

Chapter 1

Willow Bend

October, Anno Domini 1775

Smoke. Not just smoke, but flesh. Sweet Jesus, but what could it be? This is odd. I must get home. Home. Clicking his tongue at Jupiter and giving the stallion a nudge with his foot, he headed down the only path from Redfield for his own home, called *Willow Bend*. Paul Rogers had just attended a tiresome meeting. He had been invited to come to hear another man speak out against his motherland, England. England, so far away, yet so close, for this was Princess Anne County, on the southeastern coast of the Royal Colony of Virginia. But Paul was disturbed by what he had heard at that meeting. The sentiments against him and his kind were running rampant in these parts. Paulus Augustus Rogers realized with a sinking feeling that he and others like him were becoming fewer and farther between, in these parts. Such were his thoughts as he traveled down the road to his home.

The smell of the smoke was still in his nose as Paul Rogers continued on his ride back to Willow Bend, all the while scanning with his eyes for signs of the fire. There it was: A dark grey stripe in the sky, about a mile ahead and past the wood, around the bend in the dirt road. The smoke got thicker and thicker the farther he traveled down the road. But the acrid and putrid smell burnt his nostrils. He tried to breathe, and it made his eyes water and sting. Covering his nose with his sleeve, Paul looked about for signs of life, praying that no one—no friend—was the victim of the latest attack in these parts.

At once, the horse bucked, nearly throwing him. A child came running out of the wood and straight toward him. It was a little girl, perhaps five years old.

“Oh, sir, help us, help us!” cried the child, barefoot and sooty in her linen smock.

Leaping from his horse, Paul knelt by the little girl and took her into his arms. She cried out, “In there! Our house—in there! Mama! Papa!”

“Stay here and watch my horse for me, child,” said Paul to the girl as he ran through the thick smoke, coughing and hawking, waving his arms against the fumes. Looking all around him, he saw rivulets of blood running from slain animals: Pigs and a cow, some gored and others with their bellies ripped open. And the house had been burned, with nothing left but the crude brick fireplace and the barest frame. The barn was on fire still, and Paul could see the charred carcass of the family’s horse.

Getting to the back of what remained of the house, he found the parents of the small girl, Amelia and Zachary Stebbs. They were unconscious, but breathing still. Finding a bucket with some water, Paul rubbed the faces of the couple, rousing them. The woman coughed and vomited, then looked to find Paul and her husband bending over her.

“Zach? Is that you, Mr. Rogers? They were here, sir, here at my house! They came with their torches and tried to kill us!”

“Who did this to you?” asked Paul of the couple.

“It was them, Mr. Rogers—the plain-shirts. It was the rebels, I tell you, sir!”

Riding back to Redfield, the home of Wilfred and Elyse Johnson, Paul summoned help for the Stebbs, for Redfield was a large plantation, and Zachary Stebbs was a tenant of the Johnsons. But unlike his landlord, Zachary Stebbs was loyal to the English King, George III.

Paul could not get the picture out of his head—the burning house, the screaming child, slain livestock and blood running into the dirt road, all on his only road home from the central part of the county. He felt sick at heart, and sorry for the losses that the poor farmer had incurred. Paul was saddened to hear that Zachary Stebbs had decided to take his family and leave this place. They would sail back to England on the next tide, bearing nothing but the clothing on their backs and what little monies they had left in their coffers, having been spared, but only just. Paul had gotten back on his horse, having given them what money he had in his purse and set the stallion to go as quickly as he could to get home.

His home: large, beautiful, gracious, and welcoming, where he would find his beautiful wife and five nearly grown children, where there was hot tea with scones, a fire burning in the fireplace. *Fire, sweet Jesus, fire!* The day seemed as grey as his mood, the shock of this open attack on Loyalists, hitting him in his gut.

Entering the gates to the estate, Paul saw the great and ancient willow in front of the big house. Its sweeping tendrils swayed with the breeze as if they beckoned him and welcomed him back to his home. He inhaled as he headed down the long path, taking in the smell of autumn with its crispness and mossy scent, savoring the familiarity and security of the place that he and his father had built.

Paul handed his horse over to Ben Stokes, the groomsman, and headed into the house through the back. The slaves turned as they saw his quick and determined strides. He did not bother to stop and greet Hannah, the cook. Paul went into the foyer and straight upstairs to his bedroom. His clothes reeked of fire and death. Smelling first his arm and then his hands, he began to disrobe, wanting to wash the stench of the Stebbs's misfortune off of him.

His wife, Elizabeth, had been sewing in the parlor. She looked up when she heard the familiar sound of her husband's footsteps on the floor in the foyer. She saw him ascend the broad staircase to their suite. She knew that something was amiss. For him to forego greeting her must mean that something had happened. She followed him upstairs, calling him as he entered their room.

Opening the door to their suite, Elizabeth saw Paul yanking his shirt over his neck and throwing it on the floor just outside his dressing room.

“Paul, dear, what is it? What has happened?” she asked, her large hazel eyes intent and searching. She stood with her feet planted by the bed as he coughed.

“Fire. The damned rebels have fired Zach Stebbs's place, Liz.”

He came out of the dressing room in his paisley silk robe to stand by the bed with one hand on his temple and the other holding the tall post of the large bed.

“Oh, my God. Was anyone hurt?” she asked him, clasping her hand over her mouth.

“No, thank God, but the livestock were destroyed, what they didn't take, that is, and Zach and Amelia are leaving. They're going back to Lancaster.”

“Oh, I’m sorry for it.” Elizabeth sat down on the small couch in front of the fireplace in their room. The sun winked its way through the clouds and shone on her auburn hair, and it reminded Paul of the fire that he had just seen. He looked away quickly, taking a deep breath, and he slowly brought his eyes back to her.

“Yes, so am I. It could have been worse, Lizzie, much worse. And it could have been us. It may yet be.”

After a while, Paul dressed for the afternoon. There was the correspondence to read, and the work with the factoring books. He hoped that William was back from town. William would need to hear of this atrocity against the Stebbs.

Heading down the steps and into the lovely foyer, with its tall ceiling and polished wood floor, Paul’s feet soon found the red-patterned Persian rug before he crossed into the large parlor.

Stepping into the parlor first and then to the study, Paulus Augustus Rogers opened the letters on his desk, dividing them into two neat stacks. First, there was the letter from the piedmont, and then there was the list of accounts and so forth from the bank, sent by his lawyer Marcus Thornton. Under this envelope was an odd looking parchment sealed with wax, though without anything distinctive to identify its origins. He turned it over, examining it, puzzled by the cryptic nature of the unmarked letter.

The door was opened by Elizabeth, who was carrying a tray. Looking up, she smiled and it warmed him. She set the tray down on the little serving table next to his desk.

“Tea, darling.” Elizabeth handed the fine porcelain cup and saucer to her husband.

Paul took a sip of the herbal stuff that they called tea. It wasn’t bad—it just wasn’t real tea. He suddenly felt a bit of nostalgia for the tea of his youth. But proper tea was not to be had in the colonies any longer. Paul shook his head in dismay.

“Elizabeth, where is William?” he asked.

“Well, I expect that he is in his room, darling. He put in a good day’s work this morning. He’s such a good boy, God love him.”

“He is not a boy, love. He’s twenty-one years old.”

“I don’t need any reminders, Paul. I am very well aware of the fact that our children are nearly all grown up. They are all fine children.”

“Well, most of them, anyway. At least our eldest son takes his responsibilities seriously, unlike his brother.” Paul’s scowl darkened the tea in his cup as he took a long drink of the herbal stuff.

“Don’t start, Paul. John Peter will be home any time, you’ll see.”

“Mmhhh, we’ll see.” Paul looked out the window, avoiding his wife’s intent gaze.

Elizabeth watched him brood. She knew better than to pursue any more discussion now about their youngest son. “Shall I fetch Will to you, Paul?” she asked in her velvety way.

“Please. I must talk with him. We have some business to take care of. Thank you, dear.”

“Not at all, sweetheart. I have things to attend to with the girls, anyway. Cassandra’s sewing—well, need I say more?” Elizabeth rolled her eyes as she left the study, and Paul chuckled a bit thinking about his spirited second daughter. She was a wonderful combination of his mother and Elizabeth, and Paul adored this girl who was now sixteen.

The girls. Kitty is twenty-two, and ready for marriage, but Cassandra? I don’t know—she’s a bit young, I think. At least Sarah Jane is, to be certain. Plenty of time for her. How did I get to be forty-seven years old? Where has all the time gone, and where are we going?

Opening the seal with his silver-handled letter knife, he read the words that had been written in fine practiced and educated lettering. His face went ashen, and his heart beat in his chest as he read the mysterious missive. His head pounded, and he felt anger and rage. He kept reading the same words over and over again.

*“... and all those who support the King
and his puppets will be burnt out or worse,
all of you Loyalists, and your families, too!”*

Who could have sent such a letter? What manner of man would do such a thing to honorable people who were simply doing what they should? Paul Rogers knew what type of man, but the letter came from someone whose hand he did not recognize. This was not the hand of an illiterate, but the wording was not the language of a gentleman, either. *No surprise there. No gentleman would dare send such a cowardly threat to good honest folk. The cheek of the bastard. And threatening my family! God damn them all to hell.*

Paul Rogers sat at his desk contemplating his life and his family on this evening in early October of 1775. He remembered the three month voyage to Virginia, and their early days there. Paul remembered fondly the diligence that it had taken to clear the land and sow the cotton and peanut seedlings, even after they'd cleared the land. Paul was a man who loved the out of doors, and he thrived in the role of farmer. Yes, Virginia had done very well by him.

Sitting comfortably at his desk, he took stock of the fine furnishings in his house. The house itself was elegant, with its high ceilings and carved molding. Its walls were painted with expensive paints, and the glazed windows let in plenty of natural light. This was a far cry from the four room thatched-roof dwelling of his earlier years.

Paul gazed at the old dogwood tree outside his window, thinking how lovely and beautiful it was. He loved his home and the grounds surrounding the big house. In those early years they had cleared a good portion of the tall spindly pine trees and the oaks and sassafras, in order to build the house and put in the crops. There was a wonderful riding trail along the river. But near the house, the trees provided cool shade in the hot humid Virginia summers. And in the front there was the lone ancient willow tree in the dooryard. Its full sweeping branches seemed to embrace all the folk who inhabited this home and all those who came to visit. It was a welcoming beacon for every family member and their acquaintances.

Sipping his tea, he tasted the aromatic herbs and flower petals. With trade at a near standstill, he had a sudden yearning for the things of his youth, including old-fashioned English tea, as he reminisced about those earlier years of simplicity. But times were difficult, and soon to become harder for all the folk here. He was sure of it. Most of the people in these parts were harboring seditious feelings toward the King, and Paul was increasingly distressed by it. The Olive Branch had been summarily dismissed, and this had angered the people of the American colonies. Paul Rogers was not one to cry out against his king, and he worried over the growing discontent that seemed so prevalent in these parts. *I am an Englishman, and an Englishman I shall always be. The very cheek of these men who call themselves honorable! I'll not have any part in it, and neither will any member of my family. We will live honorably, by God!*

Paul looked at the letter from the piedmont. *Joseph Gordon Leggett of Mt. Athos in Orange County. A rich man, young and well-connected—he wants my daughter.*

And there's the matter with Cassandra's ostensible suitor. He's a good man, but I won't let her marry him if he has financial troubles. Yet, who among us doesn't need help these days? He is a good man, though, and a neighbor.

God, what a time to be thinking about weddings, what with firings and all decency running amuck! Besides all that, we haven't even sold all of the summer crops and trade is poor, all but cut off to the north. There will be dowries to secure and wedding trousseaus, which I'm certain that Elizabeth will insist upon, and why not? A young woman should have finery for her new home.

And then there's Johnny, blast his little hide! Where the hell is he? What does he mean by disappearing without so much as a 'by your leave, Papa'? What right has he to slough his work on the farm, leaving his brother and me to do it for him? Blast that boy!

The farm was doing rather well, all things considered, but with the political climate as it was, their resources were very tight. There was also the matter of the slaves being sick, and the unrest amongst some of them, particularly that new one, Plato. He had cost them plenty, and they could not afford to purchase any more slaves. The summer crops had done well, but there were the taxes to be paid, and they would be due before Christmas. The winter wheat would need to be harvested soon, and there was the matter of securing the dowry money for the girls, as well.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the closed door to the study. Paul sipped at his tea once again before answering the knock, grimacing at the now lukewarm stuff in his porcelain cup.

"Enter!" he called to the person outside his study.

William opened the door. Will was the eldest son and second in birth order in this house. Bearing the tall physical stature of his father, he was strong, though finely built. But unlike his father's raven coloring, he had his mother's auburn hair. His face bore the strong features of Elizabeth's father, John Pearce.

"Good evening to you, Father," said Will. "I see that you have gotten the letters from town."

"Ah, William. How is it then? Did you go to Weatherly's and pick up the plowshares? What about the new bits for the horses?"

"Yes, Papa. They are well mended and the new ones of a good quality. Mr. Weatherly sends his thanks and compliments." William looked at his father, and Paul studied his grown son.

"Sit down, son. I've something to discuss with you. And mind, this stays here, between us. I don't want your sisters to hear about this, at least not yet."

"Of course, Papa. What is it? Something to do with the farm?"

"Yes—well, not exactly, Will. I passed by the home of Zachary Stebbs. It was burnt to the ground, with the fireplace looking like a charred skeleton against the afternoon sky. All of the livestock were killed. Zach is taking his family back to England. They're doing this all over the colony, or so I've heard. It was the rebels, Will."

"I know of this, Papa. The English are doing this to the colonists, too, you know."

"The *English*? What are we, then, if we are not English? I'm not certain that I like the way that sounds, William."

“All right, both sides, then. Are you certain that you are all right, Father? You seem preoccupied with some other nagging matter. If it is about Johnny, well, you know that he always gets himself into it with something, but he is also good at weaseling his way out, too. He’ll be all right. I’m sure of it. I tell you, it’s some bitch of a whore, or the like. Let’s hope that he hasn’t gone and married the woman, if that’s where he’s been, and ...”

“William, look at this.” Paul handed the paper to William, and he read the words silently, and then aloud. “‘... and all those who stand in the way of freedom will be sorry for their misguided allegiance to the puppet King of England.’ Dear Lord! Father, there were so many soldiers in town today. They were hovering around every bend. I swear they’re spying on us.”

“Well, of course they are. They are simply doing their duty as soldiers. It is their responsibility to protect the interests of the Crown. All else is subordinate to that duty.”

“All else, Father? What about our rights as men?”

“Do not suppose to lecture me on rights, William. Did the Stebbs not have a right to life and labor? They are ruined, and it may well have been us. The soldiers are carrying out their orders. Responsibility comes first. You know, I was at Redfield today. Those Patriots, as they call themselves, had some very valid points. But when I saw the face of that frightened little girl and those dead animals ...”

“Yes, Father, I know ...” William closed his mouth, looking at his father.

Paul bit his lip and looked up abruptly, changing the subject.

“I want to discuss something with you. It’s about the girls.”

“The girls, Father? What have they to do with the farm?”

“Nothing, per se, except that both Katherine and Cassandra have men seeking their hands in marriage. I’m not quite sure what to make of it.”

“You act as if that is a bad thing, Papa. Kitty’s twenty-two, Father, and it’s about time. She hurt her reputation when she broke with Robert Kemp. Who is it?”

“A man from the piedmont. His name is Joseph Gordon Leggett.”

“Of Mt. Athos?”

“Yes, the very man. What do you know of him, William?”

“Don’t you know him, Papa?”

“Well, that is the point: I have met him several times, and I have even had a drink with the man, but to say that I know him well is simply not the case. I met him last year when I was in the foothills looking at a tract of property. Do you remember when I was there?” William looked perplexed, and his father suddenly remembered that William was still studying in Williamsburg at that time. “Of course you wouldn’t remember, because you were not there. The thing is, he seems respectful and honorable, but to send a marriage proposal when he has not even met Kitty, well, I find that odd. I would like to know more about him, that’s all. Have you heard anything of him, Will?”

“I know that he is one of the wealthiest men in the central part of the colony. I know that he has an extremely well-planted plantation. I know that he has connections with some family-owned business in England, and I know him to be extremely political.”

“And just how do you know so much, Will? To whom have you been talking? Perhaps I should ask about Mr. Leggett’s associations. He seems to have achieved some notoriety.”

“Well, I suppose that depends on who is actually doing the talking, Father.”

“Go on. Spare nothing. I want to know all that there is to know about him. I’m not just going to hand my daughter over to some man, however wealthy and well-connected he is. Speak.”

“Well, I am not so sure about this. I mean, it’s all hearsay and it may amount to nothing, Father. I hear that his politics are not so certain: That he says one thing and does another.”

“And just what is that supposed to mean?”

“I have heard that he claims openly to support the King, but that he secretly harbors feelings of rebellion. It’s just what I have heard, Father.”

“A serious accusation, indeed, Will.”

“It’s not so awful, Father. Many men in Virginia are doing the very same. Joseph Leggett is likely to be helping behind the scenes, what with his connections in England. He’s probably selling to both sides. There is profit in war, you know.”

“Yes, I know, William. His father is likely making the very cannon that are striking at our friends to the north.”

“And Leggett may be supplying funds to the men here.”

“Seems a bit less than honorable, I think. I think the whole business is less than honorable. We are Englishmen, after all.”

“Yes, and many think that we should be free.”

“Bite your tongue, William. That is treason, and no one in this family will have any part of it.”

“Father, there’s a lot of talk these days. Do calm down.”

“When you have the responsibility of a home and family, you may tell me to calm down. Until that day comes, you will mind your manners, and remember that I am your father. It’s bad enough that Johnny disrespects me by his callousness and immoralities, but I had expected better of you.” Paul did not have the humor for this kind of discussion, not on this day.

Will was tired of being the scapegoat for John Peter’s indiscretions, but took his lumps. He did not want to anger his father and he breathed deeply before replying to him. “I apologize to you, Father. I didn’t mean to be rude. It’s just that you looked so serious, and well ... I’m just sorry.”

Paul Rogers was seized by an impulse and rose quickly from his chair. He stood up and embraced his eldest son. Will returned the hug. William was not afraid to show his affection to his family, but this was unusual for his very English father.

“Are you all right, Father?” He now wore a very concerned expression on his face, and Paul stepped back a little.

“Can a man not embrace his child, Will?”

“Well, yes, of course, Father, but I am not a child.”

“That is quite true, but you are still *my* child. Perhaps I should have done more of this when you were still a boy. But you are a man now, and must be about a man’s business. Ah, William, I’m weary to the bone today. Will you sit down, son?”

William took a chair from the small table that had been set for his father’s tea. The study was small and cozy. There was a small fireplace at the south end of the room. Two dark green leather wing chairs were placed at an angle by the fireplace, casting shadows on the cream painted walls. There was a modest secretary placed next to the tall window. A painted chair rail encircled the room. The furniture was cherry wood of simple Sheraton

design with two cushioned Roman striped chairs in jewel tones of burgundy, sapphire, and emerald situated by the desk.

The refreshments that Paul had on the small table had been only partially consumed, and William looked from the table to his father. He saw the worry behind his father's eyes. He thumped his fingers against the side of his leg and decided to speak first.

"Look, Papa, I'm not certain about Leggett's political leanings. It's all hearsay, and I have no real information, just some men talking at a tavern. I heard them today when I was in town."

"Who were these men? Were they reliable sorts?"

"I did not know them, but they were tradesmen, I'm sure. They did not seem the sort to speak in vain about a man. They were Rebels, Father. They spoke of financial backing for the "Cause," and Joseph Leggett's name was brought up by one of the men and quickly hushed by the others at their table. That's all that I heard. They were not inclined to say much once they noticed that I was there."

"And why is that, Will? I thought you said that you did not know these men."

"Well, I don't. But the Rebels know who we are, Papa. They hate us because you are an ardent supporter of the King. They know who all of the Loyalists are, and the Patriots alike."

"*Patriots?* They call themselves 'Patriots'? Well, they are nothing more than over-puffed traitors. They will hang for their treachery—mark me, William."

"Father, you know that it isn't that simple. Even you agree that the Crown seems to be tightening its arms around the financial throats of the colonies. You said so yourself. If you are worried about your taxes, imagine the poor folk or tradesmen. It isn't just about money, though, and you know it. It is about the freedom that we have enjoyed. You know as well as I do, Father, that if we were in England, you would not be esteemed as you are here. Here, you are a wealthy planter."

"Farmer, Will. I am a farmer."

"Call yourself what you will, Papa. To the poor man and tradesman, you are a well-to-do planter. Do not protest it, Father. You have a very successful farm. No, it is not a large tract of tobacco acreage, as is Leggett's, but it is a good farm, nonetheless. Surely, in your heart you know that it isn't something to be ashamed of, Papa. You have made a very nice living. It was with your hard work and wits, and you have done extremely well. But ask yourself if our way of life would have been possible in England? Many say that the Crown has threatened our very existence."

Paul searched his son's face. What he found was the truth: Coming to this side of the Atlantic had been his good fortune. Had they stayed in England, he would have been condemned to a life of numbers and books. He would not have enjoyed the comforts that he presently had, and the women of his family would not be the genteel ladies that they were esteemed to be here. He knew the truth of William's assertions.

"Let us not argue semantics, son. I thank God every day for the life that I lead. I am proud of my family and of Willow Bend. I saw opportunity, and I grabbed it, with the help of my father, may God give him rest. Still, what has that got to do with Leggett?"

"Only that I think you may have more in common with him than you think you do, Father. He could be a Loyalist, and then again, he may just be on the other side, that's all. I've a feeling that there are more of them than we think. The entire colony is riled against the noose being placed around our necks, and you have to admit it, Papa. I know that

you don't get to the taverns much, but you do attend church and the meetings held in peoples' homes. You know what sentiments are being spoken. Those men may well have been acquaintances of Mr. Joseph Gordon Leggett, even his comrades."

"Tradesmen would hardly be his comrades, Will. They surely do not travel in the same society."

"No, unless they are comrades for a cause. Besides, you yourself are friends with tradesmen. And besides, Mother's father had a printing shop and that makes her the daughter of a shop owner. You never considered yourself above her, did you?"

"No, of course not. Besides, your mother is one of the best educated women in this colony. She helped her father in the shop, you know. I suppose that is one reason that she was so adamant about the girls being educated. Still, with regard to Leggett, what you say may well be true. Could be a ruse, or could be rumor. Yet, rumors usually have their basis in some fact. I'll have to get to the bottom of this one, Will. I will not allow a rebel to marry into this family, and that is that." Paul Rogers suddenly grabbed his forehead with his left hand and held the desk with the other. He felt an unbearable pounding in his head, and he sat down in his chair. "I was about to invite him to our home for the harvest, to attend the Ball. The invitation may never be extended, in light of this recent information." He sat with his legs crossed, holding his head and rubbing his temples. No, this was not good news.

William hid his exasperation at his father's stubbornness, and offered a suggestion.

"Father, why not invite him anyway? You can get to know him better. We can spend time with him before we allow him too much access to Kitty. He may reveal himself and his true political inclinations to us."

"I believe that to be a sound idea, but I remember him as being highly intelligent, so he may not reveal himself to us at all. No, if it comes to that, I will have to be direct, appealing to his sense of honor as an Englishman and a gentleman. Whatever Joseph Gordon Leggett is, he is a gentleman. I will simply ask him what his political leanings are. I will wait for him to feel comfortable enough around us. I will allow him to spend time with the family, but he will have no time alone with your sister. You must help me with this, son. If your good-for-nothing brother were here, I would also enlist his aid, but who knows where he is, and by that time ..."

"Don't worry, Father, we won't just hand Kitty over to him."

"We shall have to see. God in Heaven, but why can't things be simple, as they were when your mother and I married?"

"Simple—you call a four year courtship simple? I call that torture!"

His father chuckled at this. He remembered well the torturous moments when he thought that he and Elizabeth would never be married, and he also remembered his frustration when he wanted to be with her so badly, but they were not yet married.

"Is there something that you wish to tell me, Will? You seem so certain about the meaning of painful courtship. Are you leading up to something, son?"

"Not really, Father, at least, not yet. Not so far as I am concerned, but I did want to talk to you about Cassandra."

"Ah, yes, Cassandra. I had almost forgotten. What about her, son?"

"Father, you said that someone had declared for her. Who is he? Is it someone you know well? Is he a good man? Because I think there's something that you should know

before you accept a proposal from someone on her behalf. Cassandra cares for someone, and not just a little.”

“Who is he? When did this happen? Can a man not know what is going on under his own roof? When has she ever had the opportunity to see a young man? You know that I have told both you and Johnny to look out for the girls. Who is the man?”

“She hasn’t been sneaking around, if that is what you mean. It is all completely innocent and above board, Father. She has seen him at church and in town today. That is all. The fellow is my friend, Jacob Weatherly. He is Jonas Weatherly’s son.”

“The blacksmith?”

“Yes. He’s a good young man, Father. He is not wealthy, but he and his father have a comfortable home close to town, and they have a thriving business. Jacob is my friend, and I know him well. I truly believe that he cares for Cassie. He would make her a good husband.”

“Good husband? He hasn’t even had the guts to come to ask my permission to court her, let alone make a good husband for my daughter. Let him come and talk to me. He may be good, but if I am not mistaken, he has rebellious leanings. I will not give discourse on my feelings about this subject, as you know them well. But he will not marry my daughter if he is a traitor to his country.”

“I do not believe that he would ever commit treason against his country, Father.” William was speaking the truth when he made that statement, but Paul did not realize that William was alluding to the fact that Jacob considered *America* to be his country, not England.

“Let him come and talk to me, then. We shall see. I’ll not answer the other gentleman yet. He can wait. As far as I am concerned, they can all wait. I am so very tired of men trying to take my daughters from me. Let them be mine for just a little bit longer... William, go to the secretary and fetch the whiskey and two glasses. I am tired of cold tea. Have a drink with me.” William obeyed his father and poured out two glasses of the Scotch whiskey.

“What shall we drink to, Father?”

“Let us drink to health, peace and beautiful ladies.”

“To health, then, peace ... and beautiful ladies.”

“To your mother and sisters. Is there anyone you would like to add to the list, William?”

Will hesitated, but added someone to the list. “To Victoria Johnson.”

“Ah, the lovely Miss Johnson ... well, to Miss Johnson.” They tipped their glasses and drank the amber liquid. “So, there is someone! Have you talked to Wilfred yet, Will?”

“Of course not, Father. I haven’t even talked to you yet, because I was waiting for the mess with Johnny to clear up. I did not want to burden you further with this at this time. I truly care for her, Father. I meant to come to you, but I was waiting. Sorry.”

“No need to apologize, son. You haven’t done anything wrong. I have seen the two of you together. You make a handsome couple. She seems a fine young woman, and she is very pretty. Go to Redfield and talk to her father. You have my permission.”

“Thank you, Father. Father ...” All at once, it was William who was seized with the urge to embrace his father. He set his glass down on the desk. His father was sipping his drink when William suddenly put his arms around the well-loved and respected man. Paul almost spilled his scotch, and he chortled in surprise. He then set his glass next to William’s. He wrapped his arms around his son without hesitation. William held his father tightly, as though he were a small boy. The two of them locked arms. They looked

on each other with unconditional love. Then they sat down. They sipped their whiskey, sitting together in silence. No words were needed, no signals, no reading between any lines. They sat as father and son, joined by more than words could convey. They sat there in that study, man to man.

The next day, Paul was working in the fields with Will. He was thinking about all that that they had yet to complete, for winter would soon be upon them. It was difficult to get everything done, and without John Peter to share in their efforts, that meant that they had to do his share, too.

It was just past noon on Friday morning, that the letter from John Peter arrived. Mr. Kemp himself had delivered the sealed parchment. Paul had been at work on the south fields, and Sarah was helping with the hanging of the clean sheets out back.

Cassie was in the parlor with Mother and Kitty, trying to master some new stitch. “Popcorn stitch,” mother had called it. She said that it was one of the easiest ones, but Cassie was having a time of it. Either the loop was too big, or pulled too tight. Cassie’s annoyance at her stitching was getting the best of her. Why could she just not get it right and be done with it? Why couldn’t she just go outside and hang sheets? That would surely be better than this tedious stuff!

Cassie was as fiery as her cinnamon-gold curly locks. She possessed great intelligence and wit, with a hefty punch to match it. In her days of growing up at Willow Bend, she would get into many a scuffle with her brothers and sisters, and she wasn’t afraid to throw her fist at either of her brothers. She could outfight John Peter when they were small. She was the second daughter, younger than both of her brothers and eldest sister, Kitty. And for all that she loved to read, she loved the outdoors even more. And she loathed household arts, and talks of marriage and suitable men, and all the things that went with being a fine-bred young woman in the colony of Virginia.

When Mr. Kemp rode up, both Cassie and her mother looked up. It was then that Kitty ducked into the study. The windows were open, a beautiful Indian summer day. Cassie was sitting close to the window, squinting into her needlework when he called out to her.

“Good day to you, Cassandra!”

“Good day, Mr. Kemp! How do you do?” Cassie called back to him. Mother scolded her for calling out the window that way. Cassie demurred, and the two of them went to the front door. Thomas, the house slave, opened the stately door to the house as Elizabeth followed him into the foyer.

“Good afternoon, Alistair. Welcome to you. Do come in. Cassandra, go and tell Hannah to set the luncheon table for one more,” said Elizabeth as she waved her hand in direction of the parlor.

Alistair Kemp entered the big house, and bowed to his friend’s wife. “Your servant, madam.” He straightened up, and Elizabeth gave a curtsy.

“How are you, Alistair? How is Sally Ann? It has been so long since we have had tea. Have you been busy at the mercantile?”

“Yes, Elizabeth, business is good enough—partly, I think, due to the fact that we are the only mercantile business in this part of the county, and folk depend on us so much. I have no complaints. We prosper, or at least we are comfortable enough, thank the Lord.”

“Indeed, Alistair. We are all blessed. How is your Robert? I am sorry about it all, truly.” Elizabeth was referring to the young man who had been spurned by Kitty. She was sincere. She had been upset with Katherine over her treatment of Robert Kemp. It had been very strained between the Rogers and the Kemp families in the weeks since Kitty had spurned young Robert, who was heir to the Kemp mercantile business.

“Robert is tolerably well, Elizabeth. He is a good lad, and a true help to us. He has a keen business sense about him, you know. He has some new ideas for the mercantile, and I am paying close attention to them. I thank you for asking.” Alistair Kemp could not help but to brag on his only son, especially to the Rogerses.

“I am glad of it. I have always been fond of your boy, Alistair. Do sit down.” Alistair Robert Kemp sat in the proffered seat, and began to get himself situated and comfortable.

Alistair smiled politely towards the pretty Elizabeth Pearce Rogers. She had always been a pretty woman, and he still admired her greatly. He had never quite gotten over her.

“I am so glad to see you. You will stay and have luncheon with us, won’t you, Alistair?”

“Why, thank you, Elizabeth. I’d like that very much.”

Elizabeth rang her bell and Thomas was summoned to go find Paul. He left quickly, set on his task, winding his way down the paths to the southern fields.

Alistair gazed thoughtfully at the beautiful Elizabeth Rogers. She hadn’t changed much in all those years. She and Paul seemed blissfully content. They had a large family, and that had to have come from somewhere. Alistair knew that they were wealthy. Paul’s farm was prosperous and he lived in a stately house that was beautifully appointed and well-furnished. It was tasteful and gracious. Yes, Paul had done well by Elizabeth Pearce. He was shaken out of his envious musings by her pleasant voice.

“How are things at the store, Alistair? Is all well?” Elizabeth asked the man seated in her parlor. He was wearing his everyday clothing and she noticed that he still bit his nails. He still had that nervousness about him, the same as he had had when they were youngsters. His hair had thinned a bit, but was still that beautiful black. He had a long face, and small blue eyes. He was a rather good looking man, still.

He was about to answer her when Paul came walking into the parlor. “Hello, my friend. What brings you all the way out here?” asked a surprised Paul.

“Came to check up on you.” There was an easy smile sent to his host, and it was returned with warmth. “Oh, not really, Paul. I have something for you. It is a letter, from your Johnny, I think. I don’t mean to pry, but word has gotten to us that he was missing again, and so, I thought that I would bring it along myself. I could have sent it by Jennings, but I didn’t think you’d want any more talk, so I brought it along myself.”

“I thank you for your sensitivity and discretion, my friend,” Paul replied to Alistair. He gave his friend a grateful smile, breathed deeply and took the letter from Alistair’s outstretched hand. Elizabeth was anxiously awaiting the opening of the seal. Kemp pretended to be interested in something outside, and wandered over to the window. Paul sat down and opened the letter, as Elizabeth looked over his shoulder. The letter had been sent by post. It was postmarked, New Bern, North Carolina. It read:

2 October, 1775

Dearest Mama and Papa,

I am sure that you are no doubt at your wits end, and I am most heartily sorry to have caused you any anguish. I am well. By the time that this letter arrives in Virginia I will have been nearly a fortnight in North Carolina at the behest of my friend, Lord Henry Archibald Hannaford.

Archie and I have been the guests of His Excellency, the Royal Governor, Josiah Martin. We have been to a ball, and have had some wonderful converse. I am not completely certain when I shall return home, but I hope that you will see fit to send some money to the address on this letter, as I do not wish to transgress on either the hospitality of my host, or the generosity of my friend. Hoping that all is well, I remain

*Your loving son,
John Peter Rogers.*

It was Paul who spoke first. “North Carolina? How in hell did he get to North Carolina? How safe can it be? The Governor has only just been back at the palace. You know how poorly Loyalists are treated in that part of the colony. Surely he is trying to secure funding and support for the Crown. I suppose that he needs all of the wealthy men that he can get on his side. Which brings me to this: Who is this ‘Archie’, Lord or not? What gives Johnny the right to come and go as he pleases?”

Elizabeth made a small gesture towards their guest, and Paul bit his lip. He sat on the pale blue couch and fumed. Kemp had his arms behind his back, staring out the window. Just then, he turned around, the concern evident on his face.

“Look, Paul, I don’t have to stay for lunch. I think this a bad time, and I would be happy to go, really. You don’t need a stranger around. I am sorry for your troubles with your boy. My son gives me no grief. My girl, on the other hand ... Well, never mind. Have your lunch in peace, if it be possible. I’ll just go.”

“Nonsense, Alistair, you will take luncheon with us. No, no, I insist. Paul and I have not seen you in so long, and we would love your company, truley. And you are not a stranger, you know.”

Paul broke in, “That is true, Alistair. Do stay and break bread with us. It has been far too long. I apologize for the awkwardness of the situation. My son is defiant, irresponsible, and decadent. It is a sad moment for a father to have to say it about his own child. But I speak the truth when I say that the boy is a constant disappointment.”

Alistair saw that Elizabeth was about to cry and he quickly changed the subject to the meal that they would soon share. “Do you still have that little Scotswoman for a cook? I have never had better bread than that woman bakes.”

Elizabeth spoke, “Oh, yes, we do. Hannah is truly remarkable. She is very capable in the kitchen, and she makes our lives so much easier. We are truly blessed to have her as part of our household. She manages the house slaves well, and she does it all without giving us a worry. She is a loyal servant, praise God.”

Just then, Cassandra came in, announcing that lunch would be served in five minutes. The three adults walked out of the parlor first, and Elizabeth called behind her, "Kitty, do come out of the study and properly greet Mr. Kemp. It is time for luncheon."

Kitty came out of Father's study looking flustered, and gave a small curtsy. Mr. Kemp bowed slightly, and murmured some pleasantries to her. He noted how lovely she was, more like her father than her mother. She was tall and lean, with the same shiny black hair and blue eyes that her father had. She smiled nervously, and did not make eye contact with the man. He was amused. She was embarrassed. *At least that is over with*, they had both thought. Cassie actually felt sorry for her sister. She made sure to catch Kitty's eye and gave her a sympathetic smile. The two sisters followed the older adults out of the parlor and into the lovely red-painted dining room. They all took their places at the table. Paul was at one end and Elizabeth at the other. Alistair Kemp sat to Elizabeth's right, and one by one the children sat down. They enjoyed a nice meal of roasted capon with stuffing, and boiled carrots with glazed onions. They had the delicious bread that Alistair so enjoyed, topped off with a nice Virginia wine. There was pleasant conversation, and all in all, it was a most satisfying meal for everyone.

Mr. Kemp left an hour and a half later. His horse had been properly fed and groomed. William had seen to that. The two elder men shook hands and promised to have a pint when Paul would be in town next week. Alistair Kemp got on his horse and rode down the lane and away from the farm. He waved as he neared the end of the lane, and the women of the family went inside. Paul gave his wife a kiss on the cheek and headed back down to the fields, William just behind him. The girls went into the parlor to get to their afternoon work of embroidery. Betsy, the pretty house slave, cleared the table and linens. She was tall and slender. Her long graceful fingers reached for the items left on the table. She looked down as the white women took their places on the couch, and she went about the business of a house slave. The afternoon passed, and the evening. There were no more surprises that day.

That night, as Paul and Elizabeth were getting ready for bed, each of them felt the weight of John Peter's letter. Paul got out of his clothing and he went to his wash basin. He poured water into it and began to wash liberally. He took his long black hair out of its ribbon, and brushed it. He was in his dressing room when he heard his wife sniffing and clearing her throat. *Damn that boy. See how he treats his mother?! The cheek! I'd like to throttle him for this. "Please send money." Money, indeed. It always comes down to money.*

"Paul?" Elizabeth called out to her husband.

He was quick to answer her.

"Yes, Lizzie, I'm right here. I'll be there in just a moment, dear." Paul pulled his linen night shirt over his head and went to meet his wife in their bed chamber. Elizabeth was in her pale violet robe of satin. It was tied at the neckline. Her hair had been taken down and it was brushed. Her beautiful hair: The thick wavy tresses were down to her waist. To him, she had changed very little in the twenty-three years that they had been married. She had borne him six children, and still had a shapely figure. Her eyes were beginning to show lines around them, though, and John Peter was probably the reason for it, and especially tonight.

"Paul, how could he? What have we done, that our son should treat us with such indifference? Where did we go wrong?" She began to cry once again, and Paul could not

bear to see her sad. He crossed over to his wife and embraced her. She held him tightly and sobbed into his chest.

“Well, at least we know that he is all right, Lizzie.”

“Do we? How do we know that he is all right? And who is this Lord Hannaford? I have never heard him mention that name before. What can you find out about the fellow? Does William know anything about him?”

“I asked Will, and he says that the name is familiar, but he was surprised to hear that Johnny was with the chap. Will seems concerned. He says that he doesn’t know much about this Archie, but I think he may have been lying. If I know Will, he’ll have the goods on this Lord Hannaford in no time. I’d be willing to stake the house on it.”

“Please don’t even talk like that, darling. One spendthrift and gambler is far too much for this family, let alone having you make such declarations.”

Paul took the mild rebuke for the frustration that it came from, and just gave his wife a half-smile. “At least we know that it was his hand that drafted the letter. The wording was his, as well. Yes, in my heart of hearts, I do believe that the boy is all right. Damn! Could he think of anyone but himself? There is so much on this family—what with the taxes coming due in a month and a half’s time, and the dowries for the girls, not to mention the firings all about the county. I tell you, Liz, he could not have chosen a worse time for his fun and games.”

“And what of the girls, Paul? Will this Leggett make a good match for our Kitty? He seems well-connected, and a good provider. But I saw you exchange glances with Will when his name was brought up at dinner. What did that mean?”

“Nothing, my dear. It’s just that we know so little of him, other than the size of his bank account. I have said it, and I mean it: I will not just hand my daughters over to anyone. These men will have to be counted as worthy. I mentioned him only so that Katherine could hear his name, that’s all. I plan to invite him to spend the harvest-time with us and attend the Ball. What do you think?”

“I think that would be fine. And what of Cassandra? Will you be as leery about her suitor? Is he to be trusted?”

“No man is simply to be trusted with my daughters, as far as I am concerned. I have to do more checking on him. I’m not so sure that he would do, even if he were the Heir to the Throne.”

“Why ever not? I know that Cassandra is your favorite child. Do not even make an attempt to deny it, Paul. It is all right. Do you think that I do not have a favorite?” (He knew that she did.) “She is headstrong and willful, but she is a very good girl. And *you* have done well with a strong-willed woman, have you not?” She gave him a flirtatious smile and he returned it with a wide grin, one that she recognized well. She squeezed him round his middle.

It was that playfulness about her that he so loved. He laughed lightly and held her in silence for a moment. He had to break that magical feeling for just a minute or two.

“You know, Will has informed me that our daughter, Cassandra, may have already formed a genuine attachment with one Jacob Weatherly.”

“The young blacksmith? Isn’t he one of William’s fellows from school? I was happy that he and Will remained friends, even after Jacob began the apprenticeship with his father. He is a good boy, as I recall. He is certainly good looking, with that golden hair

and tall strong stature of his. They would certainly make a handsome match. He is the one you're speaking of, is he not, dear?"

"Yes, dear, that is the very man." He was studying her for her reaction. Women were always making couples out of people. He swore that it was a feminine trait.

"It seems that they have been eyeing each other in church, and they spent a little time together in town yesterday. William, as you know, is quite fond of him. I'm not so sure, though." Paul shot his eyes warily at his wife.

"Why not? His father is a kindly enough man, and his business is extremely profitable. God knows you send enough their way. What is it?"

"It is his politics. You know how I feel about those damned rebels, Lizzie."

With this, Elizabeth gave a long-suffering sigh and rolled her eyes at her husband. "Must it always come down to politics and money where men are concerned? Mayhap she cares for the boy. You do want your daughter to be happy, do you not? If she loves the boy, Paul—"

"I will be the judge of what will make her happy. She is my daughter, and I will do my best to assure her of a good future. In any case, it is all a bit premature. He hasn't even talked to me yet."

"You are not an easy man to approach when it comes to your daughters, Paul Rogers. Do you recall approaching my father? Don't forget how much we were in love. I would not give up on you, no matter how much Father tried to dissuade me. Do you think that Cassandra is any different?" Elizabeth was very matter-of-fact about their courtship.

"I would hope that she would be respectful of her father, Elizabeth. But yes, my love, you were very loyal to me and I shall forever love you for that. Still, this is not the same, darling. We are living in turbulent times, and a man's political ideals must be looked at with great care. Would you want to see your son-in-law put in prison, beaten, or worse? Do you think that I want to see my child suffer in any way? It isn't just that I cannot abide a traitor; it is that the scourge will fall on our doorstep, as well. And I don't want to see my daughter made into a widow early, with children and no husband to help her. Don't you see? You say that it isn't just about politics, and you are correct in this. But it is most certainly not just about love. The issue is more complex than that, Elizabeth."

She acceded to this with a nod.

"We can rehash it all on the morrow. Let's go to bed, Lizzie. I'm tired of talking about the girls and Johnny. I'm tired of talking about daughter-stealing men. I've got a pounding head, and I can think of only one cure for it." He gave her a seductive smile and raised his eyebrows. She gave him a little cuff on the arm and a coquettish giggle. Paul Rogers pulled his wife to him and held her close to his body. She could feel him quickening as he undid the satin bow at the neckline of her robe. The ivory silk gown beneath showed her still-beautiful breasts to their advantage. He pushed the capped sleeves off her slight shoulders and made the gown tumble to the floor. She pulled the night-shirt up and over his head. She smiled that familiar, half-lidded smile reserved for him alone. Backing up steps at the side of the bed, Elizabeth took hold of Paul's hands and pulled him to her as they kissed. She opened her mouth without hesitation, and she let his tongue caress hers. She sat at the edge of the bed and moved back so that he could climb up the three small steps to get inside the coverings with her. Their bed was comfortable, familiar, big,

and warm. Paul drew Elizabeth into his arms and made passionate love to his wife. Theirs was a long-standing and well-known love, for each knew very well how to navigate the body of the other. They had been joined for more than half of their lives. How wonderful to find that love and security in another! They fell asleep wrapped in each other's arms, content to be just Paul and Elizabeth ... not thinking about children, suitors, rebels, or His Majesty.