell us-how long's this thing been going on between you and Lady Olivia, and why aren't you playing the field—like the old Burke we know?" Arthur's serious brow lifted.

"What do you mean? She's very attractive."

"Yeah, if she'd keep her arrogant opinions to herself."

"Now, Arthur, you're talking about the only woman I've been out with since I returned."

"Exactly. Where's the old Jeremy?"

"And, whom would you propose I accompany to the coronation next week?"

Arthur's pleading look made its way around the table, but he failed to get any response, so he

mumbled, "Well, there's got to be others more interesting and more your type; we'll just have to think it over."

"And, what type am I?"

"Right now the drunken type." John laughed.

The rest of the men joined in with such a volume that other guests turned staring at the group.

"Maybe you need to get away for awhile," Arthur stated, noticing the sadness in his friend's expression.

"Yeah, why don't you take some days and ride somewhere," John suggested.

"Harry did want me to go see him," Jeremy muttered.

"Harry? Wonderful, that's what you need, a visit with your brother. Harry's bound to have some extra females to share."

Jeremy pushed through the heavy wooden doors and stepped into the silent library. He hesitated while his gaze scanned the many rows of dark wood desks surrounded by shelves upon shelves packed with books.

Jeremy's focus landed on his younger brother, the only person around. He smiled at his strenuous absorption in the book opened in front of him. He studied Harry for a moment and noticed the older he got the more his facial features favored Ned. Though in his early twenties, Harry's brilliant mind astounded him. He was a handsome lad with light brown hair, much like Ned's and with the same striking blue eyes, but more sensitive than Ned's had been.

Jeremy's gaze softened.

Harry was a breath of fresh air. Jeremy loved his carefree philosophy and imagination—definitely, an unpretentious fellow, loving life and forever in the pursuit of knowledge. Content, Harry surrounded himself with countless volumes, stacked from the floor to the ceiling, and he absorbed all that he could as he flipped through the pages of an old book.

Jeremy grinned.

"Has my brother had a good read lately?" Jeremy uttered, watching his shocked reaction.

"Jeremy!" Harry, jumped up and rushed to give him a warm embrace.

"I hope I'm not interrupting your studies."

“Are you dense? I need a distraction. Actually, I’m working on my thesis, and Plato isn’t going anywhere.” Smiling, Harry gestured for Jeremy to sit.

“Sure good to see you. Tell me, how is Father?”

“He’s doing well; better than I would have imagined from what Mother let on.”

“You should know Mother’s famous for her exaggeration. Meg did write of his improvement since I last saw him.”

“I can’t tell you how good it is to see you, Harry.”

“Why didn’t you send word you were coming?”

“To be honest, I decided at a moment’s notice.”

“You stole away into the night, didn’t you?”

Grinning, Jeremy reached over, mindlessly picked up the book Harry had been reading and said, “You know me so well.”

Arching a brow, Harry’s calculating blue eyes studied his older brother. “So, tell me, Jeremy. Why did you have to flee London?”

Jeremy’s mood faded into a sense of gloom. Shrugging, he struggled for an answer. Of all the people he knew, Harry was the only person he could confide in.

“Let me guess, your old buddies are onto you about something?”

Grinning, Jeremy thought of his caring, generous friends with their main agenda centered on the weekly social gathering. “You might say that. They’re not too happy with my choice of women these days.”

“So, tell me, who’s the lucky female?”

“She’s Caroline’s cousin, Lady Olivia Bertin.”

“And...the reason for your friends not liking her being-she’s too plain or outright hideous?”

“No...on the contrary, she’s very attractive, but, well, she’s opinionated for one thing, and at times, her pre-eminence comes across ostentatiously.

“You mean, she’s a snob, huh?” He watched

Jeremy's absentminded reaction. "From a well-to-do family?"

Once again, Jeremy nodded.

"Well, there you go. Mother will love her."

Shrugging, Jeremy sighed. Dropping the book on the table, he stared at his brother. "Oh, Harry, Harry, Harry. This is not supposed to be my life. I'm living Ned's life. Mine has vanished somewhere...somewhere along the way," Jeremy mumbled.

"Is Mother forcing responsibilities of an heir onto you, already?"

"Oh, it's more. I don't understand how Ned so easily accepted all this pressure."

Observing Jeremy, Harry placed his elbow on the table and rested his chin in his upturned palm. "Well, for one thing, Ned thrived on it, but then again, you've never shied from pressure either, Jeremy. So, why don't you tell me what the real problem is?" Harry's directness hit a target.

"You always could see through me, Harry."

"Well, what is it?" he insisted.

Roughly, Jeremy rubbed his forehead, wishing he could remove his memory of Katherine. He pushed away from the desk, restlessly turned to the bookshelves, and ran his fingers along a roll of books. Randomly, reaching up, he selected one, pulled it from the shelf, and flipped through it.

Harry waited without saying a word. Jeremy turned back, his heart suffering. Harry watched him slump into a chair.

"I've...I fell in love, Harry."

"You? My brother, the roué?"

A slight smile crossed Jeremy's lips. "A reformed roué, thank you."

"Why, that's wonderful...isn't it? Now you won't have to listen to Mother's constant nagging."

"If only it were that simple."

"Well, of course it is. Why wouldn't it be?"

Harry, the ever optimist, assured him.

“No...it’s an impossible situation. You don’t know.”

“Well, sounds to me as if Lady Olivia would fit right in-for Mother anyway?”

“Harry, I’m not in love with Olivia. I met someone while in the colonies.”

Harry’s eyebrows shot up. Intrigued, he leaned forward placing both hands on the table. “Really! A colonial woman?”

“According to Mother’s standards, a commoner...and, that’s not even the worst part. Her brother’s a wanted Patriot. He murdered a British Agent and a soldier.”

Jeremy’s low, coarse voice paused to give him time to absorb the news. He glanced into his little brother’s unbelievable expression.

Jeremy leaned back in his chair, stretched out his long legs, and shoved his hands deep into his pockets. He fingered the yellow satin ribbon.

Silence echoed through the library.

Finally, his muffled voice added, “She’s terribly young, Harry, somewhat younger than you, in fact.”

“Jeremy, you’re in love...what could be more important?”

“Heaven knows Mother wouldn’t agree. Ned should be here, you know.”

Harry’s brows came together. “What are you talking about?” he asked, sitting back with uplifted shoulders.

“Why did he have to die, Harry, why? He’s the one that should be living this hell, and I could be with Katherine.”

“Calm down. Now let’s be realistic. Ned’s mortality has nothing to do with your loving this...this...Katherine.”

Rising from his seat, Jeremy paced. Taking his aggression out with each word, more to convince himself than Harry, he explained. “If I were simply

Captain Burke, that would be one thing, but with everything else stacked up against us, any kind of relationship would be difficult. God knows the problem goes much deeper than just our social differences. I am now the heir to the Weatherton title. Society would never accept Katherine as a suitable Viscountess."

Harry shook his head and stood. "Look, I'm the ever practical one, not you. Where's the rebel-spirited fellow I've always looked up too?"

Continuing in an accusatory tone, Harry declared, "To hell with society. You've never cared a lick for what society thought. So, why start now, especially, since it's your happiness in jeopardy?"

Allowing Harry's words to dissipate through the library, Jeremy's stress relaxed. "You would love her, Harry. She's strong willed, and yet, vulnerable. And, beautiful, like a goddess."

"Don't do this to yourself. Go back. Find her. Marry her. If it's what you wish."

"You are not hearing me, Harry." Dropping in a chair, Jeremy gazed into Harry's eyes. The contrite firmness in his voice demanded Harry to see things his way. "She would hate it here. Her heart belongs to the New World. She's like the land-pure, wild and rich with promises. She's never known any difference. I could not expect her to turn her back on everything she loves—everything that makes her the woman I fell in love with...oh, how she would hate it here, as I hate it. But I don't have a choice."

"And now neither does she," Harry mumbled, sitting next to him frowning.

Jeremy pounded his fist on the table, vibrating the loud thump throughout the library. "Damn Ned!"

"Right. Blame our dead brother. That's sure to solve things." Harry pushed away from the desk. The loud scrapping of his chair against the hardwood floor echoed, emphasizing how he felt about the entire situation and his brother's defeated

attitude.

“Nothing can be solved, only endured,” Jeremy confessed.

“There’s always hope.”

“Hope only deepens the wounds.”

Harry stood, slammed the book closed, stacked the others on top, and picked them up. “Come on, let’s get to the estate. We’ll have a good meal and spend the rest of the evening communing with a bottle of whiskey. What do you say?”

“Sure.”

The sunlight filtered into the study to rest on Jeremy’s slumped shoulders. Pages from an opened book on his lap stared back while his mind traveled thousands of miles away.

He slammed the book shut and dropped it on the table next to Katherine’s ribbon. He dragged his tired body out of the chair while uncontrollable fingers reached out and curled the soft yellow satin into his grasp.

A lengthy sigh escaped his lips. He threaded the long ribbon through his fingers. He needed to calm his restlessness. The trip to Harry’s had neither solved any problems, nor helped dissolve his desires.

Strolling over to the tall-windowed doors, Jeremy pushed them open and scanned the grounds around the estate. Breathing deeply through his nose, he smelled the scented garden of colorful spring flowers. Distracted, he meandered through the gardens toward a bench near the small babbling brook. He stared blankly into the rippling stream and allowed his mind to become mesmerized with the rhythmic sounds.

After a while, as hard as he tried, he could find no comfort in its beauty. Jeremy folded his arms tightly across his chest and released a heavy, hopeless moan. *Well, Burke, ole boy, life had truly forgotten you. In fact, Jeremy Burke no longer*

existed.

Ned—God, he never wanted Ned's life, nor ever envied his position as head of the estate. Dear, dear brother, what would you do if you were here, now?

Jeremy bent, picked up a pebble, and tossed it into stream with a grim expression. He knew. Simple. Ned would have performed the duties expected, flawlessly, and noble in every demanding issue.

Tossing another pebble into the water, Jeremy dropped his face in his hands. God, I'm sadly inefficient at being a nobleman—help me.

“Captain Burke, Captain, you must come—”

Turning, Jeremy watched Garrick hurrying toward him along the pathway.

“Please, sir, hurry, your mother sends for you.”

“Father?”

“Yes, sir.

Jeremy covered a wide yawn as he made his way to his room. Tired from the long night with his father, he dropped on the bed without undressing. Just a few hours of sleep; then he'd go back. It was a miracle his father was still alive, but for how long?

His mind spun with thoughts of his father and the future dealt him. During the social event at the McQuire's Estate, he would escort Lady Olivia Bertin to the ball. He then would consider asking her hand in marriage. Why wait.

If he were to wed her, how could he ever make love to her without thinking of Katherine? He would make a life with her while dreaming of another.

The realization of how sick his father really was weighed heavily on him. Now the time had come for him to make the unavoidable, atrocious commitment-marriage. There was no other way. His mother would be most delighted if he asked for Lady Olivia's hand. Damn.

Jeremy squeezed his eyes shut and released a

heavy, surrendering sigh.

Jeremy tapped his fingers on the armchair. Aware of his dull mindset and emptiness, he rested a blank expression on the woman he was still contemplating on wedding. She sat across the room, next to Lady Weatherton, discussing his sister's upcoming wedding.

He pushed the air from his lungs, closed his eyes, and dropped his head back on the high top chair. Wishing he were elsewhere, he stretched out his long legs, while each digit continued their drum-drum beat, as if he were waiting for a message.

Jeremy lifted half-opened eyelids to observe the two. Their excitement had sprung into action. They discussed the enormous groundwork involved in the making of the fashionable gowns Meg would wear during her wedding feast and beyond.

His little sister was getting married. Was he to be next? Squinting, he studied the dark-headed woman of eminent style. If so, why her. Huh, it had been such a heartless thought on his part, as if picking out a hunting dog to purchase. No, no, he would've taken more time in the selection of a good breeding dog.

Jeremy rubbed his forehead and shut his eyes against the uncontrollable guilt and mistakes in his life. Damn, he wanted to leave the room, but he needed an excuse-nothing appropriate popped into his head.

Half-heartedly listening, Jeremy heard the arrogant, snobbish tone coming from the woman

that could soon become his intended wife. He turned his focus back to her slight build in the proper attire according to society. Attractive, except for her mouth. *What in heaven's name would their marriage be like?*

"Really, Lady Weatherton, if you intend to invite the Grants to Meg's wedding, then you may as well invite all of Scotland."

Lady Olivia's condescending tone lifted his mother's eyes directly into hers. "Don't patronize me, Lady Olivia. The Grants are a good family with well known social standings, and by all means, they'll receive an invitation." Her sharp reprimand spilled from her lips without the least bit intimation shown by, unbeknownst to her, a potential daughter-in-law.

Jeremy grinned. Leave it to his mother to let her know who was in charge.

The door swung open admitting a cold draft to filter into the parlor alerting him to an interruption. *Thank goodness. Bout time.*

"Harry," Lady Weatherton exclaimed, beaming. "We didn't expect you for another couple of weeks."

Teasingly, her youngest son answered, "Well, I could always come back later if..."

"Nonsense, my dear, it's good to have you home."

He strolled over to kiss her uplifted cheek. "Mother dear, it's good to see you, too. I'm not disturbing anything important, am I?"

"Of course not, Harry," Jeremy intervened, jumping to his feet. "Certainly time you came home." He quickly crossed the room to his brother's side, eyes pleading for an escape.

"It's good to see you, too." Harry chuckled under his breath, tossing a smirk at his older brother.

His attention turned to Lady Olivia. He bowed and held out his hand. "This must be the fortunate lady that has ensnared my brother from all of London."

"Oh, son, you haven't met Lady Olivia, have

you? Of course not, how could you?" Lady Weatherton laughed. "Harry, meet Lady Olivia Bertin."

Accepting her hand, Harry's charming smile met hers. "Jeremy failed to mention how beautiful you were. If for some reason you decide to dump my older brother, I'm the next Burke in line, you know."

"Harry." His mother laughed. "You're such a tease."

"Mother, I'm going to take Harry up to see Father."

"Must you, dear?"

"Later, Mother." To soften the sharpness in his voice, he added, "Father's more important and shouldn't wait."

"Really, Jeremy! Must you?" echoed Lady Olivia.

Cringing inside from her tone and without a backward glance, Jeremy led Harry out of the room.

Muffled sounds trickled throughout the affluent White's Club, with the exception of the loud foursome sitting around a card table in a back room.

Harry, a little inebriated, squeezed his eyes shut before opening them. Working his jaw muscles, he squinted at Dashiell and Arthur. As far as he was concerned, the subject matter in discussion needed to go deeper than any of them were willing to dig.

"Now, old chaps, since we're on this topic, let's be honest here. Plain and simple—we do not want Jeremy becoming engaged to that woman. Do we?"

"Well, I'm not sure it's our place—"

"No, no, no," Harry adamantly slapped the table. "Listen to me...he's considering this for all the wrong reasons."

"Are there any right ones?" Arthur teased.

"I believe there are." Harry's serious voice pulled Jeremy's clouded focus away from the bottom of his glass.

Arthur laughed heartily. "Oh, Harry, you're so

damned idealistic. Besides, he could do worse.”

“How?” Harry demanded.

“He could be marrying one of those so-called patriot women,” Dashiell offered, laughing at his own inventive notion.

Jeremy’s stone glare bored into Harry’s as if to say *I told you so*.

“Or,” laughing at Dashiell, Arthur injected his own plug, “she could be disfigured and unsightly.”

“Then her appearance would match her personality,” Harry grumbled, ignoring Jeremy’s cold stare.

Annoyed with all three, Jeremy slammed his whiskey glass on the table. “I’m thrilled you all have so many opinions about my life.”

“I beg you, Jeremy, please listen to me before it’s too late!” Harry’s ominous tone turned Arthur and Dashiell’s curious eyes on the two.

“Harry...”

“You hate this society lifestyle; on the other hand, she thrives on it. You love simplicity. She abhors it. You two are completely and totally opposites. You’ll end up killing each other, or more to the point—wishing you were dead.”

Clearing his throat, Arthur intervened, “So, I take it you’re opposed to Jeremy becoming betrothed to Lady Olivia. Right, Harry?”

Harry darted a look at his brother’s disgruntled expression.

Jeremy’s jaw muscles tightened as he stood. He shook his head in disgust, downed the last shot of whiskey, and mumbled, “Come on, it’s too quiet in here. Let’s go find a noisy pub. What’d you say, boys?”

“Good idea, Burke. I heard the pub at old George Inn’s a lively place this time of evening.” Dashiell raised his glass in agreement, swallowed the remaining whiskey, and stood.

Jeremy made his way to his bedchambers with thoughts on his father's illness and the advice Harry so adamantly provided. Everyone had an opinion, but no one had a solution.

He slammed the door shut behind him, strolled over to the window, and solemnly parted the heavy velvet drapes. While staring out beyond the courtyard, he let his mind drift across the ocean to another period—a lifetime ago. How could he find happiness when the woman he loved was clearly out of reach? Shoving his hand deep into his pocket, he held onto the yellow satin ribbon.

A restless battle motivated his muscles into action. He whirled and snatched up his gray wool clock, hat, and gloves. In a hurry, he rushed from his chambers, down the massive staircase, and out the front door before anyone, or more specific, his mother, could stop him.

His hurried strides carried him straight to the stables where he saddled and mounted the Arabian within seconds. Jeremy commanded the black stallion to gallop at full force. He rode hard and fast, as if to escape to an unknown destination, encouraging the strong, muscular horse to match his fleeting spirit.

Several miles later, Jeremy slowed the winded animal to a walk. The rushed ride brought him to the Thames River. The full moon released its glow along the narrow road snaking its way beside the meandering waterway. His breath trailed a ghostly cloud of mist over the frozen moonlit terrain.

Prickling senses alerted his body. His hand slipped to the opening of his coat, near his weapon. He glanced around, realizing how easy a target he made riding alone in the shimmer of the moonlight.

Within moments, a man jumped from behind a hedge and grabbed the reins, stopping his horse. The moonbeams bounced off the man's large knife blade.

Jeremy narrowed his gaze and stared at the

waving weapon. Showing no fear, he arched a brow and glared into the man's beady, black eyes until they ricocheted from his intimidating mien.

"Give me your pouch of coins and any valuables on your person. Do you understand?" his tight voice demanded, pointing the long-bladed knife.

Jeremy nudged his horse forward. Little by little, he closed in on the assailant, enough to detect the fear in the dirty faced, ragged-clothed man.

Without hesitating, Jeremy slipped his foot from the strap and in a swift sharp kick, surprised the attacker when his boot made contact with his nearly toothless mouth, spraying out blood, and no doubt, any remaining teeth.

Quickly, Jeremy drew his flintlock pistol from beneath his coat and aimed it toward the man sprawled out, flat on his back.

"Sir, if you wish to live, you might consider running. Now. The faster the better." Jeremy watched the frightened man scramble on all fours, disappearing into the hedges. He stared at the empty, dark hole into which the man vanished.

Jeremy held the reins tight, keeping his horse still.

He listened.

In the quietness of the evening, a soothing sound trickled from the nearby Abbey. Violin notes flowed over the cold night air mingling within the deepest depths of his essence, touching his loneliness.

Breathing in the cold wintry air, he pulled on the reins and turned his horse in the direction of the mesmerizing oeuvre. The soft melody encircled his soul, swallowing up the sound of the clip-clop of his horse's hooves. He led his mount to the front entrance, drawn, as if in a trance and in need of some deep, internal contentment, he dismounted and entered the chapel. The evening prayer service had just begun.

After the chilly ride and the near mishap, he welcomed the warmth of the cathedral. A small boys' choir directed the Abbey worshippers. Quietly glancing around, he noticed the few scattered people with heads bowed. How long had it been since he'd deliberately worshiped and talked to God. He couldn't remember.

Sitting on the hardwood pew, he rested his elbows on his knees and covered his face with his hands. Any passerby would have thought him praying. He too, felt the need from a higher power. Only, he wasn't sure how to ask.

Indeed, the deep sense of loss drowned him in discontentment. Only God could rectify and give peace. The anguish Jeremy felt put a prayer on his lips—acceptance of the life dealt him. He desperately needed to discover God's wisdom. Good judgment seemed so limited in his understanding of what needed to be done. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the yellow satin ribbon. Covering his face, he rubbed it against his moist eyes.

"Hey, Jeremy, where you going?" Harry shouted, descending the stairs after a worthwhile visit with his father. "I was on my way to look for you. Let's get out of here—"

"If you can make that happen, I'd depart with you instantly, but my presence has been requested. Mother and Lady Olivia, wait for me in the parlor.

"Leave it to me." Grinning, Harry grabbed Jeremy's arm and propelled him into the parlor. The two women sat with heads together, studying sketches of fashionable clothes that would interest Meg for her upcoming day.

Jeremy's eyes rested on Lady Olivia. When she caught his glance, he smiled at the dark-haired woman, strolled over, and gave her a polite kiss on the back of her held out hand.

"My dear, it's about time—"

“Mother—” Harry stepped forward, shot a fiendish glance toward Jeremy, and sweetly said, “Your dutiful sons are as always at your beckoning command.”

“Really, dear,” Lady Weatherton said, eyeing Jeremy.

“Jeremy, tell me which you prefer,” Lady Olivia requested, batting her eyelashes while holding up a drawing of latest fashionable riding habit.

“Mother, Harry intervened, “your judgment is impeccable, and I trust, Lady Olivia’s, as well. But since it’s Meg’s wedding, perhaps she should have the final say, would you agree?” Grabbing Jeremy’s arm, Harry dragged his brother to the door.

“Where are you taking him?” Lady Olivia’s sharp voice sliced through the room.

Harry stopped in the doorway, turned and mockingly bowed at the women, and announced, “We, my ladies, have a former engagement. Please forgive us for our hasty departure, but we must meet an associate at White’s.”

Lady Weatherton opened her mouth to speak, but Lady Olivia’s words struck out before she could say anything.

“Captain Burke, you must escort me to my residence later.”

The attractive woman’s sharp tongue stiffened Jeremy’s spine, but, as before, he held his own and let his brother’s charm take control of the situation.

“Mother, I’m sure Garrick will usher Lady Olivia to her residence. If my brother and I had known that she was spending the afternoon at Weatherton, we would not have made prior arrangements with the gentlemen waiting for us at White’s. Please forgive us.”

In a rushed exit, Harry pulled Jeremy out of the parlor and slammed the door behind them. It was followed by an indignant tone and reprimand heard from the other side.

Laughing, Jeremy clouted Harry's chest. "You do have words on your side, my shrewd little brother."

Straightening his expression, he looked at Harry with a false seriousness and said, "That is not amusing." But, his voice failed to emphasize his sternness.

"Oh, but it is, dear brother, it is."

Serious, Harry shoved Jeremy out of earshot from the parlor door. "What has gotten into you?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh, please! Lady Olivia? One good tongue lash after you wed her—should a wedding ensue, and you might never speak again. I'd sooner be hung by the neck than receive a lashing from her."

"Harry, you just made an impolite comment about my lovely—" Jeremy paused, squinted, and pulled up the side of his mouth, lost for words.

"Be serious. This is not a joke. I noticed the little unemotional *peck* on the hand you gave her. You can't love her. Don't do something you can't reverse."

"Oh, Harry, first of all, I don't have a choice. Secondly, I'm really tired of the subject."

"Come on, you know what a catch you are in these London waters. Why, every available female dreams of winning the arm of Captain Burke, soon to be Lord Weatherton."

"Please, Harry..."

"You do have a choice, yet, you allow this society to imprison you for the rest of your life. There are other women in England and all with a sweeter disposition, might I add?"

Jeremy's grim face glared back at his brother, knowing he'd verbalized his very own fear.

"Or," continued Harry, "...have I touched on something? You don't really want Lady Olivia or any other woman in England, do you? You're considering proposing to her as a duty; otherwise, you would be a little particular about your choice."

“Enough, Harry.”

“No, not when you’re on the threshold of marrying England’s biggest bitch. No, I don’t think I will.”

“Harry, quiet down. She’s in the other room.”

“But you don’t disagree with me, do you?”

Jeremy leaned against the staircase at the end of the Great Hall and rubbed his forehead. “The point being—”

“No point. You’re not over her. I can read it in your eyes.”

“Harry, it’s been almost two years, too long.” Changing the subject, Jeremy cleared his throat, “Come on, if we don’t leave now, I’ll get caught by Mother.”

“Harry,” squealed Meg.

Turning, they watched Meg’s, their sister, and Miss Clayton’s happy faces as they entered the grand front door into the large foyer.

Meg grinned at her brothers and handed over her cloak to Garrick before approaching them. “What are you two doing? Jeremy, have you seen Lady Olivia and Mother?”

His gentle kiss contradicted the tone of his voice, “They’re in the parlor, and we’re preparing to leave for a business meeting.”

“Oh, no, I imagine you’ve undoubtedly upset Lady Olivia, haven’t you? You know she gets perturbed when things don’t go as planned, and I’m sure she anticipated your offer of seeing her to her residence once we decide on my wardrobe.”

“I’m sure Lady Olivia will get over it,” Jeremy’s tone stated in an unspoken demand.

“I do hope your studies are coming along,” Miss Clayton inquired with eyes only for Harry.

Jeremy arched an eyebrow and observed his brother’s nervous reaction to her. From the way they both stared at each other, Jeremy suspected he now knew the reason Harry stayed away from home so

much. And, Mother thinks there's something between Miss Clayton and Authur. Little did she know.

"They are...very enlightening, as always, thank you," Harry replied, bowing politely.

Meg grabbed Jeremy's arm, exclaiming, "I have to tell you what we caught a glimpse of today?" Excited, she continued, "Lady Olivia's gown that she designed and will be wearing at my wedding feast. She looked gorgeous."

Jeremy's lip lifted in a half smile; he put an arm around her shoulders and directed her toward the parlor. Ignoring her statement, he warmly said, "You'd better present yourself in the parlor, or Mother will have Garrick out searching for you."

Harry, annoyed, shot a skeptical glance in Jeremy's direction.

Glancing at his brother, knowingly, Jeremy lifted a shoulder. "What?"

"I doubt if Lady Olivia could look gorgeous in anything, once she opened her mouth."

Miss Clayton's sudden intake of breath brought Harry's gaze to her wide eyes.

"You don't like her." Her straightforward statement and her stare caught his tongue.

This time, Jeremy rescued Harry. His hollowed laugh almost went unnoticed. "On the contrary; Harry doesn't want me involved with any woman or contemplate the thoughts of marriage. He knows, once Mother's married me off, her attention will be placed solely in a search for the proper wife for my little brother."

Harry retorted, "Huh—hadn't thought of that." He slapped Jeremy on the back and added, "Now, you know why you must continue to be the old rogue you were before, brother."

Impatiently, he shoved Jeremy toward the door, and after he politely bowed to Miss Clayton, he followed. "If you'll excuse us, we have a pressing

matter to attend to, and I'm sure you have equally pressing matters in the parlor."

Lord Weatherton's wrinkled brow drew together. He found it hard to concentrate, yet he struggled to read in order to keep his mind off his illness, and, his depleted energy with each day passing.

His head dropped against the pillows, permitting him to stare at the ceiling. He was trapped. Prisoner in his own large canopy bed. Even the radiating heat from the massive hearth drew no comfort to him.

A light knock turned his vacant eyes toward the door. Thankful for the distraction, he struggled for breath before he could release his weak voice, hardly heard from the other side of the door. "Come in."

Entering, Jeremy made his way across the large dark room, casting a long shadow on the floor from the huge fireplace. The gloominess reeked throughout the bedchambers.

He gazed upon his father—once a large, stout man now withered away to a thin frail soul with no quality of life. Jeremy forced a smile and hid his concern for his father's grayish skin tone. "I'm not disturbing you, am I?"

"No, my son, please come visit."

"How are you feeling?"

"Better than yesterday."

Doubts clouded Jeremy's mind in his observation.

His father's smile failed to reach his eyes as he warmly turned his gaze to his son. He covered Jeremy's hand and ever so lightly patted.

"Let's hope, tomorrow you'll be back to your old self," Jeremy mumbled, wishing some miracle would restore the health of the giant man's boots he had to fill, far too soon.

The logs crackled in the huge hearth.

Jeremy watched his father's faded blue eyes strain to study him. After several minutes of silence, his weak voice, far from the remembered baritone controlled voice, questioned him, surprisingly. "Do you love her?"

"Lady Olivia?" Ashamed of his thoughts, Jeremy looked away. "I'm sure I'll learn to, Father."

"Love spreads deeper than any surface feelings, Jeremy. It's not a subject taught with instructions."

"Perhaps it should be."

To his alarm, his father struggled to set up, but instead released a convulsion of coughing spasms, ripping through his body so severely that Jeremy thought he would depart before his eyes.

"Father, don't..."

Unable to pull up his feeble body, his father collapsed against the pillows, gasping. Closing his eyes, he waited for his labored breath to subside.

"Are you happy?" his raspy voice whispered. "You're not, are you son...I still notice things...sadness in your lifeless blue eyes. I remember when you were once full of mischief and laughter. All I ever wanted was your happiness, Jeremy."

"I know, Father." Jeremy's earnest voice, hardly above a whisper added, "You raised us to be honorable. I will do my duty as your son."

"Living an honorable life can include living a life you want."

"Harry spoke to you, didn't he?"

"Now that I near the end of my life, things have become clear. I understand things I could not see before—" pausing, he rolled over coughing, again, leaving him breathless.

Jeremy, sick inside at the sight of his frail body, waited until the uncontrollable spasm subsided, again.

"Son, I am very ill. My desire is for you to not delay what's important in your life until you are as

close to the end as I.”

Jeremy touched his hand to assure him. “I don’t want to hear such talk, Father. You’re to be up and about before Meg’s wedding.” Chocking back emotions, Jeremy blinked away tears.

“Not this time, my son.” Warily, he motioned for Jeremy to lean closer. “My son. My proud son. When Ned died, you took on so many new responsibilities.”

“Father, I want to make you proud. I can take care of the family.”

“My one last wish is for you to find the happiness you’ve lost. Now, go. I must rest. But heed my words, son, don’t grow old and feeble before you learn what’s important during this lifetime.”

Jeremy, with his head hung low, gradually made his way down the large staircase, through the Great Hall to enter the door to the parlor where he heard the ladies in his life talking.

“...and Lady Victoria told her absolutely not...” Meg gossiped.

Her story had Miss Clayton and Lady Olivia so engrossed they barely noticed Jeremy enter.

“Ladies,” he mumbled politely, and made his way to an empty chair. With his mind on his father’s words, he absently grabbed the *London Gazette* and dropped into the seat. Glancing up, he met Lady Olivia’s smile before she turned her attention back to Meg.

“Brother, dear,” Meg responded.

“Afternoon,” Miss Clayton echoed, while her gaze swung to the door, as if expecting someone else.

Uninterested in the latest gossip, Jeremy began to read and search through the paper for colonial news.

Meg’s excited tone caused Jeremy’s eyes to shift toward them without moving his head. Meg patted Lady Olivia’s arm, emphasizing more hearsay, “Oh, I

nearly forgot. Did you hear about Margaret Ashby?"

"I certainly did. It's completely absurd," she responded with a click of her tongue, shaking her head at the disgusted news.

"What did she do?" Miss Clayton asked with a questioning frown.

"She ran off to Gretna Green." Lady Olivia's disbelieving tone sounded horrified, but intrigued.

"She didn't?" Miss Clayton shook her head and delicately raised her hand covering her mouth with her fingers.

Lady Olivia nodded. "I'm sure she's ruined for life."

Hearing the news of Caroline's sister, Jeremy dropped the newspaper in his lap, shot a glance toward the ladies, and rolled his eyes at the three women.

Didn't they have more important things to do besides be enthralled by hearsay scandals? Their continued anecdotes were increasingly irritating, pushing his blood pressure to an angry point of explosion.

"Worst, yet—" Meg giggled.

"What?" Miss Clayton's brows shot up.

"The man she married is a small town squire."

"You don't say?"

"Can you imagine a woman of her breeding marrying a man so far beneath her position?" Lady Olivia shook her head in abhorrence.

Frustrated, Jeremy suddenly jumped from his seat and shouted, "Yes, I most certainly can imagine it! In fact, I have considered doing so myself."

Perplexed by the outburst, the three women stared at him in shock.

Only Lady Olivia dared to speak. "Really now, Captain Burke, what on earth do you mean?" she demanded.

Jeremy's face stiffened. Angry at their senseless trivia, their snobbery pretense of the society he lived

in, and their better-then-thou demeanor, he took a deep breath to control his emotions.

Doubling his fist to hang on to his sanity, his low accusing words slowly flowed from his tight lips. "Position and breeding aren't everything. If the young Ashby lady is happy with her squire, then who are you to ridicule her? I wish them luck. They'll need it with people like you."

Patronizingly, Lady Olivia smoothed over his words, "Now, Captain Burke, it isn't right you—"

He glared at her. Black raging eyes, no longer contained.

She shut her mouth.

"Do not take that condescending tone with me."

Jeremy's long stride headed toward the door. He stopped, turned, and stared at the dumbstruck women.

"Invite the Grants, don't invite the Grants. It's of no consequences to me, because I bloody well won't be here!"

He stopped to make one last comment. "Meg, tell Father I have gone to find happiness," and then he stormed through the door and slammed it with a bang.

He hadn't felt this alive in a long time. Stepping around, he stared into the wide-eyed, shocked Harry.

"What was that all about?"

Almost immediately, Jeremy grabbed Harry's arm, propelled him down the hallway, and ordered. "Come on, you're going with me."

The first time in many months, a sparkle in his eyes matched the bright smile on his lips.

"Where?"

"Boston."

Katherine stood on the porch, staring out beyond the fields of yellow wheat. Their stalks, covered with feathery plumbs, waved back and forth in the light breeze.

A slight whimper escaped Katherine's lips. She closed her eyes to the afternoon summer sun, feeling the heat baking into her face. Inhaling deeply, she suddenly felt old. The passing of time was good, though, she'd concluded; healing was a never-ending process.

Her mother, relaxed on the porch swing, hummed in a low, soothing voice. Katherine smiled and prepared to speak, but she closed her mouth when a figure down the long, dusty road trapped her gaze. Forgotten words were lost as her attention studied the rider approaching in the distance. "Who do you suppose that could be, Mother?"

Anne squinted. When Katherine glanced at her, she detected a slow, joyous recognition flash in her mother's expression. Without hesitating, Anne stood and rushed down the porch steps, waving.

Katherine's brow wrinkled as her gaze followed her mother's hurried pace toward the rider. She stared. Then, the familiar figure rode close enough to distinguish.

Anne barely let Paul dismount and plant his feet on the solid ground before she flung her arms around him in a huge bear hug. "Paul, Paul, Paul, you're home."

Katherine observed her life-long friend. He

seemed much older, different. The years had matured him, as they had done to her. She noticed how his features were more defined, stronger. Alert dark brown eyes set in a deep tanned face accented serious lines around his mouth, and the crease between his brows and his sun-bleached hair all encompassed a regal looking man.

Taken back by Paul's rugged handsomeness, Katherine's heart fluttered, surprising her. Embarrassed from her study of the man she'd know all her life, she forced her eyes away from him and moved to the edge of the porch. A little shy, cautiously, she stepped down.

"Mrs. Heaton, it's so good to see you." Paul returned her hug with sincere warmth.

"My dear Paul, I'm so glad you're safe. We've missed you. James? Where's my James?"

Swinging his gaze away from Anne, Paul stared at Katherine as she slowly approached. Frowning, his ricocheted glance bounced off her and back to Anne.

"He's laying low for awhile...in Boston."

"Well, I do hope he'll be home soon. I need to see my son." Anne reached up, took his face in her hands, and whispered, "Oh, but you're home." She beamed, seeing Paul. "You've been gone such a long time."

"Forever, Mrs. Heaton, forever." He darted a quick glance toward Katherine. A slight, hesitant smile thinned his lips. Teasing, he mumbled, "But, your daughter appears to need a little more meat on her bones."

"Come," Anne encouraged, slipping her arm through his to lead him toward the porch.

"The place looks wonderful," Paul said; although his eyes bored into Katherine's.

"Hello, Paul." Katherine finally found her voice, shaken by his intense stare drilling through her. A little awkward, she smiled, leaned forward, and gave

him a slight hug.

“Katie.” Paul squeezed her in delight, relieved from his long-awaited returned.

Katherine stepped back, clasped her hands together and mumbled, “You’ve had a long hot ride...I...I’ll just go get you some fresh water to quench your thirst.” Turning, not waiting for a reply, she rushed up the porch steps and disappeared into the house.

“Can you stay for supper, Paul?” Anne inquired, making her way to the swing at the opposite end of the porch where the cool shadow from the old oak tree enveloped the rockers.

Settling his tired body down next to her, Paul grinned, “Thanks, but I’m on my way home. If I don’t make it home tonight and Father finds out I had supper here, he’ll have my hide. But, I just couldn’t ride by without stopping.”

“I wouldn’t blame him. Maybe, one day next week.”

“Sure, I’ll plan on it.” Glancing at the door, he questioned, “How’s Katie doing, Mrs. Heaton?”

“You know Katherine...she worries about you and James all the time. So, I know she’s pleased you’re home.” Soft understanding eyes detected his concerned expression.

A couple of weeks later, Paul found himself sitting on the porch, patting his stuffed tummy, and lazily stating, “Dinner was outstanding, ladies. How you manage to bake in this summer heat is beyond me.”

Eyeing Katherine, Paul stood, and then turned and gave Anne a slight hug. He showed his appreciation with a gaze. “Thanks, again. Your hospitality is, as always, superb.”

He jumped off the porch, stepped near his horse,

and quickly darted a glimpse in Katherine's direction. Fumbling fingers played with the reins, nervously. "Walk with me, Katie, for a little ways."

"Sure." Stepping down from the porch, Katherine moved alongside him, staring down at her feet.

Silence fell between them while footsteps crunched the rocky dirt road beneath their feet and the clip-clop of the horse's hooves.

Katherine glanced around at thick autumn colored trees fencing the road, leading toward the Bennett farm. "This is my favorite time of day, just before dusk. I like the way the sun reflects its golden hue on everything...it...appears peaceful." Her low pensive voice trailed to Paul.

"Oh, Katie, Katie, Katie...how I wished those word rang true."

"What do you mean?"

"Peace. If only it were that simple."

Frowning, she darted a glance his way. "Paul, are things worse than what we hear? Sometimes I feel as if we're cut off from all the news. Since Gage pulled most of the troops out of the area, what few British soldiers are left never bother to tell us what's going on in the other colonies."

"I don't want to worry you, Katie, but things are, beyond a doubt, getting worse. But, on the positive side, communication should improve. Last March, the Virginia House of Burgesses elected committee members to communicate with all the colonies regarding grievances against the British."

"We haven't heard about any kind of committee," she commented.

"Ah, at first it all was organized in secret."

"Do you know who started this committee?"

"Sure. Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and some gentleman named Richard Henry Lee."

"Do you think this will help matters?"

“Well, the more we’re prepared, the better off we’ll be,” he stated, glancing out over the field, he stopped.

“We did hear something about a Tea Act and a three-penny per pound import tax.”

Paul nodded. “I’d wager there’d be some kind of boycott taking place.”

“Boycott? Oh, Paul, when will this ever end?”

Hesitating, he turned his gaze to Katherine. A beautiful woman, now, more settled with an air of assurance. Since he’d returned, he’d waited, and, now, he wanted— “Katie, I need to ask you a sensitive question.”

“Paul, you know you can ask me anything.”

Sad eyes rose up into his.

He stood still twisting the reins in his tanned hands. Looking into her eyes, his affectionate voice softened, “What about the captain?”

She stopped in her tracks. Biting her lower lip, she gazed straight into his eyes. “You know?”

Nodding, without a word, he held his breath, waiting.

“Captain Burke’s gone. Out of my life.”

A sigh of relief escaped Paul’s lips as he reached for her hand. “Good.”

“James told you.

He nodded.

“He still hasn’t forgiven me.” Katherine stared down at his hand caressing hers.

“He will.”

“I never really thought he’d stay away this long.”

“You hurt him, Katie...you hurt us both,” Paul said calmly, staring at her with determination.

“He’s still mad at me, isn’t he? And...and, you?”

Paul looked into her solemn green eyes without saying a word.

In all sincerity her voice reflected, “I never meant to...I’ve made a lot of mistakes, Paul. I guess

I needed to learn some things on my own; both you and James always wanted to protect me from everything...and, everyone.”

“I know.” Paul gave Katherine a thoughtful nod. “James is proud, Katie, but he does love you, and he will forgive you, as I.”

A tear slid down her cheek. She flipped it away. “Thank you, Paul. I hope you’re right about James.”

“I’ve known him long enough to read the signs.”

Impatiently, Paul cleared his throat, no longer able to wait. “Katie, I...I...” he paused, glanced down, and kicked a small rock out of the road. “Katie,” facing the woman he’d love his entire life, nervous at the prospect of revealing his feelings, he hesitated, again.

“Yes?”

“The reason I came back...look, I know a lot of things were left unresolved between us when I took off, but I’m ready to put everything behind us and start over.”

“Oh Paul.” Katherine nodded and placed her hand on his arm. “I would like that very much.”

“I wanted to tell you...” Suddenly, consumed with shyness, like a schoolboy carrying a crush, and not sure how to act or express himself, Paul clamped his mouth shut.

“What, Paul?” Katherine encouraged.

“I think about you all the time. Not a day goes by I don’t.”

Smiling warmly, Katherine said nothing.

Shifting from one foot to the other, desperate for reassurance, Paul reached down, and once again, took her hand. His soft voice muttered, “I’m in love with you, Katie. I always have been.”

Pleasantly surprised by Paul’s openness, Katherine warmly kissed his cheek.

“I do love you and always have.”

“I want you to marry me,” he blurred out before all his courage slipped away.

“Paul, I don’t know what to say. You deserve someone worthy of your love and I’m—”

“Don’t,” Paul interrupted. “Don’t answer at this moment. Think about it and the kind of life we could share. It would be good, Katie. We’d build a life together, work side by side, be there through the years for each other. That’s love, Katie. Think about it. We’ve all made mistakes, but it’s in the past, now, and our love will grow as we grow.”

He leaned down and tenderly kissed her cheek, mounted his horse, and left her standing in wonder, as he rounded the bend toward his farm.

Townpeople arrived and gathered around the front porch to await the bride—all dressed in their Sunday best, the ladies in their fashionable hats for protection against the autumn sun, and men in their finest linen shirts and tailored pants, and children sparkling clean in white muslin dresses. An exciting, comfortable atmosphere of joyful faces waiting for an event that most had expected for years.

Anne had gone to no restraint preparing for her daughter’s wedding day. The ceremony would take place on the front porch so all might have a good view. Wild flowers decorated the entire length of the porch, picked fresh that very morning and tied with white satin ribbon to match the bouquet the bride would carry. She’d even made sure several ribbon pots of sorted wildflowers adorned the long wooden tables Paul and his father had built for the occasion.

The last couple of days were spent preparing dishes of hominy, succotash, pumpkin, squash, potatoes, beans, turnips, not to mention the assorted pies of huckleberries, grapes, strawberries and blackberries from fruits growing wild in the forest. Breads made of rye, corn meal, and wheat severed with honey and maple sugar would satisfy any sweet tooth during the reception.

Anne made several baskets of confetti flower

petals and herbs. She placed them around the yard for the guests, at the appropriate festive time, to gather handfuls to throw on the couple in merriment.

Paul and their close neighbors spent hours planning the open fire pit for cooking oodles of roasted deer, wild turkey, quail, and all kinds of other game to serve in celebration of the joining. Much to the men's surprise, Thomas Bennett managed to acquire a tankard of ale for this long awaited day in his son's life.

Katherine stared out the bedroom window, unaware of the warm breeze as she scanned the countryside in all its impressive glory, a perfect wedding day. God's hand must have sent the Indian summer day, warm, and sunny surrounded by the golden-red leaves of autumn-it had to be a good omen. This day would be the beginning of their life together, forever, she vowed.

Hearing the door open, she swung around to find her mother, all smiles, beaming with jubilant excitement.

"Oh, my dear, you're not even in your dress. Everyone's here. Come, I'll help."

Anne reached down and picked up the beautiful silk-white-rose gown. Her fingers rubbed the material of such perfection for such a perfect occasion.

"What a thoughtful and sweet thing for your Aunt Elizabeth to do...sending you this wedding gown...a dream for any bride. We could never afford such elegant fabric. I wish she could be here to see you."

Anne dropped the full-layered petticoats of underclothes over Katherine's head, followed by the overdress fabric made of Indian silk with delicate satin ribbon rosettes around the waist. She stood back to admire the embroidered wedding dress with its pearls and metallic trims, all hand-sewn. She

gave the panned sleeves a little buff with her hands, checked the long fitted sleeves with the lacy cuffs, and said, "There."

Her gaze swept over Katherine's creamy neck, all trimmed in lace accented with more hand-sewn pearls. "You're a princess, every mother's dream for her daughter's wedding."

"Oh, Mother, you're a dear."

Tears stung Anne's eyes. Overwhelmed with the vision of her daughter's elegance and grace, in the lavishly trimmed gown, Katherine appeared at ease and content. Her shiny auburn hair presented a striking contrast in the glow of her beauty, and true to her spirited nature, adorned with summer daisies, and a white satin ribbon.

Anne dabbed away a tear slipping down her cheek and clapped her hands together. "Oh, Katherine, wait 'til you see Paul. He's so handsome in his suit. Oh, my goodness, wait 'til he sees *you*. Stay right there, I'll have the men start playing the music, and then I'll come and get you."

Stepping to the door, Anne stared one last time at her daughter. "Oh, sweetheart, I know your father would've been so happy for you and Paul." Not waiting for Katherine's response, she stepped out the door to give orders to the men playing the violins and flutes.

Katherine grabbed the massive folds of her long gown and stepped slowly to the front window. She parted the curtain to look for Paul.

He stood talking to his father and Matthew. She was proud and thankful for such a handsome, noble-looking man standing there in his fashionable white linen shirt adorned with visible lace beneath the waist vest.

A soft smile spread her lips. She would commit her life to him and love him all her life.

"Well, old friend, I guess this is the end of our

poker nights," Matthew jested, slapping his friend on the back. "Seems you've gone all out for this wedding, and it appears you've spared no expense from—" Matthew paused, trailed a skeptical glance over his attire and clicked his tongue. "I'm not sure if the suit is really you, Paul."

"Hey, Matthew, wait 'til it's your turn," Paul retaliated. "When you've waited as long as I have for this day, you'd have a black waistcoat, too."

Paul straightened the coat, which hung to his knees blending with his well-fitted breeches. The white knit stocking sat off his shiny black leather shoes of stylish high heel soles. He'd waited for this all his life and wanted to look stylish for his bride.

Matthew grinned at his friend in his lightweight suit, perfect for a warm autumn wedding. Wagging his head, he added, "I must admit, you do look kind of pompous, but I'm not sure about those high heels. Don't look too comfy to me." Matthew's little remark brought laughter to the crowd of men.

"Come son," Thomas whispered in his ear, "It's time. Anne's started the music."

He guided his son through the crowd toward the porch to meet his oncoming bride. Thomas held his head high, proud of his son, and excited about the prospect of grandchildren.

Tunes from the violin strings flowed out along the soft warm breeze announcing the bride. Gasps echoed throughout the courtyard when Katherine stepped out onto the porch.

Paul heard their reaction, and when he turned his eyes on his bride, he felt dazed. Her glowing beauty sparkled in her green eyes. Pride blazed within him as he approached her and gently took her hand.

Words from the minister floated to Katherine, giving her an uplifted blessing for the love she and Paul would share in a lifetime together. She was

thankful Paul's love went deeper than the words she heard. He made her complete. Among all their neighbors and close friends, Katherine and Paul repeated their vows, joined in wedlock for as long as they both shall live.

The minister said, "I now pronounce you man and wife."

Matthew's loud voice hollered from the crowded yard, "Bout time you two tied the knot," breaking the tranquil moment of the ceremony. Several muskets fired into the sky causing a few of the elderly to jump, startled from the thunderous echoes.

A bedlam of excited congratulations swarmed upon the couple, ringing in laughers of hugs and kisses.

Thomas gave his new daughter-in-law an affectionate hug. "You know Katherine, my son has been in love with you for as long as I can remember."

Paul mumbled, "Father."

"I'm just glad he never gave up on me," Katherine said, flashing Paul a shy smile before more hugs of congratulations crowded around her.

"Hey, one of your guests is too late for the ceremony, Paul," hollered the violin player from the porch.

Paul turned to stare down the road to observe a horse and rider approaching the festivities.

"Who is it, Paul?" Katherine asked, staring at the distance rider. Then, in a moment of shock, she recognized James. Stunned, a shudder of uneasiness swept through her.

Paul darted a quick glance at her and smiled. He took her hand and with a slight squeeze of assurance, he walked over to James just as he dismounted.

Anne, busy with the table food, stopped to see what caused all the commotion when her eyes rested on the rider, covered in dust, as well as a bearded

face. Even with his disguise, she knew her son. Running to him, she intercepted her daughter and new son-in-law.

“James, you’re home.”

“Mother.” He grinned and wiped away a tear sliding down her cheek before he embraced her.

“You’re safe. Oh, thank God, your safe.”

James squeezed his mother in another hug of reassurance then glanced at the wedding couple. Strolling toward them with his extended hand, he said, “Paul, I’m happy for you.” Slowly, he fixed his eyes on his sister and smiled. “Katie...”

Katherine stared back. She thought he looked harsh, thinner, and even wild-eyed. She swallowed hard, and her eyes stung to keep from tearing, but when James took her hands, she felt her cheek wet with a stream of happiness.

Not sure, of what to say, she smiled in her own nervous manner.

Gently, James kissed her on the forehead and suddenly lifted her off the ground in a big hug, which thrilled her.

Wrapping her arms around her brother, she whispered in his ear, “I love you, James.”

James released her and yelled to the crowd, “I thought this was a celebration. Where’s the music?” Grinning, he turned to Paul and asked, “What’s to drink, brother-in-law?”

The crowd laughed and cheered, rushing in to welcome James home.

After the bombardment, James circled Paul’s shoulders and steered him away from the gathering mass. “How’s things going around here, old buddy?”

“The weather’s hot, and there’s too much farm work. We’re behind all the time, but we manage. And, if you’re referring to the Brits, well, it’s been calm; though there’s some heavy underlying tension since the Tea Act took effect.”

James' concerned gaze studied his friend, now brother-in-law, before continuing. "A stupid import tax, if you ask me...especially, since it's caused a wave of response and itchy palms resting on muskets, wanting to get this war started."

"How long will you stay?"

"If I stay out of sight—a month. I'd like too, anyway, or, at least, until the middle of September. There's a gathering taking place to discuss the tax."

"Where?"

"Philadelphia, sometime in the next few months. I would suspect before the New Year rolls around. But, we'll see."

Laughing, Paul shook his head, "Old Adams, how's he doing, anyway?"

"Still got his nose in it all. Things are getting pretty hot, brother. We're not far off now."

"You know it's just a matter of time before there's bloodshed. Then all hell'll break loose," Matthew said, joining their conversation along with a few of the other townsmen.

Each man was eager to find out news from the man in the middle of it all.

"Just exactly what's the meeting about, James?" Thomas asked the question seemingly on everyone's mind. "We get bits and pieces, here and there, but never a complete and straight answer."

"From what I've been told, the gathering's called the First Continental Congress meeting. All thirteen colonies will be represented to try to unite and protest what we've called the Intolerable Acts."

"Good. Those laws are the cruelest acts the King's put on us, not to mention, unjust."

Nods around the entire circle of men agreed with the comment.

"If you ask me—it's all too civilized. I say kill'm all, and then see what old George has to say." James' bitter voice spat.

Paul's brows pulled together. He darted a

worried glance toward James hearing the deep hatred for the Redcoats in the tone of his voice.

"I'm sure we all know how you feel, James. So, tell us, what's this committee going to accomplish?" Thomas asked, stepping in next to his son.

"Some sort of petition drawn up by Adams and Hancock to list all complaints against King George III and the British government, which will include the Intolerable Acts, too. Then, they'll send a representative to England with the resolution, and in turn, each member will report back."

"What makes the king think we'd sit still and allow them to govern us by his own appointed people? We're the ones who have been living here for some time. Doing fine, I might add, without a king," stated an angry patriot. "We've started the colonies, businesses, and built homes. We've scraped our knuckles bare to make a life out of this new land."

"Yeah, someone ought to tell the old king we have rights to our own liberty, life, and yeah, property, too."

"Here, here," jumped in another townsman wearing a patch over his left eye. "We've managed to get along without any interference. Well, we did until...when Thomas, 'bout six year ago? I think that's when droves of ships landed in Boston harbor-red and white uniforms invaded our lives?"

James glanced down at the ground, nodded his head, and mumbled, "You're right, the year they killed Pa."

Paul, thinking Daniel Heaton wasn't a good subject to linger on, said, "No matter how long. It's been enough. The Brits have shoved one act after another on us without giving us any rights. Now, it time to become independent and stand on our own as united colonies."

"You're talking all out war, Paul." Thomas' soft-spoken voice sent stillness among the group.

"Of course he is, and I for one can't wait to kill

all the sons-of-bitches I can get my hands on.” James’ harsh voice revealed his true, gut desires.

Paul’s blood ran cold when he saw the hatred spill from his friend’s eyes, but in the next split second, James slapped him on the back and smiled happily.

“Come, let’s eat,” he shouted, with a sudden spark in his gaze. Grabbing Paul by the shoulders, he turned him toward the long oak tables piled high with all the tasty food the ladies had prepared.

“I’m starving. Looks like you’ve fired the old pit and roasted enough for an army, not to mention Mother’s baking goods.”

As the cheerful, violin music struck the air Paul sensed James’ spirit lifting, along with the other patriot’s around. As the man with the flute joined in, James said, “Come brother-in-law, I could use a drink of rum made from molasses. Let’s find your bride, get a full plate of food, and enjoy this day.”

Katherine stretched, yawned, and slowly opened her eyes. Softly, she rolled her head sideways on the pillow and watched, for a moment, her husband breathing in a peaceful sleep.

She reached over and gently touched his cheek. It had been a beautiful wedding, and when he made love to her, he was sweet and thoughtful. He was a dear, and she loved him more than she ever knew. So different from—*stop it*.

Rising, Katherine slipped out of bed. Careful not to wake Paul, she tiptoed to the window.

Twilight softly caressed her hand. She spread her fingers and stared down at the simple tiny, gold wedding band. Katherine looked out into the first whisper of light and the first day of her life as Mrs. Paul Bennett.

Her thumb whirled the ring around her finger. Leaning against the windowpane, she glanced at the fading stars, and just for a moment, allowed her

thoughts to stray back in time.

“Paul, listen to me—hear my words, you’re not going, understand?” James’ low voice rumbled out the order. To reiterate his point, he grabbed the old leather saddlebags from off the rail and stomped down the wooden porch steps.

Following, Paul justified, “You need all the men you can get.” *He could be stubborn too.* To prove his statement, he swung his own dusty saddlebag over his horse.

“For heaven’s sake, James, you heard the messenger. There’s some kind of conspiracy going down. Not even a mountain of threats by the Sons of Liberty prevented those three ships from docking. Now, they can’t sail for England without unloading their cargo.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, it’s all about taxes,” mumbled James, glancing at the determined Paul.

“What do you suppose will happen, now?”

“Something dangerous, that’s for sure.”

“Right, and I need to be there. I’m a patriot, too. It’s my wife and our freedom I’m fighting for—this didn’t happen overnight. Hell, James, I’ve been through everything else with you, why not this?”

James darted a glance at his sister standing on the porch with eyes and ears aimed at them. James gritted his teeth. He wagged his head, adamantly stating, “It’s different; now you’re Katie’s husband.”

Katherine frowned. She leaned against the rail and listened to the two men bicker. Shielding herself

against the wintry breeze, she tugged the gray wool cloak snug against her body just as her brother directed his wide stride toward her.

He stepped upon the porch and placed his large hands on her shoulders.

Instantly, she felt his cold lips press against her forehead, and then he smiled. When she looked into his stone green eyes, it frightened her.

“Be careful. I’ll miss you,” she whispered. Nodding, he walked back to his horse, leaving her wondering how long it would be before she’d see him again, or if she ever would.

Quickly, James mounted his horse and stared at Paul. “Try and make it quick. We’ve a long, hard ride ahead,” he grumbled, and then he reined the horse around and headed down the road.

Paul glanced at James, shoved his hat on his head, and rushed to mount his horse. He maneuvered the animal to the edge of porch where Katherine stood. He reached down and drawing her hand to his mouth, he pressed his lips against her fingers. “Why don’t you stay with your mother?”

Katherine bit her bottom lip and nodded.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be back before the new year.” Leaning down toward her, his soft brown eyes stared into hers. “Katie, I love you.” He kissed her tenderly on the lips. Straightening, he gathered the reins.

“Paul,” she said. Swallowing hard, she reached her hand out to grab his, “Please, be careful.”

In a quick swift motion, he kicked the horse in the flanks and galloped off toward her brother.

Harry practically ran down the long, narrow gangplank, following his brother. When he touched the dry, solid land beneath their feet, he felt relieved. They both were exhausted and dirty. The long voyage back to America took almost three months. The instant he smelt the clean, clear air, his spirits lifted. Hurrying, Harry fell into step with

Jeremy. Dodging the crowd of dockworkers, travelers, and business people, they headed for the Commons area.

Harry couldn't stop grinning from the exhilaration he felt from finally reaching their destination. He knew Jeremy's solemn and anxious demeanor centered on his unsure future with the woman he so deeply loved. But his brother's behavior didn't stop the ever-scholar in him. He absorbed as much as he could focus on at once, engrossed in the new environment with studying eyes.

"I didn't expect it to look like this. So many people, everywhere, and, commerce, trade, industry...it's amazing. Wow, brother, there's even a kind of mysterious excitement about this New World."

Jeremy nodded, frowned, and glanced around. "It seems like a lifetime since I was here last. There's a stir in the air. Something's different."

"Of course, the air's different. It's clean, clear. Not the everyday smells of London. I bet the fog's not bad, either. This New World definitely has freshness about it," Harry admitted.

He followed Jeremy down the street while taking in all he could as his head fluctuated back and forth.

"Fresh *air* wasn't my forethought," Jeremy muttered, "it's...oh, I don't know...it's the atmosphere...a charge surging through the air. There's a sense of underlying tension, a disturbance, fervor of expectation—making my skin crawl."

Jeremy's low voice became lost to Harry in the hustle and bustle of colonists along with all the horseback riders, wagons, and carts pulled around the market area.

Across the width of the Commons, Harry spied a sign reading *Green Lantern Tavern*. Grinning, he asked, "I don't suppose I could talk you into checking

out one of the local gambling tables?”

“The locals here are nothing like they are in London, Harry. People don’t separate into social classes quite the same here, brother. You get yourself in a friendly game of poker, only to find out your presence is not appreciated...and then you’re outnumbered. Even the royal governor can be seen in the same pub as the lowliest townsmen.”

“Intriguing. Sounds like a stimulating adventure,” Harry mused.

“Yes, it’s an eye-opener for those of us from the old world.”

“Come on, Jeremy, we need a good stiff drink.”

Jeremy stopped, turned, and faced his brother with a concerned expression. “I’m not teasing, Harry. This can be a dangerous place if you don’t watch yourself. You’re new here and need to go slow. Things are done differently, and people think differently.”

Harry nodded, hearing his seriousness. “Now, come on, Jeremy, a short card game never hurt anyone. Besides, I don’t know about you, but I can handle two or three good-sized men on my own.”

His remark brought a slight smile to Jeremy’s lips. “Yeah, right; did they teach you that at Oxford?”

Harry laughed. “Yes, in the Ghengus Kahn course.”

Suddenly, a body bumped solidly against him, shoving a hat feather into his mouth.

“Whoa, there. In a hurry, little lady?” Harry’s arms circled her waist to balance her against him. With a quick glance, he noticed her friend staring wide-eyed at him.

“Sir...I do apologize. I wasn’t paying any mind. Do forgive me.”

He turned to the dark-eyed young woman, so awestruck by her beauty that he couldn’t release her from his arms. A slow, friendly smile spread over his

lips.

The woman's hesitant voice expressed regret again, and she pushed away from his arms. "I'm afraid I was so involved in my conversation regarding my purchases I was insensitive to my whereabouts."

"Nonsense," Harry said, allowing her to back away.

Bowing, he said, "Your distraction is welcomed anytime it lands you in my arms. By chance, would you two lovely ladies happen to know where the closest inn is located?"

"Oh, yes, right around the corner, across from Tiny's Pub," said the young woman wearing a gray hooded cloak. With a quick turn of her head, she pointed down the street, and with a charmed laugh she swung her gaze back into Harry's.

"How convenient," he said and grinned, while his mind registered the word *pub*. My brother and I are forever at your service for your assistance."

Giggling, the ladies stepped past him, but not without another glance back.

Harry, once again, tipped his hat and bowed.

An action setting off a trickle of giggles, covered by gloved hands.

Harry and Jeremy watched for a moment as the two scurried off to who knows where.

Grinning, Jeremy shook his head and grabbed Harry's arm, "Your chivalrous, teasing English accent will get you in trouble if you don't watch yourself, Harry. Come on let's get that drink."

"Dear, dear. I think I'm going to love everything about this new land, brother."

Harry tipped his hat at several more women as they admired a window dressing. He made a slight bowing gesture toward the women and smiled wickedly.

"I could learn to like this place," he admitted.

"Your appetite for this new land might not be so

scrumptious after you've been here for awhile."

"We'll see, dear brother. We'll see. Are all the women here gorgeous?"

"Don't forget, Harry, the majority of the young women in America were born and raised here. Very few have ever been to England; therefore a gentleman of your stature is captivating to them, so don't let your head swell."

Laughing, Jeremy continued down the street toward the inn.

"I call and raise you two," Harry stated, dropping his coins in the middle of the table. His favorite pastime—poker. He knew his cards. With a blank stare, he studied the two sailors across the table. They proved to be easy targets.

Lifting his eyes from his deck of cards, Jeremy grinned. He knew the hand favored his little brother from the relaxed set of Harry's lips, so needless to say, the sailors did not appear happy about it.

An infuriated grunt escaped the red-faced soldier.

Easy to read, Jeremy knew he'd be a dim-wit to continue, or else, lose every coin he had in his pocket.

Smarter than Jeremy thought, the man stood with a smirk on his face, tossed the cards down, and declared, "I'm not gonna blow my week's salary with this foreigner. I fold."

Without questioning the stakes of the game, Jeremy threw the last of his coins into the center of the table. "I'm in."

The remaining sailor squinted at Harry. "You think you're a clever little bastard, don't you?" An eyebrow arched over a cold, calculating eye. "Well, I'm not about to fall for any amateur poker tricks. I know a bluff when I see one."

Harry's gaze swung to the sailor. "Then you would be a wise man to accept my call and raise me,

now, wouldn't you?"

Grumbling under his breath, and with an overconfident toss of his coins toward the middle of the stakes, he declared, "I'll raise you four."

Hearing the tone of the sailor's voice, a few heads turned to watch. Interest drew several other men around the table.

Surprised at the sailor's self-assurance, Jeremy and Harry exchanged glances. Smiling at his brother, Jeremy dropped his cards onto the table. "I'm out."

"Ah-ha, now, the game's a challenge. I accept your call...and, raise you two."

Jeremy shook his head at his brother's cunning skills, pushed away from the table, and left him to his expertise of bluffing. He whirled around to meander over to the bar and caught a glimpse of a British soldier entering the pub. He recognized Terrell.

"I'll be damned, Captain Burke," Terrell said, extending a hand to Jeremy as he approached. "I didn't think I'd see you in the colonies again."

"Good to see you, Terrell. I see you've been promoted."

"Someone had to fill those boots when you left." Terrell smiled.

"Couldn't've chosen a better man for the job myself."

Nodding toward the card players and the reaction of the onlookers, Terrell asked, "Too much for you?"

"More than you'll know," Jeremy said, chuckling.

"What drags you back to this part of the world? Colonel Harrington thought sure you were off to be the Viscount for good this time."

"Fortunately, my father's health is holding its own." Not wanting to go into details, he took his drink from the bartender and turned back toward

Harry's table. "Come, I'll introduce you to my brother."

"Sure. I'll update you on what happened in the last year."

Nearing the table, Jeremy overheard an angry, accusing voice.

"You son of a bitch." The sailor kicked his chair aside and stood, hovering over Harry.

Harry's steel blue eyes stared back and in a calm voice, his demeaning tone aimed at the sailor. "Those who can't handle the high stakes of gambling shouldn't play."

Sweat rolled down the sailor's forehead. He placed both hands on the table and leaned inward. Daring the sharp card player, he uttered, "You...cheaters...are—"

"My friend, you're perfectly welcome to search me. I assure you, I have no aces hidden up my sleeves."

"Are you challenging me?" demanded the fuming man. He bent forward, face to face with Harry.

Restlessness shuffled through the crowd.

"I said, are you challenging me?"

If looks could kill, both would be dead from cold, impertinent stares.

Jeremy and Terrell stopped on each side of the sailor.

Jeremy looked at the two men staring at each other as if ready to dive into a cockfight.

"Is there a problem seaman?" Terrell's rough voice ordered. A hard pat on the sailor's back drew the man's attention.

Drawing his eyes from Harry, the soldier noticed the uniform and immediately straightened from the table. Boiling blood set his face aflame, but seemingly more frightened of Terrell's rank, the sailor glared back at Harry.

Evidence showed in Harry's expression at his annoyance with the intervention.

In disgust, the sailor warned Harry as he walked away, "You'd better watch your back."

The crowd of on lookers dispersed, and the defeated embarrassed sailor took leave of the pub with his friends following.

Harry glanced at Jeremy and the Redcoat taking a seat at the table. Scrapping up his winnings, a smirk crossed his expression, showing his disappointment. "I hope you know you just ruined my evening."

"What more do you want, Harry? You took all his money?"

"Oh, I was about ready to take more, thank you."

"Yeah, only from his hide."

Pointing to Harry, Jeremy shook his head in disbelief. "Terrell, I'd like you to meet my overzealous brother, Harrison—Harry."

Graciously, Terrell extended a hand to Harry, who returned the gesture.

"A pleasure to meet another Burke. I'm sure you've heard a lot about this place from your brother." Sitting back in his chair, Terrell took out a pipe, struck a flint stick on the underside of the table, and proceeded to take short puffs until the tobacco smoked. Inhaling, he slowly let the smoke escape his lips.

"Actually, Jeremy doesn't like to talk much."

Annoyed, Jeremy ignored Harry's blunt statement.

"I think he's afraid I can't handle it; after all, I am the little brother." Harry smiled at his own remark, and looked at Jeremy for some type of reaction. Jeremy just glared at him.

"Well, Burke, things are definitely escalating; however, these rebels will soon come to their senses. And with any luck King George will compensate us all."

“Really?” mumbled Harry, stacking his coins.

Terrell took another puff from his pipe as Jeremy watched the raised eyebrow on Harry’s face. He knew his brother, and what he heard raised interest.

“I personally have sights set on some land in New England.” Terrell gloated.

“Land?” Harry questioned.

“Absolutely, I plan on settling here as governor of one of these colonies.”

“What a pity for those inhabitants.” Jeremy laughed at Terrell’s comment of becoming a governor. Glancing at Harry, he knew his brother’s silence meant wheels rotating in his mind.

“Don’t make fun of me, my friend. You just wait and see. Besides, if you keep displaying such a negative attitude, you won’t receive an invitation to the governor’s ball.”

“What governor’s ball?” Harry asked.

“Terrell,” Jeremy asked, changing the subject, “what’s with all the people in town? Everyone seems excited over something...well, maybe not excited, but apprehensive.”

“You feel it too? For the past couple of months more and more patriots have been riding in for whatever reason; we haven’t been able to find out, yet.”

“What started it?” Jeremy asked, leaning his elbows on the table. He scanned the room full of locals. They appeared in no hurry, as if waiting. Jeremy felt a chill.

“Hearsay about secret meetings held in masses in regards to the same old problem—taxes. Our spies keep hearing the word *boycott*. Last month we heard there have been more meetings about the ships docked in the harbor.”

“I overheard a gentlemen at the inn tell someone the colonists were sending a ship back to England, the Dartmouth, I think they said, but it can’t sail by

orders of Governor Hutchinson. Was that a speculation on their part?"

"Yup, you heard right; the colonists wanted to send the tea back to England without paying any import duties."

"Sounds like a bonfire ready to be ignited." Harry pursed his lips together.

"They've condemned the Tea Act. Now they wait like hunters with powder. Trouble's in the air, but we're stuck—can't make a move until someone breaks the law."

Jeremy's anxious steps clomped out the door of the inn, and he headed toward the horse where Harry stood holding both reins.

Swinging his saddlebags over the animal, he grabbed the reins and mounted. He waited for Harry to settle in the saddle and then turned the horse toward the little community of Wings Falls.

After a couple of hours of riding, Harry could stand it no longer. Slowing the horse's pace, he gave his brother a serious look, asking, "What's your plan when we get there?"

"Not sure."

Jeremy's solicitous expression swung to Harry, "Thought maybe, you'd ride up to the house and check things out for me. I'm not even sure she'd see me after all this time. Harry, it has been near two years."

"Let me get this straight, Jeremy. You want me to talk to her to see if she's willing to meet with you. In the meantime you're hiding out behind the trees?"

"Thanks, Harry." Jeremy reached over and slapped his brother on the back. "Sounds like a good plan to me." He grinned.

"Right, some big brave guy you turned out to be."

Harry slowed his horse to a trot and surveyed

the farmhouse and the surrounding barn area. No one was in sight, but he continued on as he considered the right words he'd use.

Dismounting, he cautiously took each step, walked across the porch, and stopped in front of the door. Contemplating, he lifted his hand and lightly knocked on the door.

Surprised it opened so quickly, he found himself gazing upon the most stunning dark-auburn-haired woman with the greenest eyes he'd ever seen.

The woman's warm, but guarded smile caused him to stare.

"Can I help you, sir?"

Her soft, friendly voice brought him back to his senses. He cleared his throat. "Huh, excuse me...I'm...huh...Katherine Heaton."

Recognizing the stranger's British accent, Katherine tensed. "And, you are?"

"My name is Harry."

"I'm Katherine. I'm sorry, have we met?"

"No. My name is Harry, I mean, Harrison, Harrison Burke."

Stepping back, Katherine felt every nerve in her body stretch stiff as a bowstring on the verge of release. A name she hadn't heard in an eternity.

Harry continued, "I...I'm Jeremy's brother."

"The man I knew with that name has no brother. He was killed."

"Excuse me, my Lady, but Ned was our older brother."

With care, Katherine observed his uneasy, but sincere eyes, similar striking blue ones. "Why have you come here?"

"Jeremy's here...and, would like to see you."

Katherine hitched a disturbed breath hearing the words she feared most. Biting her bottom lip, she looked beyond the man, but only saw one horse.

In a rush, Harry mumbled, "Will you please

meet with him?" Sensing her remarkable emotional restraint, Harry didn't give her a chance to reply. "Please...I can only tell you there are things he needs and wants to explain."

Katherine closed the door slightly, wishing she could slam it in the face of the past, but instead, her controlled voice flowed out.

"Tell him...tell him I'll see him...I'll see him, in the barn, tonight, after my mother retires." She stepped back and closed the door before changing her mind.

Near the edge of the road, leading to the Heaton farm, Jeremy and Harry waited. Jeremy pulled on the reins to keep his horse still.

Harry glanced at Jeremy's tense hands holding a tight fist around the reins while squirming apprehensively. It seemed to take forever for the skies to darken.

"Jeremy, you need to calm down; you're making your horse nervous. It'll be all right."

Appearing a little uneasy, too, Harry gave way to a chatty mood. "God, Jeremy, she's beautiful. Now, I can see how you fell in love with her. There's an exquisite charm about her, and it's not just on the surface, but you can tell it goes deep."

Jeremy nodded silently, remembering every inch of her face and the feel of her satin body.

"Oh, and, by the way, thanks for mentioning your younger brother to the love of your life."

Ignoring his statement, Jeremy frowned. "It's been so long. What can I say to her?"

"Follow your heart, brother; it got you this far, didn't it? Besides, it's not your heart that's let you down. It's those damn fool ideas of yours."

"What if she no longer loves me?"

"Either way, Jeremy, you'll know tonight. Now go."

Jeremy swung a concerned, grave look toward

his brother. He gave his horse a slight kick in the sides and headed toward the Heaton barn, his soul filled with anticipation and his heart thumping to the beat of his horse's hooves.

Jeremy's impatient, taut muscles couldn't stand it much longer as he treaded the horse toward the back of the barn. Dismounting, his eyes scanned the area.

A yellow reflection from a candle lit inside the house. It had to be dark enough. He made his way into the barn and stepped far into the shadows. Leaning against the stall, he took a deep breath, but his jittery nerves kept him from standing still.

Finally, he crossed his arms over his chest, planted his feet firm, and waited. He really wanted to pace. Where was she? Had she changed her mind?

The creaking barn door opened. He whirled around staring at the entrance.

Katherine entered with hesitant steps.

Their eyes connected.

For a moment, she had a look of intent, appearing soft and loving. In a flash, he detected a longing before she forced her vision downward, turning her head away.

He stepped toward her but stopped in his tracks when she moved away.

She strolled near the horse stall as if to put more distance between them.

He waited.

She didn't look at him.

God help him, he wanted to put his arms around her and tell her how sorry and how foolish he'd been. How much he loved her. Instead, his low voice broke the silence. "Many times I've seen your face in my dreams, and now you stand before me."

Unwavering, he stepped closer, watching the emotions flicker in her expression. Encouraged, he moved near, wanting to touch her soft skin, her satin hair, to hold her in his arms.

Katherine closed her eyes, heard his familiar, deep seductive voice. A voice she had locked away for so long.

Battling nerves and fighting for strength, she took a long, slow breath.

Deliberately projecting a clear, but tender tone, and not wanting to sound vindictive or cruel, she softly countered, "Your dreams weren't where I wanted to be."

"Katherine—"

"Don't say it, Jeremy. Whatever you have come to say, please don't."

"I want to explain why I didn't return, until now."

She stared beyond the horse.

"There's nothing you can say...to change things." Sadly, staring down, Katherine watched her hand squeeze around the rail of the stall fighting to stay in control.

"Perhaps there is. Please hear my words," he begged.

Knowing what she had to say, Katherine hung onto the rail. Her hands tightened, turning knuckles white, while her low voice faltered, "I...you had your reasons, your excuses; you used them to leave me that day in my aunt's garden. There's nothing left, Jeremy, nothing."

"I never wanted to leave you. I've thought about you every day since. Katherine, my life's been miserable without you, I still love you."

Oh, God, help me. Slipping, frightened of losing composure, Katherine began to feel trapped.

She turned and faced him with a determined glare and in a ragged breath, she said, "You told me your duties as your father's heir outweighed the feelings between us."

Unable to respond to the truth of her words, Jeremy remained silent.

Katherine's voice trembled. Eyes watered from hearing her own words. "The fact I loved you more than life paled in comparison to your intangible obligations. I loved you, Jeremy. I was the one in your arms...but, it didn't seem to matter."

"You did matter, Katherine. I loved you with every passionate imminent feeling I possessed...and, I still love you with every fiber of my being."

"Yet, you left me. You never once allowed me to believe you'd return."

"I was afraid...I wanted to," Jeremy confessed, "But—"

"But, you didn't...and, for that you died for me, Jeremy.

"Katherine, you don't mean—"

"Oh, but, I do, Jeremy. After nearly drowning through a period of grief, I went on with my life. Jeremy, I married another last fall."

Disbelief crossed Jeremy's face.

Katherine stepped toward the door, stopped, took one last look, and before walking out, she whispered, "Please don't try to contact me again. I've started a new life, a family. I married a good man, and I'll not hurt him."

"And, what of you, Katherine, are you happy, do you love him?"

"I'm happier having mourned you."

With her last words spoken, she turned without looking back, stepped through the door, and disappeared in the darkness of the night.

Jeremy stared, grief-stricken; he reached out and touched the rail she had held onto so tightly. A silent tear rolled down his cheek.

A mystic dampness spread over the Boston Harbor during the dismal wee-hours of the morning. Harry turned a grim expression toward his brother. Jeremy just stood there, staring out into the black bay encased by a thick fog.

The surrounding bitter cold matched his gloomy spirit. It had been a long exhausting ride back to Boston without any conservation. Harry had been unable to find words of comfort. Oh, how he ached for his brother.

“Jeremy, why don’t you just leave on the next ship to England...with me? We’ll go home together...this ship’s on it’s way to the West Indies, it’ll take months longer to get home.” Harry’s compassionate voice filtered through the heavy gray of dawn.

“I can’t go back to England, not yet, anyway.”

“Where will you go?”

“I haven’t decided. Whichever port this ship takes me first.”

“Will you write?”

“Doubt it.”

Harry’s gaze darted at his brother’s shadowy face. His wrinkled brow deepened. “Then how will we reach you?”

“When I’m ready, I’ll contact Mother,” he said.

A small silent group of travelers, all cloaked in heavy wool overcoats for protection against the murky overcast of the damp, crystal fog pushed past them, heading toward the ship. Erie, the quiet dock

claimed ownership to all the lonely souls in the universe, each with a burdensome, heavy satchel, waiting to board.

Slowly making his way toward the gangplank, Jeremy stopped long enough to gaze at Harry. Not a word passed between them as he gave his brother an affectionate hug, holding him for moment.

Hurting for his older brother, he stood watching. Jeremy boarded the ship with his head hung low, becoming lost in the misty crowd.

Harry shivered. Finally, he shoved his hands deep into his pockets and strolled away from the dock, putting the ship to his back. In need of some potent black tea, he directed his footsteps toward town and didn't stop until he sauntered into the familiar pub he'd come accustomed.

"Harry, over here," blurred a voice out of the early morning patrons.

Harry looked around to find Terrell's familiar face; he was sitting over a steamy cup of coffee.

"You're up early. Where's your brother?"

"Good to see you, Terrell. He's on board, sailing out this morning."

"Damn, Colonel Harrington just arrived in town. He expected me to find Captain Burke for him...why don't you join us? I'd say one Burke's better than no Burke at all. We're having a card game together at the Green Lantern this evening."

"How could I refuse my favorite pastime?"

Harry strolled into the pub, glanced around, and headed toward the group in anticipation of a good card game. He nodded and smiled at the officers and took a seat next to Terrell. The smoked filled establishment was unusually crowded. He raised an eyebrow and asked, "What's all the commotion in town?"

"Who knows? Colonel, this is Harry Burke, Captain Burke's brother.

Accepting Harry's hand, he frowned with disappointment. "Sorry to hear your brother took sail."

Harrington, raising his voice over the noise, waved at the barmaid, "Little lady, we need drinks over here."

Twisting around in his chair, Terrell scanned the crowded pub before glancing back at his superior who was already tipping on the inebriated side from arriving early. He shuffled a stack of cards.

"Something's up, Colonel? Seems to me there's a heap more colonists lately."

"Aha, they're just a little offended about the governor's order not to let the ship set sail until the taxes are paid. They're just colonial radicals-disgusting. Yeah, any excuse for stirring up trouble of some kind or holding their little simple-minded secret meetings."

A ghastly loud belch rolled from the Colonel's mouth before he added, "I'd wager those bloody farmers are cooking something up just to keep things stirred up, as if they could get away with anything."

"They wouldn't dare stage a boycott, not with all the British soldiers around town," Harry commented, eying the officer with doubt.

"Who knows, those commoners act before thinking."

"Your drinks gentlemen," said the barmaid, grinning at Harry who in turned displayed a seductive lopsided grin toward her. His gaze traveled over the front of her low bulging blouse as she leaned over to place a mug of beer on the table.

Her teasing glint swung down at Harry when his hand slid around her waist. With a flirtatious toss of her head, she dropped down onto his lap.

Before Harry had a chance to say anything, a rough hand snatched her up and tossed her into the next table so forceful she rolled onto the floor.

Standing to face the man, Harry recognized the ruttet complexion of the angry sailor that lost his money in a poker game several weeks earlier.

The dirty-clothed sailor spit foul words at the barmaid, and then turned to Harry, saying, "I thought I told you to watch your back."

"Why would I have to watch my back when I can smell you twenty paces away?" he mumbled.

Smiling at the young woman on the floor, Harry left the man speechless while he reached down and helped the barmaid to her feet. "Besides, you sir, are no gentleman. You should never treat a lady in such a way."

Provoked, the sailor shoved the bargirl aside and grabbed Harry, "You arrogant son of a bitch."

The colonel slowly stood and looked the sailor square in the eyes with an intimidating glare.

The sailor stepped back. His eyes widened in fear when the oversized officer's arm shot out and grabbed his sleeve. A hand locked around his neck pushing him bodily backward until he was pinned against the bar.

Viciously, the colonel pounded the man's head against the corner of the hard wood counter. "Listen to me, you filthy seaman." The loud rough tone and his angry action caused all the patrons to stare.

Unaware of the attention he caused, the red-faced colonel growled, "If I hear one more unfriendly remark from your worthless ass, I'll tear your spine out. Are we clear?"

Harry lost his light expression, stunned at a situation turned serious. He shot a glance at Terrell who appeared indifferent as if the colonel was not acting out of the ordinary.

The December night appeared wraithlike with the scattered band of Mohawk warriors scurrying among the crates and boxes along Griffin's Wharf. Silently, they approached the ship with its cargo of

tea.

The disguised patriots hunkered down and hovered behind any obstacles they could find. They waited for their signal.

Paul shivered. The dampness of the eerie fog crept over the bay and into his bare skin. He whispered, squatting next to his fellow warriors. "James, all's quiet; so far no one's detected us."

With his painted face and deer hide clothing, James glanced back at Paul and whispered, "We'll make Boston Harbor a teapot, tonight?"

Signaled from a swift wave of their leader's hand, the band of armed warrior colonists, with hatchets, axes, and pistols, swarmed out of every nook on the dock.

They jumped aboard the three ships. Each knew his orders, and in the stillness of the night went straight to work. They move stealthily upon the few sailors on board, demanding their help in attaching blocks and tackles to the tea chests located down inside the ship's cargo holes.

The disguised Mohawks swung their hatches against the chests filled with tea. The first crackling noise of slicing wooden chests rumbled over the waters, echoing through the harbor.

Each man knew exactly what he was about—a discipline mode continued during an unspoken duty of dumping tea into the harbor.

As James rushed to throw more tea overboard, he jerked his head around, squinted at the face of a disguised Indian, and was shocked to recognize Norton. A furious flint ignited through his blood as he recalled his betrayal.

James dropped the crate and pounced on him.

Surprising Norton, James tackled him to the floor blanks of the ship and punched him with pent fury. His contemptuous voice whispered, "You son-of-a-bitch."

"James, stop it," Paul frantically demanded,

tugging on his sleeve to get his attention, worried someone would hear.

“You bastard-you’re a traitor,” James screamed, enraged at the man he hadn’t seen in a long time.

“It’s not my fault; you’re the crazy one. You would’ve gotten us all killed.” Norton pleaded, “I’m sorry, please...”

“James,” Paul whispered as loud as he dared. He tried to push the men apart. “What the hell’s going on?” he demanded. In a spurt of energy, Paul yanked James off the Indian figure.

At the sight of Norton, blood rushed into his face. Livid, his tight lips ordered, “What the hell are you doing here?”

“I came to help,” Norton muttered defensively.

“We don’t need your help,” James’ disgusted voice asserted. Standing, he dragged Norton to his feet and stared at the man’s soon to be bruised, swollen face.

“I have as much right to be here as you do,” Norton declared. He dabbed his split lip with the back of his hand.

“You deceived us, you bastard. You almost got me hung.”

James’ short breath heaved his chest out and with eyes drilled into the man, he rushed forward pushing his weight into Norton and lifting him off his the deck onto his shoulders.

“You deserve to be killed, you cowardly bastard.”

“James. It’s not worth it. Just get rid of him.” Paul glanced around. The disguised warriors continued to move silently about accomplishing the task assigned. Paul frowned and turned his gaze back. The furrow on his brow deepened when James grinned.

Stepping to the bow of the ship with the begging Norton swung over his shoulder, James’ nasty tone asked, “Would you like one lump or two?”

“Perhaps he prefers a little saltwater with his

tea,” Paul said with a wide grin.

Amused by Paul’s remark, James chuckled, and in a hefty hoist, threw Norton overboard.

“You scared him to death.”

“I wish. He’s lucky I didn’t beat it out of him.” Laughing, he slapped Paul on the shoulder, wiped his bleeding bottom lip on the back of his hand, and hurried off for a crate of tea to add to the mixture he just threw in.

After aggressively completing the task, the masquerading Mohawks scurried off the ships, darted across the dock in mute moccasin covered feet, and disappeared into the safety of the black forest.

James and Paul hunched down and quietly made their way to the secure spot where their horses waited. Quickly, they shed their Indian clothing and slipped into their own. Without a word, they mounted and rode off toward the opposite direction in which they would take later.

They kept a firm gallop for the next half hour until enough distance was calculated. Finally, James slowed his horse and looked back. “Well, brother, I think we’d be safe to say no one’s the wiser as to whom was involved in tonight’s boycott.”

“I hope you’re right,” Paul whispered. He turned to search the perimeter. “Wait ‘til they find out three hundred and forty-two chests of tea float in the harbor.”

Laughing, James shook his head, “Oh, to be a fly on their horse’s ass to hear what they’re saying. There’ll be some angry individuals.”

“Come on Paul, we’ve some tracks to cover to make it home before dawn.”

James sucked in a deep draw from his pipe, leaned back on two chair legs, and released the smoke in several slow puffs. He met his mother’s

glance and smiled contently at her. She and Paul sit pushing the swing back and forth in a lazy, relaxed mood, and Thomas puffed away on his pipe.

His gaze drifted upward to the clouds reflecting the sunset's pink hue against the blue skies. This was his favorite time of day. Where else could he find peace and quiet. Why would he want anything more? He had it all, right here-land, family, a brother-in-law and friend to while away the time. But, he knew it wasn't to last. He was positive. A lull in middle of a storm, it would blow, and soon, too.

Paul covered his mouth to conceal a yawn. He scanned the field they'd just finished plowing. His languid voice commented, "Seems like spring's come mighty early this year. Nothing stays the same, you know, not even Mother Nature."

Jokingly, James commented, "Yeah, even food. Hate to tell you, but dinner wasn't very good. I can't wait 'till Katie's feeling better. You're not much of a cook, Bennett."

"And you're not much of a gracious guest," Paul retorted, grinning.

"You boys never change," Anne said, smiling.

"It's not them; it's us, Anne. We're just getting older," Thomas mumbled, lighting his pipe again, he winked at James' laughing reaction.

"Now, what's so funny, James?" his mother asked, wrinkling her brow in a puzzle.

"Oh, just thinking about Norton." He chuckled and shot Paul a noted peek as the memory of Norton floating in the harbor came to mind.

Laughing, Paul shook his head at James, "I thought you were going to kill him."

"Someday I will." James' serious voice dropped its light tone. "Besides, I just wanted him to sweat it out."

"So you soaked him." Paul chuckled and shook his head.

"James." Anne's worried tone drew his gaze.

"You should've seen Norton's face, Mrs. Heaton," Paul interrupted.

James swung his gaze to Paul. "Dumping him overboard made me feel good." He restrained from further criticism out of respect for his mother and Thomas.

Quick to change the subject, Thomas intervened, "James, it's been a few months. Has anyone contacted you, yet?"

"Things are pretty calm right now," James replied accepting the subject lead.

"I wouldn't want it any other way. I hate it when you two leave," Anne said.

"Don't worry, Mother, we'll probably be around for a while. After all, Paul can't leave now, can he?"

Standing, Paul headed for the front door. "Speaking of which, I'd better go check on Katie."

"Give her a kiss for me," Thomas ordered.

"I certainly will," he said, beaming with pride.

Paul climbed the staircase two steps at a time and hurried down the hall to their bedroom. Lightly knocking on the door, he stepped in to see Katherine on the bed with her arm across her forehead.

"Are you all right?" His brows drew together as his gaze traveled over her tired but happy face.

"I'm just really exhausted. I guess it the perils of being with child," she whispered. To make room for her husband, she rolled on her side.

Paul smiled sweetly at her and placed his hand on her swollen abdomen. His hand moved up and down to the rhythm of Katherine's breathing.

He sucked in a quick breath and glanced into her eyes. "He's kicking his old man."

"How do you know our baby's a boy? We could just as easily have a girl, you know."

"Not the way he's kicking." Paul leaned down and touched his lips to hers. With only inches separating them, he whispered, "This makes

everything complete, Katie. We have a miracle within you, and in a month or so he'll be here in this room. We're a family."

"Between you and me, I can't wait. I'm excited to see the child we've made. You're right; he is a miracle."

"Can we tell everyone what we're going to name him?"

"Sure, I think we can be safe to say what his name'll be now. I just didn't want to let everyone know until I was sure nothing was going to happen. You know, some women miscarry at the beginning. I know I'm being silly, but I was afraid..."

Patting her tummy, Paul said, "That's all right, Katie, I understand how difficult it could be. I'd even be devastated if we couldn't have our boy, and I'm not even the one carrying him for nine months. You rest, now. I'll give them the news."

Standing, Paul bent and kissed Katherine on her cheek. Stepping out of the room, he closed the door quietly behind him.

Excited, he headed back to the family, beaming with happiness. Stepping out the front door, he dropped in his seat next to Anne, and announced, "Katie's resting, but we decided to let you know what we're naming our son."

His wide smile spread across his face.

"Well, for heaven sake," Thomas reprimanded, "Quit your grinning, and tell us."

"Daniel James Bennett."

"Thoughtful of you, old friend," James mumbled, clearly touched that the namesake of his father as well as his would carry on.

A few nights later, James found himself relaxing on the Bennett porch having a smoke with Paul. He stood and moseyed over to the rail and looked out into the blackness of the night. His thoughts centered on a painful issue.

Drawing a deep puff from his pipe, he darted a glance at his brother-in-law. Word sent sooner than expected, James hesitated to tell Paul, knowing the baby's arrival so near made it impossible for Paul to leave.

Silence drifted between them for a moment as James glanced at Paul, again, wanting to say something, but unwilling to break the peaceful mood of the quiet evening.

He took another long puff and released the smoke.

Reluctantly James cleared his throat and stared down at the pipe in his hands. He muttered, "I hate to mention this now, but..."

"What?" Paul questioned, alarmed by the tone of his voice.

Turning his gaze into Paul's eyes, he said, "Word's been sent."

"When?" With cat swiftness, Paul moved to the rail to stand next to James so their low voices wouldn't be heard.

"This morning. I didn't want to tell you with Katie...and, everything."

"What's going on, James?"

"Every able man is needed. Colonists all over are preparing for war, the ineffable war, Paul."

"Sounds contagious-when do we leave?"

"I'm leaving at daybreak to join the Minutemen, but Paul, you don't have to go...Katie...and, the baby."

"James, they're the reason I have to go."

"It might mean staying away longer than we've ever been gone. It's getting close. All enlisted Minutemen are to be armed, ready in a moments notice to fight."

Paul glanced around. He knew how difficult it would be to leave Katie and the baby. "Our little one will be here next month, but I'm part of this. I have to help finish what we've begun."

"I understand. We're all ingested with an infectious need to get this war started and over. Everyone's involved, even the townspeople. The blacksmiths in our own community have already forged swords, guns, and bayonets. Those enlisted in the larger colonies have started military tactical training as well as stockpiling the ammo. Are you sure, Paul? We won't see home for many, many months."

Paul's sad expression turned to James. He nodded.

"We should leave before daybreak."

"I'll tell Katie, she'll understand."

Paul hated the thought of Katie enduring the birth of their child alone and unprotected. What else could he do?

Katherine opened her eyes to him when he entered their room.

He smiled and noticed her serious questioning look.

"Hi," he whispered, "I didn't mean to wake you."

"You didn't. I was just waiting for you to come to bed. What's wrong, Paul?"

Paul looked down at her bulging tummy under the covers. He sat down on the bed and laid his hand on her protruding form. Gently, he rubbed his child in a circular motion, avoiding Katie's eye contact. He turned his head away for a moment.

Tilting her head, she frowned. "What is it?"

"Katie...Katie, you know I love you, don't you?"

"Of course, I do. Paul, what's wrong?" she asked.

He stood and strolled over to the window.

Finding the situation more difficult than he had imagined, he searched for the right words to explain why he had to leave. He turned to gaze upon the woman carrying his child and thought his heart would burst from the love he had for her.

Staring at him, Katherine frowned and held out

her hand for him. "Please, tell me."

"Men are enlisting." His softened voice uttered. Inching his way back to the bedside, he searched for words to cushion the blow as best he could. He took her hand and said, "They need us...James is going."

His words sank into her mind, automatically drawing her focus down on her swollen tummy.

"I have to go with him, Katie."

Jerking her head up, she stared at Paul. He was serious. Tears flooded past her eyelids.

"No, Paul, you can't; please, our baby's less than a month away, please." Katherine bit down on her bottom lip.

Covering the distance between them, Paul dropped next to her and gently took her face in his hands.

Affectionately, full of love, he watched the tears spill down her cheeks. Wiping them away, he whispered, "I love you, Katie. And, I love our baby, but, this is something I've got to do...I must do. For little Daniel or little Katie, and for our future, especially, now, we've started our family."

"I don't understand why you've got to go now. Can't you wait until the baby's here?"

Paul watched the emotional trauma spread over her large green eyes. "That won't make it any easier, Katie."

"Did James talk you into this?"

He shook his head, answered, "No. No, Katie, this goes beyond James, now. This decision is mine. I would never forgive myself if our baby grew up in a country that shunned the idea of freedom."

Resting his hand on Katie's tummy, he swallowed hard and in a heavy voice, affirmed, "Little Daniel will understand the word liberty."

"There are others who can go—" she pleaded.

"I'm too involved not to go. If we have to fight...if it comes down to fighting...well, there's always the chance we'll not get the Brits to back

down-or leave. But, I cannot raise my child without one day telling him I tried...and didn't give up."

Resting her hands on each side of her body, Katherine pulled herself up. "I don't want you to leave." She forced the words out between short, hesitant breaths while tears trickled down her cheeks, dropping onto her tummy.

The only thing Paul could do was to gaze into her face. Her beautiful face. He understood how she felt, for he didn't want to leave either.

"I know. I promise I *will* come back to you."

"Oh, Paul, I never deserved such a wonderful man. I do love you."

Lovingly, Paul kissed her on the lips and held her tight. The memory of this night would get him through all the months ahead.

Katherine stared out the window disheartened and sad. Paul's departure caused a nervous twitch jerk inside her guts. She swallowed hard. He promised to return.

A little kick inside brought a smile to her lips. Despite her worries, she couldn't help but be reminded of how much she had to be thankful for because God had been good to her. *Oh, God, bless this little one and bring his father home safely.*

She'd been afraid of miscarry again, but it had been a good nine months and soon to be over. Squeezing her eyes closed, she let her thoughts slip back.

If her first baby had lived-would Paul have married her, then? How different would her life have been if she had given birth to Jeremy's baby?

If Jeremy had returned earlier, would she have gone with him? Oh, God, it tore her heart out to fix her eyes on him. The love he expressed stabbed her to her soul. Turning away was the hardest thing she'd ever had to do.

A deep sigh escaped Katherine lips; she longed

to touch him, feel him-suddenly, she pressed her lips together. She loved Paul. Her love for Paul was a different love than what she had felt for Jeremy. *Stop it.* She shook her head to trap the rising memories.

Chapter 18

James squatted on the damp earth and leaned against the dirt wall, bone tired. The rain had about made it impossible to build the fortress, but the patriots' persistence won out.

He rested his rifle against he leg and rubbed his hands over his burning eyes. Breathing deeply, he glanced around at his strong-minded comrades, diligently burrowing into the hill. The clanging sound of pickaxes and spades had echoed into the night air as they painstakingly attempted to build a fort. He noted how worn and haggard all the men looked.

Blinking lead-weight eyelids, he closed them, and for just a moment, he allowed his brain to sink into the depths of deprived sleep.

A slight brush against his shoulder stirred him awake, and he found Paul slumped beside him.

"James, my body's screaming; suppose we'll ever get to sleep in decent bedding, again?"

Squinting through the darkness, his bloodshot eyes could make out his friend's grimy, exhausted face, filthy with sweat from digging trenches.

"Let's get this fort ready to take Boston back from the Brits, and then, maybe, just maybe, we'll have a chance to go home for awhile," James mumbled, doubt lingering in his tone.

Grinning, Paul rubbed his dirty face. He yawned, muffling his words, "Deal-best think I've heard in months. I want to see my son. Heavens, I wouldn't even know I had a son if it hadn't been for

Matthew. Lucky for me he was close enough to stop by the farm.”

“Little Daniel...it’s hard to imagine I’m an uncle. How old is he now?”

“Lordy, I guess he was born last June, but I’m not sure of the date. Hell, is this June? Why, he’s a year old sometimes this month.”

“I can’t believe we’ve not been home for over a year.” James rubbed his stinging, red eyes.

“I can. It’s been forever. My son will be walking before he ever sees his old pa.”

“Yeah, well, let’s hope he looks like his mother. He’ll never have a chance with the women if he has your ugly mug. Look at you; I’m not sure if you’re a white or black person.”

For once, James’ voice reflected the love he felt for his close brother-in-arms. Grinning, he reached over and playfully shoved him against the damp, dirt wall.

“Yeah, well, you should see yours. I don’t even remember when we had our last bath, do you?”

“Nope, way before we found ourselves hiding out on the road to Concord.”

“Yup, hard to realize it’s been only a few months since.”

“Hmm. Seems a lifetime, but we scared off those sons-of-bitches, didn’t we? I’m just sorry we didn’t kill more of them.”

“Oh, but, we paid dearly. I can still hear the beating of those British drums pounding in my head as they marched right into our little trap. Boy, did we surprise them when our Minutemen came out of every crack and cranny all along the road.”

“Yep, we did. Can you believe that idiot Redcoat had the audacity to tell us to disperse? And, the nerve of him to tell us to lay down our arms...the jackass, did he think we’d obey?” James’ voice reflected his despicable hatred against the Redcoats.

“We stood our ground against them, until

someone fired. Do you have any idea who fired first?"

"Nope, couldn't tell where it come from. I don't give a damn...bound to happen sooner or later. I'm just glad it started."

"I'd like to know who the bastard is spying for Gage. The dim-wit snitched about our powder and weapons' stockpile location."

"Well, we have our own spies, or we wouldn't have been prepared to stand against Gage's men. As it turned out, we still had to flee for safety, but I'm confident they'll get their turn. We'll show them." James leaned his head back, squeezing his eyes shut.

"Hey, I'm one exhausted soldier here," Matthew whispered.

James' eyes came open. Matthew dropped his shovel as he crouched down on his knees in front of his friends.

"Yeah, join us for a breather. We're just chattin' about the spies that ratted on us. We lost too many at Lexington and Concord." Paul took a short breath and rested his head against the bank.

"Good question. I'm sorry to say I wasn't there," Matthew said, expressing his guilt; he stared down digging the butt of his musket into the soft, fresh earth. "Got any idea how or who our spies are?"

"There's several. We heard from Revere," James said, yawning. "Our own spies found out about Gage's plan. We just waited until the Redcoats crossed the Charles River. A light flashed from the old tower of the church alerted us."

"Pretty dramatic." Paul grinned. "When Revere saw the light, he rode hard and fast. We surprised them, but still, we were only seventy men to hundreds...one-sided fight, I'd say."

"Heard you guys came out of nowhere-from the trees, dirt walls, hedges on both sides of the road...unforeseen you were able to kill more than three times what we lost."

“Yeah, we killed a mess of them before we lost eighteen of ours,” James reminded them.

“My friend...” Paul paused and glanced around at all the worn-out men. His shoulders drooped. “We’ve come many miles in such a short distance, and I’m sure that battle will go down in history. The day war began for American Independence.”

Shaking his head, Matthew muttered, “Wished I’d been there.”

“Hey, Matthew, if it wasn’t for you I wouldn’t know I had a son. Means a lot to me.”

“Well, at least this battle won’t commence without me,” Matthew grinned, and rubbed the palm of his hand against his thigh, revealing his nervous anticipation.

Bored with previous conflicts, James pushed to his tired feet. “Come on men; it’s near daybreak, and we need to check each man’s gunpowder to make sure there’s an ample amount.”

James listened to the sounds of the men laboring into the dark before the dawn. “How’s it going down the line?”

“We’re just about done. The men are totally dog-tired, but they’ll fight until they drop.”

“Especially, now we’re called the Continental Army. An official army. Hey, James, did you hear some man named Washington would command all the forces here in Boston?”

“I heard.” James’ tone revealed his distaste for rules. “Next thing you’ll know, they’ll be drafting military regulations for everyone.”

Standing, James anxiously scanned the Boston bay, squinting to see beyond the early morning fog.

The pink reflections on the drifting clouds broadcasted the sunrise. James hurried along the six-foot tall ramparts the men had created overnight. As he continued at a fast pace, he focused on the situation at hand.

Paul followed, checking with every soldier to

make sure he had plenty of gunpowder.

“Men, there’ll be no turning back when the ships are in clear view,” James declared to the weary patriots.

He knew, as before, once the firing began they would get a second wind and fight with all their might.

“Our informants tell us that those ships are loaded with seventy-eight big guns. So, we’ll be facing them all as soon as the sun rises.”

“James, do you think the fort will be strong enough to hold them off?” Paul whispered, prickly nerves rippled down his neck.

“No matter, we’re twenty-thousand strong, even if Gage orders seven-thousand men to take us out, God help us, he’ll never do it. This is our hill, and we’ll take back our town.”

The stillness gnawed into each man’s mental strain. Then, without warning, the first canons’ *boom* broke through the dawn.

James was right; no sooner had the fog lifted, revealing the deceptive happy sunshine, than firing started. The warships’ relentlessly bombarded the hill, thundering throughout the day.

Paul’s fretful glance darted down the hill, shocked at the perfect formation lines of the British. The overwhelming sight of thousands of Redcoats marched up the hill at a steady pace.

A single musket went off, frantically firing in a brave attempt. The troops were too far-gosh, wasted gunpowder. Paul waited.

Silence fell over the hillside except for the tramp, tramp, tramp of the oncoming Redcoats.

He squatted behind the backbreaking barricade he worked on all night, rested his muskets on mother earth, and peeked out over the ledge, waiting.

Smoke from the booming cannonballs made

visibility difficult. Anticipating his first shot, Paul glanced around for James. He wasn't there, but he didn't have time to think as muskets began firing. He turned back and fixed his gaze on the red and white stiff soldiers marching closer.

Aiming, he pulled the trigger and took down his first Redcoat of the day. A half-lipped smile touched his lips.

At first it seemed too easy to target the Redcoats dropping each one in their straight formal line. It didn't seem to matter how many he hit, as if by some evil force, each dead soldier was replaced by another Redcoat.

Round after round, he shot until his brain only registered the color of red instead of British soldiers, or even men.

Loud whishing cannonballs flew through the air, projected at the hill, and blended with the sounds of the patriots' rifles.

The continued bombardment blanketed the hill with smoke and blood. The Patriots hit their targets one after another, leaving the hill strewn with bloody soldiers.

Much to their surprise, the British retreated to the bottom of the hill.

"James. James," Paul hollered above the cannons' roar.

Hunkering down, James kept his head low and made his way to Paul. Packing two muskets, he grabbed a couple more from dead patriots. He shoved one into Paul's free hand.

Gripping the extra weapon, Paul looked around and noticed men scurrying off, running toward Breeds Hill.

"Where'd you go?" Paul shouted.

"The stupid cowards are running away."

Then, suddenly the tramp, tramp, tramp echo alerted the worn-out colonists.

The soldiers' march started again, announcing

the Redcoats. The persistent deafening boom from the warships screamed through the air.

After loading his musket, James tossed the gunpowder to Paul and glanced over the barricade. Frantically, he aimed at the ever-continuous oncoming soldiers and fired.

Catching the satchel of powder, Paul loaded his weapon at expert speed. Without hesitating, he aimed at his target and fired. Ducking down, he felt the vibration of the cannonballs, dangerously close to the fragile fort. His nostrils filled with the smell of burning gun smoke as he poured powder into the barrel of his musket.

“Words coming down the line-ammunition’s low...Prescott doesn’t want us shoot until we see the whites of their eyes.”

“Yeah,” James mumbled, busy loading powder into his musket. His head jerked around to find his arm trapped by a shaky hand. He glanced up to stare into the frightened eyes of a young man squatting, clinging to him. James shook his hand away.

Standing, the terrified young man stammered, “I’m going to die. I’m going to die. I’m going to die.”

James dragged him down to keep him from running over the barricade.

“Damn it, boy. If you run out there, they’ll blow your fucking head off.”

Sobbing, the young boy cried, “I don’t want to die.”

Short-tempered, James’ authoritative voice aimed at the young man. “You don’t want to die. *You* don’t want to die.”

In an attempt to bring the man to his senses, James shook him vigorously. “Then get off your fucking ass and fight. Damn it, man, fight,” he demanded.

Shoving a musket into the man’s hands, he pushed him against the wall. “Now, fire.”

Facing the British, the young man's glassy wild-eyes stared out at the oncoming band of Redcoats. He fired.

All of a sudden, the blasting muskets and booming echoes of the cannonballs went silent—a deafening silence.

James peered over the bunker and mumbled, “They’ve retreated, again.”

Squatting, he snorted, “Watch this guy, Paul, I’ll check down the line for Prescott’s orders. Be right back.”

Paul nodded, hunkered low, and carefully peered over the bunker, scanning the hill.

A third attack would be devastating if others were as low on ammo as he.

Seemingly breathless, James slumped down on the ground, face white as snow from the dirt paste.

“James?” Paul whispered, feeling the pit of his stomach fill with bile.

“We’ve driven them back twice, and they’ve suffered heavy losses from the looks of all the strewn bloody bodies. But, our situation isn’t too good for a third attack. We’re all low on ammo—Prescott’s orders are to make one more attempt to drive them back then retreat.

“Here they come,” someone screamed.

A chill slithered down Paul’s spine.

The cannons continued to open fire on the hill causing distraction as the Brits marched upon them with their bayonet blades flashing in the sun.

Once close enough, the patriots fired, dropping the Redcoat line after line, until they depleted their gunpowder.

Breathing heavy, James squatted. “I’m out of ammo. What about you?”

“I’m finished,” Paul’s dismal tone sounded defeated.

Then all hell broke loose. The labored wall of defiance collapsed from a crashing cannonball,

giving way to the British. They flooded over the barrier like ants on the hunt.

Grabbing Paul's arm, James pushed him, screaming to the men close by, "Retreat, run for the hill-they broke through. Run for the hill."

James hurried as fast as he could, pushing Paul through the bloody hill as if in a state of non-existence. They stepped over mangled bodies, bloody parts, and wounded crying out for help.

James pulled Paul along with him to prevent him from helping. If they stopped, they'd be dead.

The last few months of skirmishes, after the horrendous clash at Bunker Hill, left the men worn and miserable with the prospect of a dreary freezing winter ahead.

James hiked his way along the wooded path against the hostile, wintry wind. He pulled his thin coat collar close around his neck to protect from the icy whipping air. He led the small patriots' group with their supplies of gunpowder and food back to the troops' camp.

James and Paul hurried, knowing once the supplies were delivered to Prescott, they'd be heading home. They'd been granted their long overdue furlough, and James knew Paul needed to be home.

They needed a break, time to see their families and to regroup. Rest and renewed motivation was imperative to continue their fight for independence.

Paul tugged the tattered wool coat close around his thin body. "I must admit I'm exhausted. If I didn't think with each step I take it brings me closer to home, I don't think I'd make it."

James glanced at Paul's dark-circled eyes. "Yeah, it's been long and hard," James agreed, shooting a white breath mist flowing from his mouth as he spoke.

"Burr-cold wind, winter's coming too soon this

year. I can't wait to sleep in a warm bed. It'll be a little piece of heaven."

"You mean you can't wait to sleep with Katie's warm body, again." James jested, grinning.

"That, I don't deny."

"Well, you won't be the only one. I'm sure there'll be a lady willing to comfort my poor war-torn body. I deserve it, after the last mishap."

"Oh yeah, the one that got away," Paul said, feeling his spirits lift.

"I tell you, Paul, she was ready for me to take her." James smirked. "That'll drive me crazy for months."

"Ah, the one that got away. Not just once, but twice. Sad, sad story, James." In a fun manner, Paul slapped him on his chest.

Paul couldn't remember the last time they'd had any kind of lighthearted bickering. Their lives had been on the move continuously, fighting one skirmish after another, and when they weren't in a battle, they were looking for food and shelter, scared, and exhausted.

"It's all your fault. You could've had her, yourself."

Half-laughing, Paul stated, "You never give up."

"I'm just telling you..."

"You've told me."

"...but," James insisted, "You don't really know until you've experienced it. Let me explain—"

"Look, my dear friend, you may keep all the tarts and wenches for yourself. I can't even believe you would suggest such a thing. I'm married to your sister."

"What Katie doesn't know can't hurt her."

"I'll tell her you said so."

Laughing, James asked, "Think it'll surprise her?"

"Probably not."

The two fell silent as they tramped through the narrow, wooded area. Then James' serious tone broke through the gray damp forest, "You're good for her...you know, don't you, Paul?"

Caught off guard, Paul shot a bewildered look toward James. "What?"

"Well, I...I know I never tell you these things...it's just...well—"

Paul grinned at James' sudden embarrassment over revealing his true feelings.

"Well...you know what I mean."

"Yeah, I know," Paul replied, touched.

Prickly hairs on Paul's neck struck a nerve.

James' arm swung against Paul's chest, stopping him in his tracks. Turning, he glanced over his shoulder, discovering some of the men were missing.

"What is it?" Paul whispered, puzzled.

James waved his hands in alarm, bringing the men to a halt. Then, without warning, out of the dark forest came an ambush of four British soldiers armed with pistols and knives. They struck with intense fury.

Shots rang out before any of the patriots had a chance to draw their weapons. In a speedy reaction, James and Paul jumped in opposite directions, ready for battle.

Paul lunged forward and tackled one of the British soldiers charging James. In his peripheral vision, he detected another British soldier pounce another patriot, and he stabbed his combatant in the throat. Helpless, he wrestled against the Redcoat for his own life.

The exhausting struggle with the soldier left Paul knocked on the ground. Trying to stand, he watched the Redcoat grab a bag of supplies and flee for the safety of the woods. With some difficulty, Paul pulled his pistol, aimed at the fleeing soldier, and fired.

James wrapped his arms around a Brit's neck and snapped it under the pressure. He twisted around to look for Paul and found himself staring down the barrel of a pistol aimed at his head.

In a rapid attempt, he shoved the broken-necked soldier toward the Redcoat, knocking the Brit off balance.

Given the chance, James jumped behind a tree just as a shot fired past his head. Pulling his pistol, he fired, shooting the soldier in the chest. Grabbing his other pistol, he fired but missed, barely escaping another fired musket.

James, watched in rage as the two fled into the thick, dark woods with more of their supplies and gunpowder. Without a thought, he rushed after them.

Winded and angry, James returned empty-handed. He halted by the soldier he had shot and kicked the dead man.

"Damn son of a bitch." James' heated temper jabbed another angry kick into the corpse, berating the dead soldier.

His gaze fixed on the two colonial soldiers, staring at him in horror.

Aiming his eyes on the slumped body at their feet, he felt the blood drain from his head. Paul lay in a puddle of blood.

Forcing air into his lungs, James flew to his friend. His jaw muscles tightened. He squinted, feeling an anguish cry within his soul as he was unable to fight back the tears. Deep emotional love surfaced when he gently lifted Paul's shoulders and cradled his head in his arms.

"James...James," Paul's weak voice mumbled, barely audible.

"I'm here, Paul. I'm here." Leaning close to his face, James' vision blurred.

"I'm not going to make it."

“Paul, Paul, you’ve got to. Damn it, Paul. You’ve got to make it for Katie. You have a son now.”

“Take care of them.”

“I won’t need to, Paul. You’ll make it. I’m going to get you out of here.” A heavy stream of tears flowed without shame from James’ eyes.

In a fading voice, Paul whispered, “Promise me, promise...” His attempt to say more failed as his lifeless head dropped back.

James hugged his beloved friend, cradled his blood-soaked body against his chest, and wept for his friend, his father, his life of sorrow, and what he’d have to do to revenge the ones he loved.

“Paul. Paul.” His desperate, low voice begged, hoping somehow he could still hear him. “I promise. God, Paul, I promise.”

Preoccupied, Katherine continued to swing back and forth on the porch swing. The warm late afternoon sun penetrated her gray wool wrap while she stared out into a vacuum of space. Oblivious of the color burst of spring and the new life budding around the farm, her grief dug deep.

Slicing through her private room of thoughts, the creaking front door drew her attention.

Anne stepped out and strolled over to take a seat in the rocker. "My goodness, it's too early in the spring for such warm weather. We'll be having a scorcher this summer," she commented, staring out into the fields.

"Hmm."

"Daniel, what are you doing?" Anne grinned, swinging her attention down toward her grandson.

The two-year-old Daniel gazed up at his grandmother, busy creating a mess in the mud just beyond the porch.

He never failed to put a smile on Anne's face. At times, his facial expressions favored James, but the older he grew the more his little blond head became the splitting image of his father.

He jabbered to her, threw a handful of dirt into the air. He appeared very serious in his reply.

"Katherine, look at your son."

Anne pulled herself up from the rocker and stepped off the porch to squat next to Daniel. She took the corner of her apron and wiped his little hands before she tickled his ribs.

“Fun? Huh, is that fun, Daniel?” her loving voice almost sang.

Daniel giggled, held his arms up, and giggled again when she swooped him up. Anne grinned when his arms flew around her neck to give her a tight hug.

His childish laughter brought Katherine’s attention back to the present. “Daniel, what did you do?” she asked, as he dropped down from Anne’s arm onto her lap.

“Tell your ma you’re having a good time making mud pies.”

Anne’s smile faded when she met Katherine’s sad gaze. “How are you doing, my dear?”

“Fine...really Mother, I’m fine.”

“Oh, Katie dear, it might help if you talked about Paul.”

Pulling her gaze from Daniel, she met her mother’s gentle, understanding eyes. Yes, she knew she understood, she’d lost a husband, too. “I know...just not right now.” It still hurt too much.

“Honey, we all miss Paul, and Thomas is hurting, too. He’s lost his only son. He’ll need to be with his grandson more. It’s been months now since the neighbor’s son got home from war with news about Paul. They say it helps to talk about the loved one you’ve lost. You’re allowed to grieve, dear.”

Katherine forced herself from tearing up. Changing the subject, her soft voice asked, “When will James be back?”

Anne seemed to decide not to press the matter further and glanced out beyond the dirt road, as if looking for her son. “It could be any day now.”

“It’s going to kill him to be away from that damn war.”

“His spirits are pretty low, dear. I’m sure there’s no way he can continue to fight at the present. I suppose we have to trust what we’ve been told.”

“You know James. He’ll find a way to stay active

in fighting for the cause...even from here.”

“I know...it’s worrisome,” Anne admitted.

“Why don’t you let me take Daniel inside for his bath? I’ll get him ready for bed. Give yourself some time alone.”

Kissing Daniel’s forehead, Katherine lifted her son to his grandmother. Watching the door close, she looked out over the field while a silent window of waves formed in her eyes.

Wiping away an escaped tear, Katherine stood. Stepping off the porch, she meandered around the yard then headed beyond the barn for the open fields, needing to walk.

The instant she neared the barn door, a hand reached out and grabbed her, pulling her inside.

Attempts at screaming failed when a hand covered her mouth. Her heart pounded. Panicked, she twisted around staring into the face of her abductor. Shocked. She recognized the worried blue eyes staring into hers.

Harry released her.

“What are you doing here?” she whispered.

“I didn’t mean to frighten you, but I couldn’t risk it any other way.”

“How did you get here? I don’t understand how...”

“I...I had to see you, and this was my only chance.”

“Why are you here?”

“I won’t be missed for a while, but I don’t have much time. I just needed to make sure you were all right.”

“Why?”

“For Jeremy’s sake.”

Katherine’s eyes became drawn and heavy. “He sent you here?”

“No, he would not ask that of me.”

“How is he?” she dare ask, drawing her hands against her chest as if to stop her rushing heartbeat

at hearing the sound of his name. "Is he here?"

"No. Katherine, are you..."

"Have you heard from him?"

Harry shook his head. A cracking sound emanated beyond the field. Concerned, they searched beyond the partially opened door.

"I've been here too long," Harry muttered, scanning the area, listening.

Her focus turned from the field to look directly into his tired, dull eyes, filled with pain. "You look exhausted. You need rest."

"We all are."

"It's bad, isn't it?"

"You can't imagine how terrible, Katherine. The suffering, the pain, bloody body parts, dead men, some half-alive screaming in agony. The lost lives—King George should just get out and let you people live."

Pausing, he looked deep into her sincere expression.

"Harry—"

"I know, I shouldn't have come, it dangerous, but...but, I had to. There so many soldiers running; they've had enough, and they're tired and want to go home to see their wives and kids. Everyone is discouraged and miserable as if we're fighting a hopeless battle."

"Oh, Harry, I'm so sorry. We've both paid a big price, more than we ever dreamed."

"I...I just needed to see someone connected to my family. I'm so far from home...you're the only one—"

"Oh, Harry." Katherine's eyes filled with tears.

"I gotta go, Katherine." He glanced out the door to scan the field again.

"Harry—"

"Take care, Katherine," he whispered, and then he stepped out into the opening, but before he took off for the woods, Katherine's hand rested on his arm

delaying him.

He paused.

Turning to her, his sad eyes expressed hopelessness. "I'll be fine."

Throughout these past years, at times, she wondered and longed for Jeremy. It had only been in the last several months her grief for Paul had blanked out the memory of him.

"Harry, be careful."

Forcing a smile, he took off for the safety of the woods and his horse.

Katherine stood watch in the shadow of the barn, absorbed in thought as she stared at the spot in which Harry took his leave.

A shot rang out.

Katherine jumped, startled.

Another. The terrifying sound ricocheted from the woods to the open area.

Harry—

Without thinking, Katherine ran through the field toward the dense forest. Slowing her steps, she searched. A horse neighed guiding her direction.

The moment she found the horse, she grabbed its reins before the frightened animal could take off. Frantically searching the area, she discovered Harry lying on the ground gasping.

Katherine dropped to his side and caught her breath when her gaze landed on the red blood oozing from his leg.

"Oh, my God, Harry, you're shot."

Harry wrenched from pain.

Grabbing his leg, Katherine felt the warm blood gush from its deep wound. To make Harry aware of her presence, she whispered, "I'm here, Harry, please don't blackout on me."

Katherine hurriedly pulled off her apron and wrapped his leg. When she made a tight knot over his wound, his jaw muscles clamped tight to keep from screaming in pain.

“You’ve got to get out of here, Katherine.”

“I’m not leaving you.”

“I didn’t see him.”

“Can you walk?”

Supporting his attempt to stand, Katherine seized his horse reins so Harry could steady himself against the animal. When he straightened out his leg, Katherine watched the blood drain from his face.

He shifted his full weight against her, causing her to tumble to the ground with him.

“Oh God, no, please,” she whispered when she heard the rumble of approaching horses.

“Harry, you can’t die. We have to find a place to hide. Harry, Harry...stay with me, please,” she begged, dragging him toward a large fallen tree.

“I’ll try...” he whispered, pulling his body with her help.

Once concealed, Katherine allowed Harry to drop to the ground. Rushing to his horse, she slapped the animal on its hindquarters to make him take off running through the woods.

The rumble grew closer.

She dashed back, crouched down against Harry, and prayed the approaching evening shadows would help to hide them. A quick glance told her Harry had blacked out, which was probably a good thing.

She held her breath when she heard horses halt just a few feet away.

“He must still be riding. The tracks lead this way. I know I hit him.” A look of disgust crossed Thomas’ face as he shook his head. “James, you get home; the boys and I’ll look for this man.”

“You think I’d let you trap that son-of-a-bitch without me?”

“What the hell do you think you’re doing? We didn’t ride you all the way back home so you could...”

James held his hand against his ribs. His face grimaced as if in pain. “I’m not a damn broken

body.”

Thomas looked sternly at James.

“We’re wasting time. Let’s go.” James kicked the belly of his horse and headed in the direction of the tracks. The other men followed his lead.

Still shielding Harry, Katherine waited quietly until the sounds of their horses died in the distance.

James. Oh, God, he’ll be home soon. Glancing down at her blood-drenched dress, she swallowed hard to keep back the tears.

“Harry...Harry.”

She could hear his guttural, groggy grunts, but he seemed unable to speak. Panic swept over her. Quick short breaths panicked her until she demanded her brain to take control and think.

Harry’s eyes fluttered open, drawing her attention. “Shhhh. I’ll help you. I promise. Harry, you’ve got to stay with me. Do you hear me? You have to help. I need you to stay with me, because if you don’t...”

A cry escaped her lips; she couldn’t bring herself to say his name, but she knew it would kill him if he lost his only brother.

Katherine caught her breath when she heard Harry’s whisper. “I knew you were here.”

“Don’t worry. I’m going to get you back, whatever it takes. Look at me, please.”

Katherine’s hands held the side of Harry face and forced him to look at her. “That’s right, concentrate on my voice. Oh, God, Harry, I need you to make it through because you have to make it home. You’re the only one who can tell Jeremy I have to see him again...Harry.”

Realizing what she had just said ripped her heart open. A stream of tears spilled down her cheeks. She’d pushed away his love for so long she didn’t realize how much she still longed for him.

“Oh, God, you’ve got to get back to him. Can you hear me...tell...tell him I still love him...I still love

him.” Her anguish voice choked as she dropped her head on Harry’s chest.

No longer able to muffle her sorrow, she allowed her broken heart to cry out for the loss of her husband and a love she’d long for all her life. She never knew how deep the hurt could go.

The snap of a branch brought her back to reality.

She glanced around to search for danger.

Too late.

She’d been so upset she didn’t hear the rider.

A British soldier brought his horse to a halt within inches. His pistol pointed directly at her.

“Don’t move, woman,” he said glancing down at the wounded man in the red uniform. Recognition flashed in his eyes as he lowered his weapon. “Lieutenant Burke?”

Forcing her voice to sound calm, Katherine hurried to explain, “He’s been shot. I can’t stop the bleeding. I tried, but he keeps losing consciousness.”

The soldier jumped from his horse and bent to take a closer look at Harry’s wrapped leg. Glancing at Katherine, he asked, “What are you doing out here?”

“I heard the shot from my farm. I didn’t know what to do. You must hurry. You must help him,” she urged, desperate to have them on their way in case James returned.

Struggling, both Katherine and the soldier managed to lift Harry onto the horse. Once mounted, the soldier ordered, “You better get back home.”

Katherine watched until they disappeared, and then she ran as fast as she could to slip into the house before her brother discovered her. God, please don’t let James be there, yet. Give me time.

She rushed to the back door, quietly opened it, and stepped into the kitchen. Forcing her steps to

move silently as possible, she tiptoed her way to her room.

Hurrying, like the swiftness of a doe, she shed her bloody petticoats and dress, hurried to the washbasin for a fast clean up, and then slipped on a white flannel nightgown.

In haste, she rolled her soiled garments, shoved them under the bed, and then literally dropped onto her bed, breathing a sigh of relief. What to do about the bundle was the question in her mind. She'd have to burn it all or bury the bloody evidence.

Katherine heard James slam the front door in a rage. Her body stiffened, and her skin crawled thinking how close he came to discovering her and Harry.

She pressed her lips together and willed her body into action. She rushed from her room and down the stairs just as her mother reached her brother's side.

"James, you're hurt-wounded," Anne cried helping him to the settee. What happened? We didn't expect you until tomorrow."

Katherine reached over to help him remove his jacket. She looked into his exhausted face, but the anger in his eyes exuded a kind of madness that frightened her.

"You look terrible; what's happened to you, son?"

With every movement, pain struck through his ribs as he unbuttoned his shirt, exposing a bloody wound around his ribs.

Between short, choppy breaths, he sputtered, "I was on my way home when I ran into Thomas. He'd been out patrolling the area when he met up with me. He'd spotted some damn bloodbacks hanging around."

Slipping his arm from the sleeve, James winced with every movement.

Helping, Katherine stepped aside when her

mother returned from the kitchen with hot water and a cloth for a bandage.

“James, your wound...it’s severe; how could you stand to ride?”

“I’ll live. Those brutal doctors did more damage than the bullet.” Biting down, his grunts proved how painful it was just to have his mother wrap the clean white cloth around his torso.

“Did Thomas find any Redcoats close around?” Katherine nonchalantly asked, curious.

“Yeah,” James replied between grunts.

Settling back against the settee, he closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and said, “Why the bastard was out here, I’d like to know. I just wished I’d gotten the shot off. That damn Thomas couldn’t hit a lame horse’s ass.”

Anne covered her son with a wool throw and touched his face with loving hands. “You’re brooding, James dear, please, just forget about the war; you’re home now.”

“Ma, I can’t forget. Not while those bastards are out there...I’ll never stop fighting until every last one of them pays for Paul’s death.”

Katherine turned away.

James glanced at his sister’s reaction, his voice softened, “I didn’t mean...”

“I know,” Katherine stared down at her hands.

“He loved you. He always did.”

“I loved him, too.”

A little uncomfortable, James held his hand against his ribs. “We’re winning. I can feel it, we’re winning, Katie. Thomas and some of the other men are going to stockpile weapons here. The cellar beneath the barn will be a perfect place to hide a fair amount.”

A flash of fury sparked Katherine’s heart. Infuriated, her heated voice drew his gaze, “What are you talking about? You’re thinking of bringing the war to this house? I will not allow it.”

“Katie, it’s already here. Only moments ago, one of the bastards snooped around on our farmland. Besides, we’re too far out of town for them to suspect, but close enough for the men to get supplies in a hurry if need be.”

Enraged, Katherine sent a sour glare in James’ direction, “I’ll not sit here and allow you to endanger the life of my son, nor, fill him with the ramblings of madmen.”

“And, I’ll not sit here because of some damned orders and do nothing. If the Colonial Army needs our home, then they’ll get it.”

“No,” Katherine screamed. Her hand covered her mouth, blocking her sob. She heard Daniel’s cry from the back room.

“Katie, it’s my duty to help the troops.”

“It’s my duty to protect Daniel. And, it’s yours too.”

“I will, and I’ll protect his future, too.”

“You’re not doing this for Daniel. It’s because you couldn’t save Paul.”

James struggled to rise, but the pain apparently consumed his body, pushing him back. “My first duty is to this cause.”

Gripped with the same determination as her brother, she stared fiercely at him, saying, “I’ll not have this.”

Alone at last, Katherine shut her bedroom door. A heavy sigh made her shoulders slump in an overwhelming fatigued state. Staring at the bundle she needed to dispose of, she felt a tear escape.

What was life to be like with a brother so consumed with hatred and a former lover’s brother wearing the crimson color?

Her life, now, had to center on Daniel. Suddenly, a deep emotional yearning cried out. With a heavy whimper, she sat on the bed and closed her eyes. When she opened them, she stared at a drawer. Carefully pulling it open, she reached inside and

grasped a small jewelry box.

Slowly, lifting the lid to reveal several small pieces of jewelry, Katherine searched through the aged heirlooms, until she found a ring.

The silver ring Jeremy left behind long ago, a lifetime ago, in her aunt's stable on the first night they revealed their love.

How easy she could remember his touch, his lips, and his caressing hands. Somberly, she turned and stared down at Paul's side of the bed. Softly, touching his pillow, tears blurred her vision. How could she think of Jeremy when her beloved husband was dead?

Her mother was right; she'd been in a state of melancholy for months. She needed to grieve, then let go, for Daniel's sake.

Katherine curled under the covers. When she smoothed her arm along Paul's side of the bed, crushing emotions pressed her against his pillow. Giving in, she sobbed, freely allowing the tears to flow.

His death wasn't fair. Life wasn't fair. She'd only had such a short time with Paul. The rest of their life was supposed to be time-consuming in giving birth to brothers and sisters for Daniel. Oh, God. They'd been happy. In an anguish cry, she dropped her face into his pillow, muffling her sobs. *Paul you never sat eyes on your son. He's beautiful. Looks just like you. I promise he'll never forget his father.*

Jeremy set eyes on Harry the instant the ship docked. Hurrying down the gangplank, he practically ran to his brother. Without a word, he circled his shoulders with his arms and hugged him close. Jeremy felt Harry's bony body shudder before he pulled back.

Harry's watery eyes stared into his without the spark of life he was accustomed to. The appalling effects of the war showed through the dark circles under his eyes reflecting a sadness Jeremy had never seen in his usually light-hearted brother.

Now defeated, drawn, and somber in spirit, Jeremy was glad he decided to make the long, treacherous trip to bring him home. He could only speculate the horrid sights his little brother had seen or the battles he'd fought.

"My, my, it does me good to see you, Jeremy." Harry smiled at him and took him by the arm. "Come, you need a drink."

"You're right, I need a good, stiff drink," Jeremy said, noticing his brother's limp.

Inhaling a strong breath of the crisp, clean air, Jeremy glanced around the town he thought he'd never see again. Now, once again, he found himself miles away from an unforgiving love he'd left behind.

He strolled into the familiar Green Lantern pub behind Harry. Jeremy set eyes on Terrell at the far end of the room. Some things never change.

The soldier slapped the cards on the table, pushed back his chair, and rose. "Well, gentlemen,

with that hand I'll take my leave."

"What? You're giving up so early in the evening?"

Terrell glanced up; recognition of Jeremy spread a wide grin across his face. "When did you get back?" He reached out his hand to welcome the man he'd always respected.

"Just arrived."

"Must say, I never expected to see you again," he said to Jeremy, after a short nod toward Harry. They made their way to a table as Terrell motioned the barmaid for a round of drinks.

"I bet you're surprised to find your little brother enlisted? Am I wrong?"

"Not by a long shot. I wondered if you unscrewed his head and put it back on wrong."

"A bloody fool, I'd say. He could have left when he received word of your father's passing...a bloody fool," Terrell's unsympathetic voice declared as he shook his head.

"You're not the first to think so, my friend." Jeremy chuckled with Terrell as he reached over to give his little brother a fisted knuckle rub against his cheek.

"Ah, drinks." Terrell grabbed the container from the barmaid. "Let's drink and forget this bloody war, if only for a short time."

After a quick swallow of whiskey, Jeremy stood. "Thanks; another time. After the long voyage, I have a need to settle my body for the evening and food in my stomach."

"Certainly understandable, Captain. We'll do drinks and a friendly card game some other night, huh, Harry?"

"Plan on it," Harry said, taking his leave with his brother.

Harry rubbed his stomach and stretched back on two legs of the wooden chair. "Yup, that was some

delicious stew.”

Jeremy nodded.

“Something else, sir?” asked the young lady by his side, waiting.

“Sure, sweetie, give us two strong coffees,” he said with a flirtatious tone. When he winked at the young lady, her cheeks turned pink.

Harry grinned and turned his attention to Jeremy and asked, “Tell me, how’s Meg and Mother?”

Jeremy’s eyes drifted to the floor in sudden sorrow. “Should’ve been there for them, instead of wallowing in my own misery.”

“So was I, dear brother, so was I. I should have gone home, too.”

“Harry, when I arrived, I couldn’t believe what Meg told me. What made you stay and enlist? What were you thinking?”

Harry rubbed his forehead and closed his eyes.

“When I left here, you told me you’d be on the next ship to England.”

Suddenly, Jeremy dropped his face into his hands and rubbed his weary eyes. “What the devil got into you, Harry?”

“I don’t know...now. Truly, I wanted to be there for the funeral, but things escalated here.”

He said, “So, my brother, you’re Lord Weatherton, now. Aren’t you? Have you come to terms with being the Viscount?”

Sorrow weighed heavy in Jeremy’s heart.

Harry glanced down at his hands. Again, changing the subject, he delved into another tender issue. “Will you see her?”

“I haven’t decided, yet. I doubt it.”

“Maybe I can help you make a decision.”

“What do you mean?”

“She saved my life.”

In disbelief, Jeremy’s brows wrinkled. He stared at his brother. In all the times he’d thought about

her, he never considered Harry in her presence.

"I rode out to Wings Falls to check on her. Oh, Jeremy, with more soldiers arriving and so many skirmishes, I thought I should check to make sure nothing bad had happened."

"Her husband...do you...do you know who he is?" Jeremy's heart skipped a beat. All these years he'd wondered if she'd married Bennett.

"No, never bothered to ask. Actually, we never really talked about anything, but you. She's still beautiful, Jeremy. Her beauty reaches deep within, too, it appears. When I was shot, I fell off my horse, and she found me before any of the colonists did, or I'd be dead, now."

"Why was she out in the woods in the first place?"

"I had been at the farm...waited for her in the barn...we talked just a short time."

"Is she well?"

"Yes, seemed to be. After I left, I rode off into the woods where I ran into some patriots. She heard the shots, found me, and managed to get the help of one of my men. She saved my life, Jeremy."

"When did this happen?" Jeremy stared out into space, remembering every inch of her beautiful face and green eyes, sparking with life.

"Several months ago."

"How's your leg, now?"

"Notice my limp, huh?" Harry grinned.

"Yeah."

Harry glanced down at his leg and mumbled, "Tells me when it's going to rain. Besides, women like wounded war soldiers."

"I heard about the Battle of Lexington."

"The battle's got a name, huh?"

"Yeah, some say it was the beginning of the Revolutionary War. Were you there?"

"Yup, sorry to say. You wouldn't believe it, Jeremy. We were surprised and caught off guard."

I'm lucky to still be alive. They killed so many before we were able to fire our weapons. No joke, Jeremy-Minutemen know all the roads, river bends, hills, and every crook and cranny of the surrounding territories. They know where to hit hard and when to run for cover, disappearing into areas we're unfamiliar with."

Jeremy leaned back in his chair, took a sip of black coffee, and observed Harry's features as his brother's low voice reflected his sorrow.

"Who'd guess mere farmers could fight for freedom with such spirit. I don't think they'll give up. They know how to handle guns, too."

"What do you mean?" Jeremy encouraged.

"Unbelievable. Those farmers...patriots...have some kind of long rifle. The thing shoots further and with greater accuracy than any gun the British carry."

"Yeah, I heard. The rumor spread through England, but I guess it's not a rumor, huh?"

"Nope. Some old frontiersman invented the weapon. There's an award, a generous one, for seizing one or more of these long rifles."

"Do you know if they've got one, yet?"

"Gage hasn't said. I'd like to see one myself."

Harry took a long sip from his coffee mug and placed the cup on the table with a shaking hand.

Jeremy reached over and touched his shoulder. He stared into his eyes filled with pain and anguish. Jeremy's heart filled with compassion for his brother and what he'd been through.

"It's over for you, now; you can return home with me."

"You don't understand, Jeremy, I'm not sure I can go home. This is a part of me, now. Since Lexington...you don't know the sights I've seen since the beginning."

"The bloody battle at Bunker Hill?"

Harry rubbed his forehead and looked at his

brother, his brow wrinkled as he confessed. "Jeremy, I sifted through dead bodies, looking for anyone alive, sickened at the sight of what lay before me, a mixture of Colonial soldiers and British soldiers strewn throughout the hill. The entire area turned into a nauseating stench of red blood..."

Harry hunched over the table and held his coffee cup in both hands. He shook his head and looked up at Jeremy. "These people amaze me. They proved to be a formidable challenge against us. I've always heard believing in a dream can be the most powerful weapon against an enemy."

"Harry, don't—" Jeremy pleaded. He wanted to help his brother vanquish all horrible sights from his memory, and yet, at every push of his being, Harry had been a soldier following orders heroically.

"Those idiots," Harry continued. "Did they think we wouldn't take back the hill? We showed them."

Then, unexpectedly, Harry laughed, a repulsive laugh and glanced into Jeremy's face, asking, "Who's the idiots?"

Harry's eyes filled with tears as he seemed to play back the bloody disaster. He whispered, "So many lives, more than our adversaries. Defeat cost us greatly."

"Harry, it won't be long before it's all over. I heard reinforcements have arrived."

"They did. King George hired thousands of Hessian soldiers. They arrived several months ago. He figured we needed foreign soldiers to help end this rebellion."

"Well, then, it can't last much longer."

"They won't give up, Jeremy. Every time we knock them down they spring back. It's almost as if they all believe that man when he said *I am an American*. To believe in something to the point of giving up your life is admirable. Don't you think?"

Jeremy couldn't answer. He knew how strong the Patriots' beliefs ran, including Katherine's and

James Heaton's. Inhaling deeply, he turned his head and glanced out the window. Had James managed to stay alive? He didn't dare inquire.

Gazing back at Harry, he studied his war-torn brother. God, maybe he shouldn't have come, treading on dangerous grounds back in America. Might prove, in the long run to be a bad choice. But it seemed the only choice for his brother. Jeremy stood and waited for Harry to push himself up like an old man with a bad leg. He took his brother's arm and led him out into the brisk air of the chilly late afternoon.

After he walked Harry back to the encampment, Jeremy left his brother at his tent with plans to meet for breakfast. He turned his direction toward the inn across from the Green Lantern.

Stepping through the doors and without a glance at the innkeeper, his heavy-laden steps ascended the stairs. Jeremy entered the small room, pulled off his black hat, and tossed it on the tiny bed. Filled with anguish, he collapsed in the chair next to the window. Inhaling long and deep, he released it. How old and tattered his body felt.

The events of his life surrounding his father's death, duties as Viscount of Weatherton, longings for a woman he could not have, and now, a brother he'd left behind in torment, all unraveled his entire being. Yet, with all his exhaustion, the hidden passions trapped deep within his soul dug their way to the surface.

Without thinking, he shoved his hand into his pocket and pulled out Katherine's yellow hair-ribbon.

Twisting the soft satin around his fingers, Jeremy released the salty tears to spill all his pinned up emotions, wetting his face.

Chapter 21

James picked up the last heavy crate of ammunition. A deep grunt pushed from his gut. His muscles strained under the load when he ducked down into the large cellar located beneath the barn. He dropped the wooden crate on top of one, and then wiped the moisture from his face with the back of his forearm. The wetness rolled from his thick-haired scalp down his neck to tickle his back before soaking into his shirt.

Drawing in a deep breath, he ran his hand through his wet hair. The low temperature in the underground room cooled his moist skin.

Physical labor was good. For the past several months, he'd been incapacitated, unable to do much of anything except eat and sleep. He'd been wounded before, but this time it took longer to heal. Now, he figured, it was time to get involved with much needed work such as concealing precious supplies.

So far, all appeared peaceful throughout the countryside. Not one British soldier had been seen near the farm since the night he'd arrived home. *Lucky thing for the bastards.* Without their interruptions, the Minutemen had time to store guns and ammunition before an inevitable conflict happened.

A rustling noise stopped James in his tracks. Instinctively, he reached for his pistol. He listened. Drawing his gun from its holster, he slowly stepped toward the opening of the cellar just enough to enable him to peek out in all directions.

Nothing.

You're hearing things, old man.

James narrowed his eyes scanning the trees beyond the fields. His stance relaxed, he shook his head and turned back to board the doors to the secret underground stash.

Frowning, he felt the hairs prickle along the back of his neck. Once again, strained ears listened for any unusual sound.

Nothing.

Damn them to hell. His only purpose now was to kill as many Redcoats as he could, and he intended to do so.

James made a slight move to holster his pistol, and then froze. With a firm hold on his firearm, he whirled around, finding himself face-to-face with a young man, not more than sixteen years, dressed in a British uniform.

The youth's frightened expression stared back while poking his bayonet toward James.

In an instant, James' finger jerked, firing the pistol.

The soldier dropped his rifle and slumped to the ground.

James took a quick glance around and rushed to unlatch the cellar door. He grabbed the Redcoat and dragged his prize down onto the cool dirt floor.

The young soldier moaned.

James grinned. He wasn't dead.

Hovering over him, he shoved his pistol into his chest. "Who sent you? Tell me, you son-of-a-bitch. Why are you here? Tell me now, or I'll pull this trigger."

"No, please...I...I...snooping...that's all-"

"For what? Who gave you orders to come here?"

"No one...heard a roomer...please, I need...I'm bleeding. I didn't see anything...please."

"Right," James mumbled. Grinning at the terror in the young man's eyes, he pointed the pistol at his

chest and squeezed his trigger finger.

Gray smoke spiraled up his nostrils.

"You won't see anything, now." Standing over the body, a smirk spread across his lips.

Straightening, he shoved his pistol into the holster. *Another one down.*

Grinning, he whirled to meet the horrid look on his sister's face.

Katherine trembled from the look in her brother's eyes—a kind of satisfied hatred-no guilt at murdering. She grasped her hands together to keep them from shaking.

"James, are you hurt," she finally whispered.

"Katie..."

"I heard shots. Is he alone?" The bloody body at James' feet turned her skin cold.

"I think so. Go get a shovel, Katie. I'll get rid of this worthless trash in the forest, dump it in a hole."

She watched his angry, black eyes look down at the lifeless youth. He yanked the boy up by the uniform collar and hauled him from the cellar.

Slowly, Katherine's feet led her away while she stared at her bother dragging the dead body across the field like a sack of potatoes. She covered her mouth to stifle a cry, turned and rushed into the barn, sick.

When she had first heard a shot, she had rushed to investigate, fearful that Harry had returned. He hadn't. But what she observed frightened her more.

James thought she's heard two shots when in fact, she'd witnessed her brother murder the soldier, even after he'd begged for his life.

Katherine stepped inside the barn and grabbed a shovel. She pressed her lips together, turned, and hurried across the field toward the forest. She found James, not far from where she had hidden with Harry the night he was shot.

His apathetic and deliberate search through the

coat pockets of the dead soldier sent a fretful chill down her back. When he discovered a few pieces of silver, he shoved them into his own pocket.

James stood and took the shovel from her. Glancing at her, he grinned.

Katherine returned his look with a frown.

“Don’t worry, sis. Just one less we have to worry about.”

Katherine stepped back out of the way while he dug a shallow secret grave. The cold manner in which James performed the task was disconcerting. She couldn’t believe her brother unmercifully kicked the body into the hole and without hesitating, shoveled the dirt on top of a forever-lost soul.

Unable to pull her eyes from the bloody corpus in the burial place that would be forever lost, she noticed his youthful face. Surely, he had a mother somewhere, a family, maybe a wife, children—she didn’t even know his name. She stared until the cold, dark earth covered him from existence.

Almost in a blind daze, she headed back to the house leaving the brother she no longer knew. Immediately, she busied herself in several tasks demanding her attention all afternoon and the meal preparation. She needed to forget the terrible incident. After all, she had to think about Daniel, now. Keeping him safe was the most important thing in her life.

Katherine leaned against the porch rail and pushed her back into the hard wood post to rid her mind of the nightmare that had taken place earlier that morning. A deep breath of warm earth filled her lungs while her gaze trailed out across the Heaton land toward her son. Worried, she bit her bottom lip while her gaze followed Daniel and her brother’s slow meander toward the house.

Little Daniel was content and happy, jabbering away nonstop while he rode on his uncle’s shoulders.

He adored James. A strong male figure around the farm had been good for him. And, yet, she knew James would leave—when the war called. After today, maybe, that would be a good thing.

Oh, dear God, James was always so gentle with his nephew and full of love for his family. Yet, the person that killed the young soldier just hours ago was different, full of unforgiving anger, hatred, and violence.

Daniel's sweet giggle swept along the breeze toward her and broke into her thoughts, spreading a smile across her lips. He could always lift her spirits. Her son was her life now. She would do whatever it took to protect him.

Shirtless, James carried his young nephew through the wheat field, the earlier act of killing all but forgotten. Holding onto Daniel's little legs, he made his way over the dry furrows while little hands playfully tugged his hair.

For a moment, just a split moment, James pretended no war surrounded them. Free of tension for the first time in a long while, he enjoyed being back on the farm, living a simple life.

James stopped and turned in a full slow circle to drink in the entire farmland before him.

Daniel clapped his hands and squealed.

"You like that, huh?"

James whirled around again, drawing out a bubble of laughter from his nephew. "This is it, Daniel. This farm will be all yours, and no son-of-a-bitch British soldier will take it away. This is the reason your pa died. He loved you and your mother more than anything."

James felt Daniel's legs flip up and down as he grabbed another fist full of hair while giggling with joy.

"Whoa, boy, I don't intend on going bald, yet." James smiled at Daniel's jabber.

Raising the child off his shoulders, he said, "You're growing so fast, you'll be riding all over the countryside before long."

He sat Daniel on the dry earth and squatted beside him. The little body plopped down and grabbed a handful of dirt.

James chuckled. He, too, scooped a fistful of black rich soil and studied the fine grains of dust sifting through his fingers.

His brows pulled together.

Daniel giggled.

Standing, James lifted the boy and hugged him close, emotions choked deep within his throat. *Oh, Paul, you've missed so much—*

"I'm sorry, my little man, I never knew...I should have made him stay...I didn't understand how important it was. He had a family...I should have made him stay."

Swallowing hard, James promised Daniel with great conviction, "I'll never be as good as your pa, but I'll keep you safe. I gave my word I'd take care of you. I wish he could be here for you, for us both."

Turning, James headed for the house. "Come on, let's get back before your ma comes looking. It's time for your bath anyway. Maybe I'll take you for a ride tomorrow."

Katherine's fingers toyed with the fragile bundle of bright blue and yellow wildflowers. It had been a long, stressful day, and her walk through the meadow had done her good. She struggled to think of only happy thoughts, but the terrible scene of several days ago still lingered in her mind.

Bending down she picked an orange flower growing all alone, away from the others. That's the way she felt deep down inside—all alone far away from the one trapped in her heart. Holding the bunch of flowers up to her nose, she smelled in their sweet, fragrant mixture. Harry slipped into her

thoughts.

He said things would get worse before getting better. Who knows? She might be like James and kill just to protect. Oh, dear God, what was this war doing to their empathy toward others? Would they survive? Would James? Would she? She must, for Daniel's sake.

Katherine blinked the mist from her eyes. Loneliness and sorrow had tied a knot around her heart that she couldn't shake. Breathing in the lovely sweet-scented bundle, she stepped around the corner of the barn.

Glancing over the bunch of flowers, she caught her breath. She staggered, stumbling over a rock.

She stared straight ahead, uncertain. Her heartbeat increased so fast, she thought she'd faint.

A yellow satin ribbon was tied to the barn door, fluttering in the breeze.

It couldn't be.

Katherine pressed her lips together. Her body trembled, and she was afraid to move. Finally, she took a slow step toward the barn.

Nearing the door, she reached out and caressed the ribbon.

Katherine sucked in a quick, nervous breath. Her body strained backward; she was apprehensive of what it meant—afraid to hope.

Hesitant fingers untied the satin ribbon as its glistening hues danced in the sunset. She wrapped it around her fingers and squeezed her eyes shut. Hugging it to her chest, she filled her lungs with courage, wearily pushed the wooden barn door open, and walked inside.

Internal instincts drew her eyes to the figure standing in the far corner of the barn. A quick intake of breath halted her. If he weren't Harry—

The figure took a step out of the shadows toward her.

She stared.

Katherine fixed her eyes upon Jeremy's face. A trickle of moisture slipped down her cheeks. Ever so slowly, he stepped toward her.

The space between them dwindled until he raised his hand and softly touched the tear sliding down her cheek.

"Jeremy," she whispered, "You're here."

"Katherine—"

His low voice drifted to her emotional restraint. *Dear God, she still loved him.*

"Katherine, can you ever forgive me?" his gentle voice asked, staring into her eyes.

"After all this time, you're really here."

"I can't live without you. My love for you runs so deep. Life is meaningless without you." He cupped his hand against her cheek, wiping away another tear.

She didn't move.

Her chest pounded. Her heart, unable to keep buried the love she contained for so many years, now exploded. Her trembling hand reached up, but the yellow ribbon, twisted around her fingers, drew her attention.

"My ribbon?" she whispered.

"Yes."

Her skin cooled when he dropped his hand to finger her long hair draped over her shoulder. She melted into his gaze when his warm hands reached down to fold over hers, locking in the precious ribbon.

He stepped closer, pulled her hands over his heart, and in a that memorable seductive voice, said, "It's been right here, everyday, since the day I sailed so far from you. I know I don't deserve you, but my heart and soul aches for you."

She pulled her eyes from the ribbon and stared into his worried blue ones. "Even when you discovered I married Paul?" she asked.

He pulled his gaze from her and stared down at

her hands wrapped in his. She felt his chest rise as he inhaled a deep breath. He seemed ill at ease. Finally, his gaze returned to her.

He smiled, melting her to a point of no return. Oh, how she loved him. Powerless to hold back, she shifted her eyes to his lips, needing to taste him and to feel his arms around her. Overwhelming desires took over her heart, soul, and mind. She trembled.

Squeezing her eyelids shut, she listened to his heavenly voice flow into her soul, calling.

“My love, my life, I’ll love you ‘til the day I die.”

Slowly opening her eyes, her breath hitched when she gazed into his expression of love. She surrendered.

Jeremy didn’t need another signal. He showered her face with kisses and held her tight against him until their hearts beat in harmony.

He gently tangled his fingers in her long, flowing hair. Its soft, luscious texture sent a thrill through his body. He lowered his face against her neck and tasted her skin against his lips.

“Oh, Jeremy, I too, love you...I’ve always loved you.”

He pulled away just enough to stare deep into her soft green eyes glowing with love. Knowing she forgave him made all those agonizing years he spent without her disappear. He touched her warm moist lips to his.

Katherine took a step back, just far enough to place the palms of her hands on his chest. “Oh, Jeremy, Harry...I knew when—”

“Shhhhh,” he demanded.

“But, Jeremy...” she mumbled, breathlessly.

Hearing the concern in her voice, he gazed into her adoring eyes he had dreamed of for so many lonely nights.

“He’s all right,” he muttered, dazed by her beauty and the actual reality she still loved him.

“Only because of you...I wanted to believe everything he told me, but I was so afraid.”

I’ve wanted nothing more than to see you again...the things I said—”

“No, Katherine, I’m the one; I never meant to hurt you.” Regrets of fleeting time without her flashed through his mind. He buried his head in her neck, breathing in her sweet smell. “Do you think it wrong I returned? I know you have another life.”

“Jeremy—”

“I’m not afraid to ask now...all I want is to be with you. Oh, my darling Katherine, I know it means you would have to leave behind all you’ve ever known and the man you married. But—”

Katherine pulled away from his arms. Turning away, she stared down at her wedding ring.

Doubts silenced him. Frightened she would send him away he stepped closer, reached out, and captured her waist in his hands. He didn’t want distance between their bodies.

She turned and gazed up into his eyes. “It isn’t you, Jeremy. There’s so much you don’t know. So many things have changed.”

“Yes, in both our lives, but we can begin a new one together. Please, Katherine, we belong with each other. I love you, and you love me. Nothing else matters now.”

He kissed her gently.

How she had longed for his touch, his taste, his smell, and his lips. This wasn’t a dream...the thrill of his sweet kiss was breathtaking.

Katherine yielded, blending with his mouth, and in need of more, she responded to the deep sensations she hadn’t felt in years. His tender, supple lips pushed against hers, hungry and demanding. Waves of excitement shivered through her as his hands caressed, building the heat within

her soul.

Long-awaited passion burst forth like a flame, uncontrollable. Just as she thought she would faint from sheer joy or lack of breath, he dragged his mouth from hers and gathered her into his arms. Her body, squeezed against his, smothered her into the heavenly essences of belonging.

“Oh, Jeremy, I do need you,” her disturbed voice cried. She reached up touching her lips to his. The tender play of her mouth against his sent sparks between them, deepening to a more cherished need.

“Oh Katherine, Katherine, Katherine.” His low naked, passionate tone sent ripples through her heart.

He leaned his forehead against hers and whispered, “Will you come back with me, Katherine?”

Yes, yes, yes, her responsive needs screamed.

Oh, God, no. No. She couldn't.

Suddenly, the reality of the present jolted her thoughts back to the danger of the situation.

“What the hell?” A cold calculated voice sliced through the air.

The icy tone startled Katherine. Pulling away from Jeremy, she stared into the angry face of her brother. She couldn't hide the gasp when she fearfully identified the repulsion spread over his face. Speechless, she just stood there with Jeremy's arms around her.

“Tell me, Katherine dear, that I *do not* see what is before my eyes.”

James' choppy breath heated his face, so consumed with hatred he lunged for his sister, only to have Jeremy push him away.

Jeremy's protective hands pulled Katherine behind him. He stood his ground and stared at the pistol in James' hand.

“I'll not allow you to hurt her,” his adamant voice flowed across the barn toward James.

“Please, James...let me explain.” Katherine sobbed.

Jeremy waited with locked eyes on the wild-eyed man.

James ignored him. “You deceiving whore. How long? How long, woman?”

Jeremy’s fist tightened.

“No...no, James,” Katherine sobbed, “I never, ever, betrayed Paul. You have to believe me.” Reaching out, she stepped forward.

Jeremy shot his arm out in front of her to keep her from approaching her brother.

“Stay back, James,” Jeremy demanded. He placed his hand on his pistol while his other arm held Katherine tight around her waist.

“You son of a bitch. Damn you,” James said, skirting his stony eyes from Jeremy to his sister’s. “Damn you, too, Katherine. Paul loved you.”

James spat on the ground. His eyes narrowed and stared at the couple. A fierce growl spewed hatred up from his throat. “I’ll kill you both.”

Katherine chocked out words to convince him, “You have to believe me...”

“What—that he warmed your bed before Paul’s body turned cold?”

“This is between you and me,” Jeremy claimed, “You leave her the bloody hell alone.” Alert eyes waited for the inevitable.

“Answer me,” James ordered.

“You’re a madman,” Jeremy muttered.

James grinned and slowly circled them like a predator.

Jeremy followed his movement.

Except for the solid grasp of Jeremy’s arm, Katherine’s legs nearly collapsed, sending her to the ground. Confusion spun in her mind. Katherine’s body shook with the intensity of the situation. She needed James to come to his senses and listen to her, understand her.

Her watery eyes reflected back into her brother's, not recognizing his demeanor or the man standing before her.

James raised his pistol and aimed directly at Katherine's head.

Jeremy charged into action, knocking him against the stall.

Katherine covered the cry trying to escape her lips. She couldn't pull her eyes from the tangled, struggling bodies before her...the two men she loved the most in her life; this couldn't be. Her legs trembled until they buckled beneath her. Dropping to her knees, tears spilled nonstop.

Suddenly, a loud bang echoed throughout the barn.

Her body jerked due to the vibrating sound.

The smell of gunpowder stopped her heartbeat. Her eyes glued to the tight-knitted bodies standing motionless.

Gray smoke trailed upward from between them. Katherine watched each man stare into the eyes of his opponent.

They slumped to the ground.

Her watery gaze focused on Jeremy moving away from her brother. He held the pistol in his hand.

James didn't move.

Jeremy turned a horrified expression to Katherine. He dropped the pistol.

"No! No!" Katherine sobbed.

She crawled to her brother's side. Gently touching his chest, she felt the warm blood stain her fingers. Embracing his lifeless body, an agonizing wail rumbled from her throat. She sobbed over her brother's dead body.

"Katherine—" Jeremy whispered. He reached down and pulled her away from the motionless form.

Shocked and grief-stricken, her gaze pleaded with him, but his lips remained silent, his sorrowful

eyes regarding her. Offering an embrace, he circled his arms around her.

Katherine rested her tear-stained cheeks against his chest. Her arms squeezed Jeremy as he rocked her, powerless to soothe her pain.

Pushing away, Katherine whispered in an urgent voice, “Jeremy...Jeremy...go, you must go...if someone discovers you here, they’ll kill you. Please...hurry, leave.”

“Katherine, I can’t leave you, not now.”

“You must...please. Oh, God, please.”

Katherine glanced down at James’ still body, and warm tears slid down her cheeks. Breathing deeply, she turned her worried eyes upon Jeremy—oh, God, she couldn’t lose him, too. She threw her arms around his neck and held him tight. Her mind grasped the danger surrounding them.

“Jeremy,” she whispered.

Gazing into his hopeless expression, with his eyes on James, she reached up and touched his cheek. “Jeremy, the other day, James killed a young British soldier...I...I helped him bury him in the forest.”

Stepping out of his arms, Katherine clamped her hands together and drew them to her mouth, thinking. She nibbled on her fingernail, forming a solution in her brain.

Frowning, she whirled to face Jeremy, “Please, go; I’ll tell everyone James caught the Redcoat in our barn, and they shot each other. I’ll just tell them I buried the British soldier in the forest...Thomas...I’m sure Thomas and the other Patriots will protect us. Please, it’s the only way.”

He pulled her into his arms, hiding his face into her rumped hair. “Katherine, I never meant for this to happen.”

“I know, my dearest. Please, Jeremy, do as I say. This war has cost me so much, I can’t risk losing you, too. Please.”

Squeezing his eyes shut, he took a deep breath and nodded. He gently drew her close, kissed her softly on the lips, and whispered, "We'll get through this."

"Oh Jeremy," Katherine sobbed. She circled her arms around him and held him so tight she could feel his heart beat. Gazing up into his face, she whispered, "I'll go anywhere with you, Jeremy. I'll go with you to England. We cannot be denied a love that is meant to be..."

A word about the author...

Judy Baker lives in the beautiful western state of Utah. Though she's a southern at heart, she loves the surrounding mountains and the desert valleys. With three grown children and grandchildren, she and her husband enjoy their home with two spoiled fur babies named Stanley and Charlie. When not writing the stories that fill her head, she enjoys camping with her family, stargazing through one of her many telescopes, digging in her wildflower garden, and golfing, or just swinging on the patio while plotting her next story.

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Dear Reader,

I truly hope you enjoyed *The Quartering Act*. A story inspired by my daughter and her friend while they were writing the screenplay.

Please write a review of *The Quartering Act*, and let me know if you loved it, hated it – anything. I'd love your feedback. Please email me at judybakersugg@gmail.com or contact me through my website www.judybakerauthor.com

Thank you for spending time to read this letter of appreciation.

Judy Baker / Anna Sugg