



I Walk My Hill
Clark P. Lovrien

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-A Family Story-

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Second Edition

2019

ISBN:

978-1-312-87587-6

Part One - Sophia's Time

CAST OF FAMILY CHARACTERS

Lois Hoyt (Married Peter Lovrien, Feb 07, 1810)

Aunt Hannah Hoyt (Lois Hoyt's younger sister)

Samuel Lovering (Father to Samuel Lovrien)

Samuel Lovrien (Father to Peter Lovrien)

Mehita Rowe (Married Samuel Lovrien, Aug 03, 1775)

John Rowe (*Mehita's Father*)

Hannah Rowe (*Mehita's Mother*)

Peter Lovrien (Father to George W. Lovrien)

Aunt Hannah Hoyt (George W. was her ward from age 2)

George W. Lovrien (Married Sophia Bixby, May 01, 1842)

Sophia Bixby (Wife to George, Sister to Marie Bixby)

George H. Lovrien (*Son to George W. & Sophia*)

Hannah Lovrien (Daughter to George W. & Sophia)

Frank Lovrien (*Son to George W. & Sophia*)

Marcella Lovrien (Daughter to George W. & Sophia)

James Lovrien (*Son to George W. & Sophia*)

Marie Bixby (Married Joseph Patten, Sister to Sophia)

Author's Note

I wanted my family genealogy to be more than names, dates, deaths, and marriages, so I wrote this book. The family members written of in this book were all real people that lived, loved and died. The names, dates and locations of their lives are from the pages of our family genealogy records; much of it researched by members that came before me.

Beginning from the basic historical documents, I took the liberty of re-imagining day to day events in order to create a continuous story. It is my hope that the narrative style will bring these characters to life for generations to come. My research, shown in the bibliography, helped to provide my story with its factual components. By interspersing actual quotes from other historical writings, I have sought to establish both the mood and backdrop in factual American history. Each instance of quotation has been footnoted, but the more scholarly reader will notice that I have valued the “voice and delivery” of historical figures over the typical conventions of research style presentations: *This is a piece of fiction using historical research in a creative way.* I offer this introduction as a means of both caution and justification. I openly state that not all of the words are my own, some are in fact the words of either real people or historians of that era that seemed most fitting placed “as if” they were the words of my characters or narrators. Any materials still under copyright have been respected, footnoted and utilized in my own words. Older materials, which

maintain the voice of people of that era, seemed more valuable when left intact as “flavor text” and footnoted.

I must state that no source named in the bibliography should be held responsible for my final utilization of material. Sole responsibility for omissions or errors is my own. My story is historical fiction based on real family members’ lives. I wrote this story for my enjoyment with the hope of keeping interest in genealogy for the next generation of Lovrien’s. It is my desire to stimulate others to use this book as a template to write their own family stories and create interest in their personal family histories.

Prologue

Rutland, Iowa, March 10, 1877

Aunt Hannah kept watch at Sophia's bedside; the kerosene lamp low and the hour late. A warm soft glow of light casts a pale hue on the dying woman's face; Sophia struggles to breathe. With each haggard breath she drifts closer...her time to pass. Sophia's family waits for her death; now it's Aunt Hannah's turn to keep vigil. Dear old Aunt Hannah! Frail, aged, and tired; witness of far too many loved ones exhausting their final rattle.

With Sophia's passing, Aunt Hannah will have out-lived being anyone's real "Aunt." More death, and more worthless change in Hannah's life. No one now living remembers her before the label "Aunt" was bestrode her... Lost long ago, the years when even Aunt Hannah was a child and young woman...People don't get it right! No one will call her "Great Aunt Hannah," what's so "Great" about being this old, anyway? Her title, used correctly, will be of no importance to anyone; "Aunt Hannah" will forever remain her only handle.

Beside Sophia's bed, the old aunt sleeps in a chair. Sophia no longer labors to live, finding peace; she allows a little life to slip away in each quiet breath. Sophia's daughter, Marcella, awakens Aunt Hannah with a touch. The vigil will now be Marcella's. Beside the dying woman's bed she will wait through the late hours of this night. Aunt Hannah, old and unsteady on her feet, uses a hand along the wall to guide her way down the dark hall. She is

drawn to the light from the kitchen. In that warm room, Frank is seated at the round oak kitchen table holding a blue porcelain cup of hot steaming coffee. Wide awake, he gives Aunt Hannah a look; his wild eyes flash. His eyes ignite, whenever he is either angry or just thinking hard. These eyes often say more than his mouth. Frank, a better listener than talker, knows Aunt Hannah's mood and pours her a cup of hot brew. Aunt Hannah's hurting and needs to talk.

Talk they will. For the next few nights these two unlikely companions will pass the hours sharing stories, drinking coffee, and waiting for Sophia's time.

Chapter One

Samuel's Story

L O V E R I N G, Samuel Lovering; my father's name, also mine, given to us at birth, but by a twist of events it will not be the name I'll be buried with. Living my boyhood dream may have brought me to this end.

Mother said I was just dreaming; I called it my future. Somehow the future I wanted and the life I lived came together. This future swept along the events of my life, often out of my control, making it difficult to have changed and truly a waste of time pondering how I could have lived differently; it was what it was.

As a boy, my future had a strong hold on me. It often stopped me dead in my tracks. Like the time Mother sent me out for fire wood. When I did not return promptly, she caught me standing there by the wood pile looking far off dreaming with my eyes wide open. Mother gave me a swat to get my attention, and declared "Samuel Lovering, you are slower than molasses in January." I don't think I was ever slow, just too busy thinking. I'd be thinking of great thoughts like: fighting a bear with just my knife, getting hurt bad and pulling an arrow out of my leg, or killing a deer with one long shot from my musket. I was always busy even when she caught me looking far off daydreaming. My desire to live these fantasies burned inside me throughout my entire

boyhood. I could hardly wait to grow up and seek a life of adventure in the wilderness frontier. My dream was common among the boys I played with in my childhood village of Kingston, New Hampshire. We all wanted to be Frontiersmen, carry a long rifle, like the heroic legends that often passed through our town. Men of the wild like Major Ebenezer Stevens, Robert Rogers or John Stark. These were great men that lived lives of action on the frontier. Wild tales were often told of these men that every boy in Kingston wanted to hear. Like the story of young John Stark, captured by Abenaki warriors while his party hunted and trapped along the Baker River. During his capture, David Stinson was shot and killed but Stark's brother, William, was able to escape down river in his canoe. Stark and his fellow prisoner, Amos Eastman, were forced to run a gauntlet of warriors, two lines of young braves swinging sticks to beat them down. Amos was made to enter first, into the canapé of warrior's clubs, and he was severely beaten to the ground. Stark followed Amos into the gauntlet, but while singing a taunting song in their native tongue, he grabbed a stick from a warrior and struck back, attacking the young braves so aggressively they backed away from him, causing the older warriors to laugh as they watched. The old chief found Stark's actions fearless, thus he awarded Stark higher status and acceptance into their tribe; John spent the winter with the Abenaki.

During the French & Indian War, John Stark served as second in command under Robert Rogers of the famous Rogers' Rangers. The Rangers were formed because British troops were not prepared to engage the French and Indians in the wilderness of America. "The British sent Crown forces from England to fortify

the colonies and fight the French and Indian invaders, but it was necessary to recruit soldiers from the colonial population. The British army found that fighting an enemy in the near-wilderness of North America was too much for their massed regiments. The dense forests and mountainous terrain required fighting men who knew the habits of the enemy and could serve effectively as scouts and skirmishers.”^[1] Rangers were able to operate in mountainous terrain or harsh winter conditions, traveling on snowshoes if necessary to undertake winter wilderness raids against French settlements and military emplacements. Rangers were one of the few non-Indian forces able to fight in such inhospitable conditions.

Robert Rogers, of New Hampshire, formed the most famous of these ranger companies, Rogers’ Rangers. The rangers proved indispensable and their ranks grew to twelve companies, with Rogers acting as their commandant as well as direct commander of his own company. Rogers wrote the 28 “**Rules of Ranging**”; however, the British regulars found them unorthodox and treated the rangers poorly during the war.

When British General Jeffery Amherst ordered Rogers’ Rangers north to attack an Abenaki Indian village, John Stark by now second-in-command of all ranger companies, refused to accompany the attacking force out of respect for his Indian family residing there. Stark returned to New Hampshire. John Stark knew what was right; he was a great man.

The famous Major Stevens died 1749 in Kingston five years before I was born there, but his exploits still lived on, retold often by the men of my town. Major Stevens even had a fort named after him, Stevenstown Fort located along the Merrimack River, built on the eight acres of cleared land once cultivated by Philip Call. The Fort and the surrounding land later became the town of Salisbury, New Hampshire. To me, Salisbury was the frontier. I heard the stories and longed to see it.

When first settled, Salisbury was the northern most outpost, in-habituated by white men, in the colony of New Hampshire. *"For several years after its settlement there rose no smoke from the habitation of any white man between Salisbury and the settlements on the rivers of Canada. Her women were slain by the tomahawk, and her men and maidens ambushed, seized, made to run the gauntlet and carried away into captivity; while the inhabitants of other towns were obliged to abandon their recently-made homes, the stalwart inhabitants of Salisbury stood firm, built their cabins and defended them."*[\[2\]](#)

My Father, a planter, had even been to Salisbury. He spent three months at Stevenstown Fort in 1755 during the French & Indian War. *"Early in the winter of 1755, Governor Wentworth ordered Colonel Joseph Blanchard, of Dunstable, to raise a regiment of six hundred men, and to rendezvous at the Salisbury Fort. Before Blanchard began transporting troops up the river from Salisbury Fort, authorities ordered the enlistment of three hundred men to take their place. They were mustered into service about the 20th of September, 1755, and were discharged at the end of three months."*[\[3\]](#) In this regiment the name of Samuel Lovering of

Kingston, New Hampshire, my Father, is found.

When my brother Joseph and I left home, October of 1771, seeking a life of adventure in the wilderness of New Hampshire, we went to Salisbury. To us, Salisbury was the frontier we yearned to set eyes on. Father told us stories of this wilderness and we wanted to be part of it.



[1] Fitzgerald & Kavanaugh, Roger's Ranger's Educational Web Site, 1998

[2] Dearborn, The History of Salisbury, New Hampshire, published 1890, page 4

[3] Dearborn, *The History of Salisbury, New Hampshire*, published 1890, page 198

Chapter Two

Salisbury

October, 1771

FATHER OFTEN TELLS me, “Samuel, you’re still too young to go off alone,” but young or not I’m trying to tell Pa, I’ve done enough farming for one lifetime. I’m seventeen. I’ve grown up tall and lean, much like my older brother Joseph, only he has to look up to see into my eyes. I am about half a hand taller than my older brother Joe. Pa says I’m good at farming, work hard, but have no heart for it. He thinks he can change me and has tried. All summer I’ve refused to sleep in his house, making my bed out back between the two old maples. My sleeping arrangement makes Pa angry and it does not help matters that the neighbors tease him about his crazy son. Oh I still work the land and Ma makes me come in to eat, but Pa will no longer tell me what to do. I told him to expect me gone after harvest.

WHEN I WOKE today, with the maple leaves gathering red around my bedroll, I’m no longer a farmer. The harvest is complete. I will now do as I please. The sun is long up but not me. I’ve still some thinking to do; having spent the last few years preparing for this day, now that it’s here, I’m slow to start. During these years I’ve hunted and trapped to buy or trade for all the gear and supplies I’ll need to start my new life in the wilderness. Ownership of my Pennsylvania long rifle gives me pride. I’m told

pride is a sin, but we don't see many long rifles in these parts. Most men here carry a smooth bore musket, or trade gun, built by the thousands in France and England. The American long rifle is crafted here by our gunsmiths; in the northern Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, Christian's Spring in Pennsylvania and in the Salem area of North Carolina, and is the weapon of choice on the frontier. My rifle was built in Pennsylvania, and in expert hands can strike the dead center of a small melon at over three hundred yards. The smooth bore musket, used by most Americans is only accurate at ranges of less than one hundred yards. Frontiersmen and market hunters preferred the long rifle due to its longer range. The choice of military men is the musket because it can be reloaded in twenty seconds or less. The long rifle requires for most a full minute to reload, but I can accomplish this task within forty seconds. I practice each time the gun is reloaded, counting to myself to become as fast as possible. I touch the wooden stock of my rifle that lies beside me in my bedroll. My rifle will keep me alive and earn me a living.

Joseph, looking not yet awake, stands outside the house drinking a cup of hot tea as he looks my way. "Getting up little brother, or will you spend your life dreaming? Ma's got food on the table and wants to know your plans."

We all worked long after dark last evening, making everyone slow this morning. "I'm up." Wrapping my bedroll in its oil skin cloth, I brush back my thick dark hair, pick up my rifle and head for the house. Joseph is inside by the time I reach the door, hang my gun on the wall and go in. Everyone, but Pa, is at the table. My younger sister Abigail sits sleepy eyed in her chair. "Morning

Ma, where's Pa?"

Ma puts the hot corn cakes on the table and gives me a look. "He's gone to Kingston to do some trading. Samuel, what I want from you, young man, is your plans. It's about time you start talking and telling me your mind. You and your Father can act like a couple of old bulls, but I'm your Mother so sit down at this table and start your mouth a going!"

I wrap my large hands around Mother's face, move my eyes close to hers and see she is holding back tears. "Ma, I'll be fine. Stop fretting over me." Mother's eyes fill with tears as she pulls away and turns her head. "Mother, I give you my word, I'll be safe."

We all sit at the table, eat and act like Mother has not been crying. Joseph finally breaks the silence by saying, "It appears to me that in order to keep my little brother safe and Ma from worry, I'll have to go along with Samuel to look after him. Anyway it's been on my mind to do so for some time now."

Pa steps in the open doorway, having just returned from Kingston. "Joseph, Samuel, come outside, see what I have for you!"

My parents always surprise me by knowing more than I think they do. Joseph had not told them he was planning to come with me to Salisbury, yet Pa bought supplies for both of us: a good wet stone to keep our axe sharp, powder, lead and dry goods. Ma was crying 'cause she already knows Joseph and I will be leaving

together. Pa even slips Joseph a small bag of coins, walking around money, for a drink or meal during our journey. I reckon they've been reading my blue eyes, my secrets for over seventeen years; I often forget this, and underestimate how well they truly know me. It's when I think, no one understands me; they prove me wrong.

TWO HOURS BEFORE first light the following morning we start out on foot for Salisbury. Everything we own, we carry. At Concord, New Hampshire, sixteen miles south of the village of Salisbury, we cross the Merrimack River and followed the road to the north. The lands of Salisbury are more than that of a small village. Salisbury is a large, six mile square, tract of land, more like a township, located on the west bank of the Merrimack River, bordered on the south by the lands of Contoocook. To the west a considerable portion of Kearsage Mountain is within the bounds of Salisbury. The landscape of Salisbury is that of rugged hills and trees. Norway and White Pines are found along the river, with native hard woods covering the uplands. Mount Pisgah, a hill near the center of the village was once used for signal fires during the perilous days of Indian raids.

THE VILLAGE OF Salisbury is not as wild and unsettled as we pictured in our minds. In the twenty-nine thousand acres that makes up Salisbury, there are over four hundred people living here when we arrive. But the hunting is still good to the west, so we set up our camp on a tall hill not far from the village. The first week is spent building a hunter's shelter on the southwest slope of our hill. It is to serve as our home for the winter, although we'll not be there much, spending most of our time hunting and trapping in the lands to the west.

BY SPRING WE are tired of eating deer meat and have a large pile of hides and pelts to trade. The Greenleaf Store[\[4\]](#) at South Road in the village offers us our best trade. Samuel Greenleaf, the store's owner is impressed by our winter's work and offers us a line of credit at his store. Pa always warned us of debt, so we thank Greenleaf and take our trade in pounds sterling. With coins in hand, warmth of the sun on our face, we take a meal of roast beef, gravy and warm fresh bread on the tables outside Pettengill's Tavern.

Joseph, finishes his meal, packs a house pipe with tobacco and begins to smoke. "Sam, I'll be heading back to Kingston tomorrow to help Pa do his planting, but I'll be back here next winter to hunt and trap. Are you coming with me?"

I watch the smoke curl from the pipe. Joseph has good reason to return and help Pa farm, being the oldest son, the land will some day be his. I have no good reason or land to return for; my future will be here in Salisbury. "Joe, you go back without me, I like Salisbury; I'm staying here to build a cabin on the side of our hill. I won't do any more planting for Pa."

THE NEXT MORNING Joseph starts out for Kingston traveling fast and light with only his musket, silver coins, bedroll and clothes on his back. I walk my hill, study it to locate the best site for a cabin. I watch the sun as its light changes on my hill throughout the day. Joseph and I naturally picked the southwest side of the hill, for our winter camp, to get the most sunlight and for its view of Kearsage Mountain. My hill is steep and tall, with a good view of the Merrimack River from its top, but that's not a

place for a cabin. Part way up the southwest slope will be my cabin site, the place where the land flattens on that side of the hill. I drop my first tree for a cabin, as the sun sets in the west.



[4] Dearborn, *The History of Salisbury, New Hampshire*, page 277, The Greenleaf Store was not built in Salisbury until about 1794.

Chapter Three

Lovering Hill

THE DAYS PASS quickly and I have no time for the people in the village. Work on my cabin progresses, but there is still time to fish in my stream and sit in the sun.

I FIGURE TODAY is Saturday; I have a mind to go to town for a fine meal. I wash, shave, comb my dark hair and put on my best clothes for this occasion. Leaving my rifle at the cabin, I start my walk to the village. I choose not to follow our path, but bushwhack my way through the heavy woods.

The bright sun has difficulty cutting through the overhanging trees, but in the clearings I find berries to eat. As I eat my berries, I note movement in the trees on the hillside below me. I watch, wait and see her step out from the trees to pick berries; a young woman, basket in her hand, wearing a pretty blue dress, her loose blond hair hangs to her shoulders. As I watch her pick berries, she moves out of my sight; blocked by the hill crest. I quickly climb the tall tree beside me, hoping to catch another view of this woman. My heart races as I reach the furthest height I can climb in this tree. I look for her. As my eyes search the woods below, the pretty girl in the blue dress appears over the crest of the hill and walks towards my tree. I slow my breathing and hold my breath as she places her basket on the ground, pulls up her skirt and squats with her back to my tree. I almost laugh when I realize she is going

to relieve herself at the base of my tree. Out of nowhere a small black bear rounds the tree and begins eating the berries in her basket. The startled, pretty young woman, in a blue dress, with golden hair, runs leaving her basket with the bear. With the wave of my hands I chase the bear from the empty basket. As I touch its handle a vision of its owner plays through my mind like a song. The walk to the village is like a dream; I could not shake the strong feelings racing through my head and into my heart.

I return to this world when I see her, the young woman in the blue dress, standing outside the Greenleaf Store. My brother Joe and I thought it great sport to tease our younger sister, Abigail; make her scream, laugh and sometimes cry. It was fun and Abigail loves us. I approach the young woman in the blue dress with the intent to tease her. I hold the basket up in front of her and my eyes met hers. "I'm here to return your basket."

The look of confusion, then concern flashes across her face. "How is it you think it's mine?"

"A bear asked me to return it to you."

"What are you saying Sir?" Her face begins to turn a deep red.

"I'm not sure about you, but our Mother taught us boys to always look before we leak!" Her hand strikes me hard across my face, her eyes flash with anger as she turns and storms away.

"You sure know how to sweet talk the ladies," Greenleaf said

from the doorway of his store.

“That didn’t go as well as I had hoped.” Ma and Abigail are about the only two women I know much about and they both can take a good teasing. I walk up the road to Pettengill’s Tavern to have that good meal, served at one of his outside tables. I enjoy taking my meals outdoors, the food just tastes better. I order ale and the beef stew. With the sun in my face, no shadow is cast that I can see; I have no warning of the approach from behind or the violent blow that strikes me on the side my head. The punch knocks me off my bench and onto the ground. I’ve never been hit this hard before, as a dark curtain falls before my eyes, all I can see is flashing stars on a background of black. With no sight, I jump to my feet; because an injured man on the ground can be kicked to death. Once afoot, I turn toward my attacker, my eyes not yet clear from the blow to my head; I begin to talk, to give me time for my sight to return, “Sir if you wanted to join me for a meal you just had to ask!”

“You stay away from my daughter!”

As flashing stars turn back into sight, I see a mountain of a man standing before me. The anger on his face is clear as he punches me again, square in the face; I fall back, out cold.

WHEN I WAKE, I do not feel much like eating. My head hurts and I have blood on my face.

Pettengill informs me, “You’re lucky to still be alive. John Rowe hits harder than any man I know! I was told he once got

mad and punched his cow so hard he killed it. Son, its best you stay away from him and his daughter.”

I thank Pettengill for his advice and he places my food in a tin I can later return. I make the walk home by way of the path and watch the sun set from my log table outside my cabin door. I’ve had better days.

In the morn, at first light, I catch some fish, clean and place them in an iron kettle to bake over my fire. My hands smell of fish when she calls me out of my cabin.

“Sir, please come out of your cabin, I would like to talk with you.”

It’s the young woman in the blue dress, only now she is dressed in brown. “You must be a Rowe.”

“Yes.” She studies the marks on my face made by her Father’s hands. “I’m sorry my Father hit you. He got angry when he saw me slap you. I have a temper like Father, and I’m not very ladylike when I get upset.”

“My hands smell of fish. I’m going down to the stream to wash them.”

“May I walk along?”

“I was told by your Father to stay away from you. It’s best you leave before I return from washing.” I walk away.

The hike back from the stream seems long; I hope she'll still be waiting for me, yet she is no where in sight. This is for the best. Yet as I approach the cabin, out she comes with a plate of fish and the tin of hot stew.

"I still need to talk with you," she spoke as the dishes hit the table, giving me a look difficult to say no to.

"If you sit and eat with me, I will listen."

She goes back to the cabin without saying a word; returns with another plate, fork and a spoon and arranges them neatly on my table outdoors. So from my log table, on this glorious morning, I relish my view; mountains to the west, a pretty girl to my east. The morning sun serves her well, lights her hair like spun gold, as she sits at this table with me. We eat in loud silence, our eyes do not meet. She finishes, looks up, and stares at me long, but still says no words. She studies my face, hair, then my eyes. Forever was her gaze, before she first spoke.

"Tell me your name?"

"You asked someone how to find my cabin, you already know my name." I spoke in a voice as soft as a breath.

"I want to hear you say it."

"Tell me yours first, then I'll tell mine."

"I'm Mehita Rowe, my Father is John Rowe."

“I think I’ve already met your Father. My name is Samuel Lovering, the same as my Father’s.”

“Samuel Lovering, when you returned my basket, I’ve never felt so embarrassed and angry in my whole life, although once I got past my rage, and thought about your approach to charming a woman, I could not stop laughing at you. You are a fool! What kind of woman has ever enjoyed your charm?”

“My younger sister, Abigail enjoys a good tease.”

Mehita storms around the table, thrusts her face close to mine and whispers in a sensual voice, “Samuel, I’m not your sister.”

Golden hair sweeps my face, her breath on my cheeks, sending chills to my soul; yet I catch a look that seems too young for her eyes. “Mehita, how old are you?”

“Why is that important?”

“How old?!”

“I’ll be fifteen in November, and everyone tells me I look much older.”

“Now I understand your Father’s anger. Run home little girl! Get your little fourteen year-old behind home now, before I spank it!”

“You’re just afraid of my Pa!”

“Mehita, I’m afraid of no man. I respect your Pa’s right to keep his family safe and you little girl cause him trouble. He has no idea what kind of man I might be. Get home now or I’ll take you there and tell your Pa! I’m not afraid to do it.”

“Samuel, this is between you and me, not my Pa.”

“No, it’s all about your Pa ‘cause you are too young to be seeing men alone! You’re about the same age as my younger sister and my Pa won’t let her have men come calling, or marry till she’s eighteen. It’s just that way in my family and having felt your Father’s fists, he must think you’re too young to be seeing a man.”

WITHOUT A WORD Mehita whirls about and storms down the hill towards town. I did not finish much work today, because this golden haired girl keeps playing through my mind.

WEEKS PAST, as summer moves toward fall, when I’m approached outside the Greenleaf Store by a fine looking older woman.

“Are you Samuel Lovering?”

“I am, and who is asking?” She reaches for my hand, shakes it and studies my eyes. I realize who this woman is, “You are Mehita’s Mother.”

“Yes, I’m Hannah Rowe. I would like to talk to you about my daughter, Mehita.”

I flash Hannah a smile, “Will I be safe with you? The other

two Rowe's I met both struck me on my face and they both had quite a temper."

"Master Lovering, I will bring you no harm, just a few questions," she smiles and her eyes sparkle their splendor as she speaks, "How did you know I'm Mehita's Mother?"

"It is easy to see were Mehita acquired her beauty."

"I can understand why my daughter likes you. Can we talk?"

We sat at my favorite table outside Pettengill's and I order us a noon meal. Unlike her daughter, we spoke as we ate.

"Master Lovering...."

"Please call me Samuel."

"And I am Hannah to you. Samuel, my daughter Mehita has not been herself since she met you and my husband gave you a beating. Mehita mopes around, I catch her crying and I think she's in love. Why would she be in love with you? What has happened between you?"

"I don't want to say anything that will cause her more trouble with her Father; but I can tell you, nothing happened between us."

"'Tis not how Mehita sees it. She thinks something happened or she would not be acting as she is."

“Hannah, she is only fourteen and...”

“Did you tell her she is only fourteen?”

“Yes I did when I figured out she is younger than she looks. I have a sister her age and my Pa would never approve if she came calling on a man.” I tell Hannah the story of the bear, returning the basket and the events that occurred when Mehita visited my cabin that morning.

“Are you interested in my daughter?”

“Yes I am, but she’s got some growing up to do.”

“Samuel, ‘tis most certainly the right answer, she does have some growing up to do. I want you to meet us at church on Sunday and after, come back to our place for dinner. I owe you a meal so you’ll be my guest. You can meet John on better terms, Mehita can make eyes at you and maybe then I’ll find some peace in my home.”

SUNDAY COULD NOT come soon enough for me. I have not been to a service since leaving Kingston, so why am I looking forward to church? At church I’ll see John Rowe, a man I don’t care to meet again, but Mehita will be there. I want to look into her eyes again, smell her hair; feel it on my face. If my brother Joe finds out a fourteen year old girl has taken my heart, I’ll never hear the end of it. Yes, she has taken my heart and I can’t let her know this, not yet.

THE CHURCH STANDS on top of Mount Pisgah, a hill near the center of the village, now called by most Searle's Hill after Rev. Jonathan Searle our minister that lives there. Oh he's not our permanent preacher as of yet, but everyone thinks it will be his calling. The first preacher, Rev. John Elliot was invited to settle in Salisbury, January of 1771, but left by July, a few months before I arrived. The feeling in town is that Searle will stay if offered the position. Rev. Searle is said to be cut from a different cloth than John Elliot.[\[5\]](#)

Rev. Searle stands at the door of the church greeting every one as they enter. I wait outside for the Rowe's to arrive.

Rev. Searle steps down from the door of his church and shakes my hand, "I'm Jonathan Searle, come inside and have a seat, we have plenty of room."

"Samuel Lovering, from Kingston, I'm waiting for John Rowe and his family to arrive, I've been asked to sit with them."

"Son, they are already here. Hannah comes early to help me set up. I'll show you to their pew. Samuel, is it God that brings you to church or Mehita Rowe?" the minister laughs as he walks me to his church.

John, Hannah and Mehita are already sitting in their pew. Rev. Searle seats me on the end next to Mehita. No greetings by the family are made, there is no small talk in this church, everyone sits quietly, and Mehita does not look at me. A ray of morning sun finds its way through the white-washed sanctuary walls and

illuminates Mehita's golden hair, as the preacher works to save our souls. Hymns are sung, blessings received; the service drags on, before at last I stand to follow the Rowe's out of church. Mehita looks fine in her blue dress as she walks in front of me.

At the door Rev. Searle shakes John Rowe's hand, "John, I think you should talk to the boy a while before you hit him again. Samuel looks to be of a good sort." John finds no humor in these words.

Outside the church, Hannah turns her husband to face me and directs him, "This is Samuel Lovering, now shake his hand!"

We both hesitate before shaking hands and John looks me square in the eye. The look he gives is, *I can kill you where you stand if you give me a reason.* We speak no words to each other, just stare. I'll not back down to any man.

"'Tis easy to see you men will be of good fun today," Hannah spoke as she drags us along each on an arm toward their place outside of town. "John cuts trees for Webster's Mill. Samuel I understand you are from Kingston. John and I were married in Kingston. Mehita was born in Danville." John and I both remain quiet as Hannah talks. It's clear where Mehita gets her gift of words along with her beauty.

Hannah continues to talk throughout the fine meal she serves. John seems accustomed to her talking and it calms him. Mehita will not look at me and has not a word to say.

With the meal complete, John pushes back his chair, and grunts, “I know your Father, Sam Lovering; he’s a good man.” John gets up from the table and goes outside to smoke.

Mehita looks up toward me, her eyes meet mine as she flashes me a quick shy smile, then looks away.

“Mehita ‘tis time you checked the milk cow. Samuel, walk with her and be a good boy. John, I’m sending Mehita and Samuel out to bring the cow back up to the house.”

Mehita let the milk cow out after we returned from church. The cow is now out-of-sight, most likely down by the stream eating grass. I follow Mehita, as she best knows how to find the cow.

When down the hill out-of-view from the house, Mehita looks back and smiles, “What made you come to Sunday dinner at our house, after what Pa did to you?”

“You know the answer, and it wasn’t to see your Mother.”

“Then who is it you wanted to see?”

“I came to see you, Mehita.”

“But I’m just a little fourteen-year-old girl.”

“Yes you are, but you’ll grow up.”

“That sounds like you’ll wait for me to grow up. Why

would you do that Samuel?"

"Because Mehita, you are the prettiest girl I've ever met and I think you already have my heart."

"Samuel, hold my hand as we walk and tell me where you were when the bear ate my berries."

"Mehita, I don't think you want to know that."

"Samuel, tell me now or I may never talk to you again!"

"Mehita, on that day when you wore this same blue dress and the bear ate your basket of berries, I was in the tree above you."

"All right...now...ah...this is worse than I imagined! How can I ever look at you again without feeling embarrassed? How could you have done this to me? I felt so sure about you, but now I know it will never work!"

Samuel wraps his arms around Mehita and gives her a soft long kiss on her lips that quiets her down as she melts in his embrace. "Mehita I'm telling you it will work, but that kiss will have to hold you until your old enough for a real one."

The couple walks arm in arm to find a cow. "Samuel, how will I ever wait that long? Pa won't let me see you, I'm too young. I just don't want to be away from you ever again."

"Mehita, talk to your Mother, I think she already has a

plan. I'll talk to your Father."

"Samuel, Father will never let me see you, he thinks I'm too young."

"You are too young Mehita, but I have a plan and so does your Mother. Be patient, everything will work out for us. It has to."

The cow stood eating grass by the stream and it did not take long to walk her back to the house. Being Sunday, John sat idle outside the cabin still smoking his pipe. Mehita went in to talk with her Mother. "Mr. Rowe may I speak with you about a matter that concerns myself and your family?"

"Hannah likes you and she told me I have to let you talk. You can talk all you want but answer is already, NO!"

"Mr. Rowe, I understand Mehita is too young to have a man come calling, but that's not what I want to talk about. I need your advice on how to best spend my time until you tell me she's old enough. Mr. Rowe, during my winters I hunt and trap with my brother Joe, but summers I have time. Time I would like to use helping you cut trees, time that might allow me more opportunity to be around your daughter while she is still too young to court. My working for you will not only help out your family, but my future wife. Sir, I plan to marry your daughter when she is old enough."

John Rowe sat quiet smoking his pipe, then spoke, "Bring

your axe at first light, and I'll see if you can work."

AT FIRST LIGHT John Rowe makes me sharpen my ax until it suites his fancy. Under his study my axe has never been sharper. He keeps saying, "A sharp axe saves time." As we cut trees, John Rowe sets a pace difficult to match. I know if I continue to meet his pace, he will have to slow up, but not so the first day or any time during that week. Each day Hannah carries out our noon meal and each day I long for Mehita to bring the food so I can see her pretty face. By Saturday it seems John and I have shared more noon meals than words spoken. John, not a big talker on work days or maybe at any time, continues to push me to my limit without a word between us. On this last work day of my first week, Mehita arrives at midday with our meal, looking as pretty as ever; but she will not look at me and speaks only to her Father.

"Pa, Mother wants you to ask Samuel to stay for supper this evening." Mehita kisses her Father's cheek and hurries off towards home.

John sets out our meal and we sit together at the base of a large tree. "Samuel Lovering, I'm telling by Mehita's look and my wife's behavior, we no longer have a say. If you want out, best run, 'cause these women have plans for you."

"No sir, I plan to stay."

"My wife is a good woman, and given me a fine life. Hannah is too good for the likes of me. I've never understood why she

chose me when she could have any man...‘Cause she did choose me, I toil hard every day to prove my merit. Be worthy of her. Hell, I’m rougher than the back side of an ol’ bull. Ya understand what I’m telling you Samuel?”

“No sir, I’m not sure I understand.”

“Samuel, I’m telling you straight up, Mehita is too good for you and you’ll never be worthy of my daughter. Do you understand that or ought I talk slower so it’ll sink into your head?”

“But sir...”

“Shut your mouth and listen, I’m trying to teach you something about a good woman. Mehita will always be too good for the likes of you. Like me, you’ll have to work hard, cherish her every day; but, you’ll never be worthy of her love.”

“Are you saying...”

“I’m saying, if you don’t make my daughter feel cherished every day of her life, you’ll answer to me! Is that clear to you or ‘ave I to talk louder?”

“It is clear sir.”

“Good, let’s finish these two trees and make a short day of it. The women need more time to make plans for you. Samuel, be good to my daughter. I won’t let you marry her ‘til she’s eighteen; is that understood?”

“Yes sir.”

“The only reason I’ll allow you a chance with my daughter, is ‘cause of your Father’s good name.”

“My Father is a fine man, but he’s just a planter at Kingston.”

“I don’t think you understand who your Father is, or how he made his good name, he wasn’t always a farmer. We were both young once, like you. I knew him then; we hunted and trapped together. What you know of the wilderness, I’m sure, you learned from your father; is that not so?”

“Yes.”

“Your Father is a brave, but humble man. He will not speak of his own deeds. Samuel, keep your good family name alive and pass it on to your children. People in town already speak highly of you; remember, a good name is the greatest gift a father can give his child...Enough talk, back to work.”

The sun was still high when we make our way to the Rowe place. John extended the invite to share supper with his family. It is unspoken, but clear to me that to all outsiders, I have no social relationship with Mehita beyond being the daughter of the man I work for. During the meal Mehita plays the game well; with no looks my way or a word spoken, she eats.

With the meal complete, John pushes back his chair, “I’m

going out for a smoke. Mehita, go look after the cow and take Samuel along. There's no need to hurry back, still plenty of sun light left."

I can see now, the milk cow will be our new best friend.



[5] Dearborn, *The History of Salisbury, New Hampshire*, published 1890, page 120-121

Chapter Four

In My Doorway

BROTHER JOSEPH'S RETURN to Salisbury comes with the end of summer. By October and far to the west of town, we settled into our lives as hunters. Joe is impressed by how cutting wood this summer has filled out my back and arms which are now thickened to my liking. I reckon my brother Joseph sees me differently now, no longer like the times Ma had us sit shirtless to trim our hair. Back then Joe had the chest and arms I wanted. Watching him sit on that stool as Ma used her shears; I lagged behind him having to wait my turn, thick was my hair and thin were my arms compared to Joe. But I've changed and he won't tell me so, only a tease about how Mehita has me by the nose; cutting trees for her father. John Rowe paid me for my work, but I gave the wages to Mehita to hold for our future; again, giving Joseph another reason to rib me.

MY LIFE SEEMS out of my control as these years pass waiting for her, driven summers by cutting trees, winters hunting and trapping, with precious little time spent talking to Mehita, holding her, making her mine. My heart burns every day with desire to have her and the life I long for. Joseph tells me I'm always trying to live in tomorrow instead of enjoying today. I just want my tomorrows to be today. The thought that she might find another, while I'm away, gives me a fear that'll wake me in the night. I haven't felt fear much in my life; it's never been my way.

I thought of myself like Pa, he knows no fear, but every day he has his woman's love, I do not. I am afraid.

THE SPRING OF 1775 gives me hope, Mehita will turn eighteen this year and we still plan to wed. John Rowe will soon let me "come calling" and I will show everyone she is mine, but we are still miles away living in our winter hunting camp. It's not been good this winter hunting or trapping, so we've stayed longer trying to pickup a few more deer hides. Tomorrow we plan to return to Salisbury and my Mehita. By my best guess its now mid April, the year of my wedding and I feel alive with anticipation.

WE MAKE OUR way directly to Greenleaf's store to trade our winter's work for silver. Joseph and I traveled back to Salisbury with little rest or food; he is late for his return to plant in Kingston and I need my woman's touch.

Greenleaf greets our arrival, "You boys are coming in late this year. Not many pelts or hides, same as most, a bad year for hunters, but the price in trade is up some due to the shortage of good skins. Samuel, Mehita's been coming in every day asking 'bout you. Your sweet talking must have finally got to her. I hear she'll turn eighteen this November. Boys will be getting in line to marry her, don't you think?"

We make a fair trade with Greenleaf, take our tired bones with empty stomachs to Pettengill's, wanting our first good meal in months. If Mehita is asking about me, then she still loves me; I plan to eat, wash the winter stink off and see her tonight. I'll "come calling". The tables at Pettengill's are full of men talking

war. They talk of British taxes and rebellion; last year the men of Boston, dressed as Indians, dumped tea in the harbor. Such foolishness makes me laugh, but Pettengill looks stern and chides me; he reads the Boston paper better than once a month. He speaks to us of tyranny which ought to concern every American, “boil the blood of every free thinking man.” William, a fair and giving man, tells how his family in Boston is forced to feed and room a British soldier, when they have not enough.

As we finish our meal and second glass of ale, a post rider arrives, yelling and waving his arms, his horse spent, “Its war, the British fired on us at Lexington and Concord!”

After the post rider recounts events that lead to war, Ebenezer Webster, a Selectman for Salisbury, stood on his chair and addresses the crowd of angry men, “I am convinced, it is now necessary to stand against the tyranny of British rule; Men this means war! We leave tomorrow for Boston, the seat of war! Put your affairs in order, it will be a long hard fight, even for freedom loving men!”

As the crowd of men disperses, Joseph grabs my arm, “Sam, are you going with me to war?”

“I’ll be ready to leave in the morning; I’ll talk to Mehita.”

“Sam, before there’s a run on the store, let’s stop now at Greenleaf’s and pick-up supplies.”

Joseph is first to think of supplies, so all the powder, lead,

coffee, bacon, flour, we can carry, is ours to buy. We store our goods at my cabin that's been unused all winter. It is clear Mehita has looked after things while I was away; the floor appears freshly scrubbed, the blankets on the bed are neat and clean.

We shave, wash up and pack our belonging for tomorrow's departure. "Sam I'll meet you outside Greenleaf's at first light. I have some living to do tonight." Joseph heads for town with all his gear.

Joe's not much of a drinking man, but he'll do some tonight. I slip the two gifts for Mehita safely into the front of my blouse. My heart quickens as I sense her presence. In the door way of my cabin stands the woman I love, a few steps from my arms; a threshold to cross. Her eyes are red as the tears run down her face. My smile brings her to my side, to hold and kiss me. Her lips quiver as she kisses me and I taste the salt from her tears. She knows I'm going to war. As I try to speak, she puts her hand to my lips, sobs, buries her face to my chest, and shakes uncontrollably.

"I love you Samuel Lovering, don't speak to me of war, not tonight," her voice catches as she works to get the words out between sobs.

I sweep her up in my arms and onto my bed. I hold her; the crying subsides as she settles to sleep in my arms. I've never before held Mehita while she slept; watching over her, protecting the one I love. Never have I felt stronger, more powerful, needed, than now with this good woman sleeping in my arms. Throughout

the night she'd wake, find my lips, kiss me, and return to sleep in my arms. Long before first light I wake her to take her home. I light a candle and Mehita reads the worried look on my face.

“Samuel it will be alright, Mother knows where I'm at. We heard the news of war while in town. Mother walked me here to be with you. She trusts you'll keep me safe.”

We sit on the edge of the bed, the room is cold, and I remove the gifts from my blouse, presenting them to Mehita. She studies my gifts in the dim candle light: a blue ribbon, the color of her dress, for her hair and a page marker for the family Bible. During the long winter, I carved the page marker from a fine piece of walnut, decorating it with finely cut triangles and other pretty patterns. On the back of the marker I carved the words:

When This You See, Remember Me

April 19th 1775

Mehita reads the engraved words and gave me a long passionate kiss, a kiss I will carry with me in my mind.

“Samuel Lovering, I love you, I'll remember you.”[\[6\]](#)



[6] Page marker is similar to Samuel's, this one carved in 1801

Chapter Five

Medford

EIGHTEEN MEN FROM Salisbury make ready for the march to war. Six of us leave Salisbury at first light: Abraham Fifield, John Bean, Joseph Lovering, Moses Welch, myself and E. Rano.^[7] What the E stands for in Rano's name is unknown to us. We just call him E, sometime Rano; whatever his first name is, we'd have to ask his mother to find it out. It's clear he doesn't care for the name they give him at birth; the E most likely stands for Ebenezer or Elisha.

Abraham has the most military experience in our party; having spent time in Salisbury's militia. He naturally takes charge of us this morning as we travel south the sixteen miles to Concord, New Hampshire. Abraham can act in charge of us, but Joseph and I, we are our own men.

As we march to Concord I try to clear my head; the trees are beginning to leaf, the smell of spring hangs in the air, my heart is ready to explode with love and I'm going to war. I keep reliving Mehita's eyes as we said our goodbyes; holding back tears she kisses me on my lips in front of her Father. War changes the rules and our lives. Why a war now?

Five days ago, April 19th, British marine Major John Pitcairn led the advance party of light infantry, four hundred strong, to

capture the colonial arms and ammunition in Concord, Massachusetts. Paul Revere rode to warn the colonial militia of the approaching British troops. Captain John Parker, of the Lexington militia, with a little over seventy men, waited along the edge of the Green when the British entered Lexington at sunrise. Major Pitcairn ordered his men into battle formation, a line with three ranks, then he shouted, "Lay down your arms, you damned rebels, and disperse." Captain Parker, out numbered, gave the order for his men to fall out, disperse, and they began leaving the Green with their muskets. Pitcairn yelled out, "Damn you! Why don't you lay down your arms?" Other British officer's and men began to holler, "Damn them! We will have them!" "Fire, by God! Fire," and a British platoon delivered a volley. A war had started.

[8]

We easily reach Concord, New Hampshire before mid-morning; we all have good legs on us. The town of Concord is wild with the fever of war. Like many in New Hampshire, we six from Salisbury want to serve under John Stark, so when we meet Captain Joshua Abbot of Concord, who is forming a company for Stark, we join his outfit and make the march to Medford.

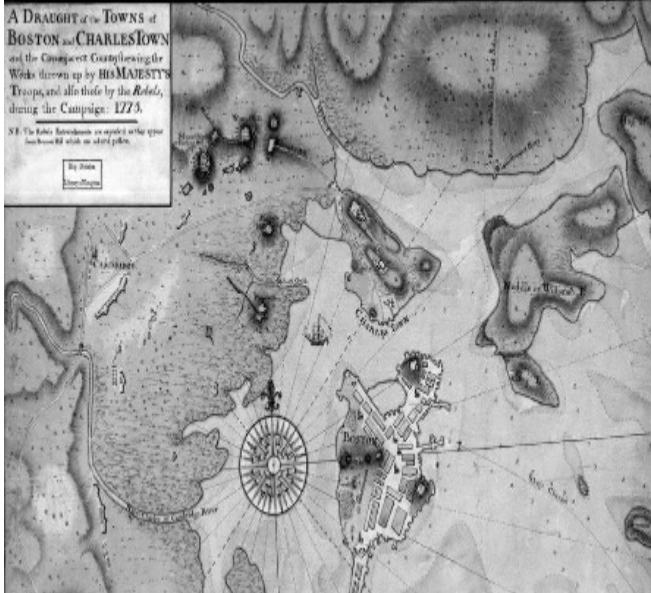
JOHN STARK PASSED the word to the men of New Hampshire and the call became, "Turn out, and meet him at Medford." Hundreds answering the call met Stark at Medford, Massachusetts, a short distance from Boston. Several thousand men arrive in Cambridge, a few miles away, as it becomes our rebellion's headquarters. The British occupy the city of Boston; we hold the country side around it. With their navy the British control the ships and sea needed to resupply Boston. The talk is

British Redcoats remain in the city because they don't understand frontier fighting. Captain Abbott says the British fight best on flat open fields where they can form their lines, marching directly toward their enemy. On April 19th, when the British fire upon our colonial militia at Lexington, the militia scatter, but later that day regroup on the bridge at Concord to return fire. What struck fear into the British army, happens during the Redcoats return march from Concord, Massachusetts; an enemy they could not see, fires upon them from behind every tree, stone wall and thicket. Minute men stay out of sight, fire, move, and fire again, eventually causing the British troop to break ranks and run for Boston. It's the fear of what they don't know, that now keeps them in Boston.

A DRAUGHT of the TOWNS of
BOSTON and CHARLESTOWN
and the Consequent Country lying the
Works thrown up by HIS MAJESTY'S
Troops, and also those by the Rebels,
during the Campaign: 1773.

N.B. The Rebel Fortifications are marked with open
diamonds and which are solid pillars.

By Order
of the Map



JOSEPH AND I settle into camp life near Winter Hill, just outside Medford; it's a little like hunting camp only we're right by large towns, so many people around; we find it all quite uncomfortable. John Stark makes his headquarters in the confiscated Isaac Royall House in Medford. Abraham Fifield, our sergeant, is teaching us the basics of being a soldier: stand in line; march in step; and battle field firing formations, with each section learning to fire in volleys. These drills take place every day; but

with the serious shortage of gunpowder, we don't fire our weapons. We, Stark's men from New Hampshire, already know how to load and fire our weapons. Volunteers arrive daily, many without a musket; they are sent away. By late May word reaches us that Fort Ticonderoga has been captured from the British. Ethan Allen, Seth Warner and the Green Mountain Boys, with the help of Benedict Arnold, launch a surprise, lightening attack, overtaking the fort without a single casualty.

EACH EVENING IS much the same as another at Winter Hill, after a simple meal, men gather, talk and share news. Our six from Salisbury share the same cooking fire. E. Rano talks all the time, but he's clever and tells great stories. After only a few days in camp, Rano seems to know everyone and their business.

"Boys I've got some big news," E calls us in closer to the fire. "I hear tell: Stark wants a few volunteers for a hazardous mission. Tomorrow he'll need a few skilled men, trained in moving dangerous cows. Sam, you'd be right for this expedition, after spending so much time helping John Rowe move his milk cow; or was it Mehita that needed your help?"

I let the comment pass as everyone from Salisbury laughs. "If any one of you had half a chance to wed Mehita, you'd be chasing John Rowe's cow too."

"You might be right there, Sam," E says, looking over at me as he pokes the fire with a stick, "but I have to tell you, the man with the interesting wife is Stark. I'm told when John Stark wanted to marry Betsy Page, daughter of the very rich Caleb Page,

he tells her, "If you are ever to become my wife, Molly, you will have to come with me now." Stark, up and calls her "Molly" and Betsy thinks it's funny and marries him. Can you believe that? Wait I've got more. Stark is fond of choosing nicknames for Betsy; when she becomes too stern, he'll tease her by calling her "Deborah" or "Huldah" after her grandmother or any other crabby lady they've met. John's a man who does not like small talk, trying to avoid attending a social affair he stuffs his wife's best brocade dress in the butter churn. Betsy simply churns the butter making sure her husband's breakfast butter includes pieces of the dress. John, the less social of the couple, leaves his wife at a party one evening, returning home early. Betsy finds herself locked out of the house; being the woman she is, climbs in through the window, and is there to greet him for breakfast, no worse for wear. Another story told, is when John becomes annoyed by the amount of time Betsy spends on her housework. He protests, "Spin away, Molly, spin away. You'll have a spinning wheel in your coffin." To which Betsy replies, "And you'll have a jug of rum in yours." [9] John and Betsy Stark are about the most interesting couple I've ever heard of."

"E, where do you hear these stories?"

"The men over in Captain Dearborn's company were all telling Stark tales the other night. There's a good one about when he was captured by the Abenaki."

"I've heard that story, my Pa used to tell it. I'm going to turn in now."

THE MORNING SUN woke me early on this twenty-sixth day of May. Major McClary, working his way through camp, handpicks men, sending them down to the officer's quarters. Many of the men he picks were rangers, our best. I wake Joe and he stares at me like I'm a stranger. Joe's never any good when he first wakes.

“What is it you want Sam?”

“Joe, something is going on; McClary's sending the best men in camp down to a meeting.”

“Well he didn't pick us.”

“Joe I want to go along; let's follow them down.” Joe's slow to respond, rubs his eyes thinking until, without a word, he grabs his musket and day pack. I sling on mine and shoulder my rifle as we stride toward the center of camp. Colonel Stark is there greeting many of the men by first names as they arrive. John Stark, standing before us, *appears perhaps five feet ten inches, with a thin, hawkish face, high cheekbones and deep-set, light-blue eyes and spoke with a slight Scotch-Irish brogue.*[\[10\]](#) Joe and I watch as Stark works the men, he truly is a great leader. Stark's gaze meets mine, after he eyes my rifle. He makes his way through the crowd until he shakes my hand.

“Son, are you coming on this turkey hunt?”

“Yes sir.”

“Your rifle’s a Moravian, if I’m not mistaken. May I examine your weapon?”

“Yes sir.” Stark checks the rifle for balance, throws it up to his shoulder, sights down the barrow then hands it back to me as he studies my face.

“Would your father be Samuel Lovering of Kingston?”

“Yes.”

“And your older brother?”

“Yes sir, Joseph Lovering,” Joe shakes Stark’s hand, “and the cub with the fancy rifle, is my little brother Samuel.”

Other men in the crowd move in to greet Stark, taking his attention from us, but he looks back our way, “Your Father is a good man.”

Major McClary quiets the men so Stark can speak and motions us to sit on the ground in front of his quarters. From the doorstep Stark addresses the near two-hundred men on the ground in front of him. “Men, if you have not heard there’s a war going on and it’s high time we get our feet wet. Tomorrow, just before low tide we will wade over to Hog Island, move the sheep and other livestock located there, back to the mainland while the tide remains low.



We're taking food from the mouths of the Brits. We'll need to move fast for two reasons. First, it will take time to round up the sheep; they must be moved across the water before the tide is too high. Second, we will be very close to Boston, so when the Redcoats catch wind of our activity, they will come down upon us. Is this clear? Let me clarify, we're going to Hog Island, but we're looking for sheep, fuzzy, white, four legs." The men all laugh. "Alright, be ready to leave by dark, get some sleep, we'll

march all night.”

WE SET OUT from Winter Hill just before midnight, and cross the bridge over the Mystic River a short time later. Traversing the Massachusetts countryside on its back roads past farms, fields, and woods might have been quite pleasing for the eye if it wasn't too dark to see. We march at night to keep our intentions unknown to the British guard boats patrolling the waters off Hog and Noodle's Island. Stark leads us on a wide circle, around the waters of the harbor, northeast, southeast, and then south to the far shore.



The two islands we seek lay a short way out in Boston Harbor with Hog Island the closest to the mainland separated by Belle Isle Creek. Its mid-morning when we approach Belle Isle Creek from the east, arriving in time to take advantage of a low tide for our crossing to Hog Island. Several hundred sheep are in plain sight grazing on the Island's green grass. As we wade knee-deep, the order is passed, "Step carefully and keep your powder dry." Once to Hog Island, Stark and thirty of his best men head to the

island's outer shore, crossing Crooked Creek to Noodle's Island. We are left to encircle the sheep, herd them to the water's edge and drive them across Belle Isle Creek to the mainland. The sheep are reluctant to enter the water, as the flock turns back with each attempt to cross. We must get one to start across for the rest to follow. As we tighten our circle to drive them into the water, shots ring out from Noodle's Island, men turn and we lose control of the sheep; they scatter. Stark's party has encountered a small group of British marines on the other island. Black smoke rises as Stark's men set fire to the buildings and hay located on Noodle's Island. The sheep smell the smoke and our fear, as muskets fire. Our next drive starts the first group of sheep across the ford to the mainland. The alarm has been sent; we will soon have Brits raining lead upon us. Joseph, with a few other men, locates some horses and cows, and drives them to the crossing. Well into the afternoon we move livestock off Hog Island as Stark's party continues to send us more stock from Noodle and skirmish with marines. Before the last of the sheep cross Belle Isle Creek, an armed British sloop sails round the lower end of the island trying to block our escape. The tail end of the flock is still bogged down in the swampy marshes along the mainland, making our movement slow, as the ship fires upon us. My heart pounds hard as we yell and scream to keep the sheep moving. Hundreds of British marines begin landing on Noodle's Island, forming ranks to drive Stark off the island. With the livestock on the mainland, half of our party returns to Hog, running to give Stark support. Joseph and I make that run, with hearts pounding we cross Crooked Creek to Noodle. Stark and his men flee the British without a fight. When our retreating force reaches us at the edge of the creek, Stark yells, "Everyone down in the ditches and make ready." When the British

are at hand, Stark orders us to fire from our strong defensive position, squatting low in our ditches. British Marines start dropping in front of us as we fire and reload until they retreat to the interior of the island. Stark orders us to fall back and once again on Hog Island we note that the sloop has run aground in the shallow water of low tide along the Chelsea coast of the mainland. Stark sends sharpshooters to fire upon the ship to cover our retreat.

Stark looks my way and yells, "Go try out that rifle and show me how she shoots."

Joseph and I follow the sharpshooters down the shoreline until we find high ground across from the armed sloop *Diana*. From our position in the trees of the mainland we lay down a deadly fire, killing everyone topside. Blood runs from its scuppers. As more men appear on deck we again open up with deadly fire. We keep the crew pinned down below deck until the reinforcements, Stark requested, begin to arrive. General Israel Putnam and his men take over the action. We retreat to rejoin our sheep.

Safe, away from the action, this body that served me with such calm during battle begins to slip from my control; my hands tremble and my jaw shakes as if I were standing naked on a winter's day doused in cold wash water. The fear and panic I held at bay is the ice water that now washes over me. The men around me take no note of my condition, we march on. With each step away from battle I warm and the chill of death shakes loose its hold on my heart.

BY THE NEXT night stories are told of the action, telling how Putnam “hailed the schooner, offering the men good quarters if they would submit.” The schooner answered with several rounds from their cannons. The British warship *Lively* arrived to provide support while the crew set fire to the *Diana*, denying us an enemy ship. As the ship burned, Putnam’s men stripped her of four cannons, twelve swivels and all her munitions.

Local newspaper accounts began to make their way to camp in the days following our skirmish, calling it the Battle of Chelsea Creek, with General Putnam the hero of each story; with no mention of Stark and his sharpshooter.

IN APRIL, SHORTY before we first arrived in Medford, General Ward of Massachusetts commissioned John Stark a lieutenant colonel and within a week Stark raised a regiment of over eight hundred men from New Hampshire. Becoming the largest and first regiment to form from New Hampshire, Stark referred to us as The First Regiment of New Hampshire.

General Israel Putnam, who took over our action at Hog Island, had once served under Stark in Roger’s Rangers and both fought with the British during the French & Indian War. During that war, in the summer of 1758, Putnam and Stark were both captains in the Rangers when the French defeated the British at Fort Carillon. British General Abercrombie and Lord Howe were called upon to capture the fort located at the edge of Lake Champlain. Lord Howe often dined with Stark to discuss the terrain and tactics needed to defeat the French; the revered British general valued his input. Howe understood the ranger’s fighting

style and worked to obtain their skills. Captain John Stark was called upon to lead a scouting party around the fort to determine the French weaknesses and make suggestions regarding tactics for the ensuing battle.^[11] Stark and British Colonel Clerk scouted the enemy's works and reported back to General Abercrombie. When they returned that evening, Colonel Clerk reported to Abercrombie that the enemy's works were of little importance. Stark had a different opinion and told the general that the French had formidable preparations for defense and artillery was needed to defeat them. "Stark was but a provincial woodsman, and Clerk a British engineer. The opinion of the former was unheeded, while, most unfortunately, the advice of the latter was followed."^[12] General Abercrombie, relying upon the report of his engineer, did not bring up artillery for the attack, and the British were defeated. The gallant Lord Howe led a charge of more than two hundred rangers, with Captain Israel Putnam being one of them. Stark's friend, Lord Howe was killed in this attack. Stark considered Howe the ablest commander under whom he ever served. If Howe had lived, his talents might have been employed against us in this rebellion.

Stark soon became frustrated by the British system and refused to take part in a "secret" reprisal raid against the Abenaki Indians, to massacre their women and children. Before the end of that war Stark returned to civilian life. Putnam continued as a soldier, and was promoted to major in 1758. Putnam's reckless courage and fighting spirit became known throughout New England as many folk tales of his exploits were told. At the start of this war, Connecticut made Putnam a general. But it takes more than reckless courage to lead men.

THREE DAYS AFTER the Battle of Chelsea Creek, Stark was called away to Exeter to meet with the New Hampshire legislators. Because he refused to serve under the politically well-connected Nathaniel Folsom, chosen by the legislator, Stark was kept waiting outside their chambers for almost an entire day. Stark had angered the legislators by what they perceived as a disregard for their authority. When finally called before the legislative body, Stark was informed Folsom would command the first regiment as a general and he the second as a colonel.

Stark responded by asking them whether they had “any way of making a child that was born today older than one that was born six weeks ago?”^[13] The legislators could give him no answer, so Stark left angry.

On June 3, 1775, by the great wisdom of the legislators, they officially appointed John Stark, colonel of the First New Hampshire Regiment. John Stark should have been made a general that day; he is the best soldier America has to offer.



^[7] Dearborn, *The History of Salisbury, New Hampshire*, published 1890, page 202

^[8] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, published 2005, page 273-276

^[9] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 41-45

^[10] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 5

[11] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 36-37

[12] Stark, *General John Stark*, published 1877, page 26

[13] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 56

Chapter Six

Breed's Hill

JUNE 13th 1775, today I wrote Mehita a letter to let her know my health is good. Today we are still camped at Winter Hill outside of Medford, Massachusetts. Each day after marching and firing drills, Captain Abbot sends out teams of marksmen to scout and take a few long shots across the water at Redcoats when a clear target is found in Boston. Its fun to try and shoot that far, we don't hit much, but the British know we're trying.

The stand off with the British continues; they hold Boston, we control the countryside outlying the harbor. The town of Boston is situated on a spit of land jetting north, locked by water on more than three sides, leaving British troop movements to the surrounding countryside in any direction but south, accomplished by using boats. With the Charles River to the west, Boston Harbor to the East, Charles and Mystic River to the North, marching south across the narrow Boston Neck is the only route to move troops out of Boston by land.

Dorchester Heights and Bunker Hill are two areas of high ground outside of Boston, located across the water in different directions from the city. Artillery on either of these two hills would control the city of Boston. For the most part, we have no artillery, so we have no need of these hills. Intelligence has been acquired that British General Gage plans to ship troops north out

of Boston across the Charles River to Charlestown Peninsula and seize Bunker Hill. Charlestown Peninsula is formed by the meeting of two rivers: Charles River on the West and the Mystic on the East, as it faced southerly just a half mile across the water from the City of Boston. There is talk in camp that we may occupy Bunker Hill first and play spoiler to the British plan.

ON THE EVENING of the 16th of June we learn that our General Ward placed Colonel William Prescott and his men from Massachusetts in charge of fortifying Bunker Hill during this night. Stark says when the British wake tomorrow to find us holding Bunker Hill, they will attack to take it back.

After evening sup, Captain Abbot calls me away from the fire and tells me in a hushed voice only I can hear, "I'm riding with Colonel Stark to Bunker Hill before first light, he wants you with us."

"Yes sir, I'll be ready to ride."

"All right, I'll wake you. Bring your rifle."

I TRY TO sleep but slumber escapes me as thoughts of war hang in my head. This night is warm; tomorrow will be clear and hot. There could be worse days to die. Stark is right, the British will attack us when they learn we hold the hill. Stark wants to see for himself where we might fight and die tomorrow. When Abbot shakes me awake, I'm not aware I've slept. This day will be long.

NOT ONE OF us talks on the short ride south to

Charlestown Peninsula and Bunker Hill. We arrive at the neck about 4 a.m. the time between night and day, shapes and shadows. In the early light we make out movement on the hill above us as the first cannon blasts thunders out from a British ship in the harbor. It has begun.

With horses secured to a tree, we climb the back side of Bunker Hill to its high ground. From this height, looking southeast, the peninsula before us resembles an odd shaped triangle, with its base facing southerly out into the water towards Boston. The peak of this rough triangle points northwest, behind us, where it connects to the mainland by a narrow strip of land called Charlestown Neck. From the height of Bunker Hill, a hundred-ten feet above the harbor, Stark studies the sight before us. The distance between the neck, behind us, to the end of this peninsula is about a mile. With the Mystic River on the northeast and the Charles River on the southwest, this jut of land is only a half mile wide; hardly worth fighting over.

With the glow of first light we are surprised to find most of the men and their activity on the next hill, six hundred yards to the southeast, by Breed's pasture. This next hill, to the southeast, stands only sixty feet high, and is where several hundred men are digging an earthen fortification. At the front of Bunker Hill, General Putnam is preparing men to dig more trenches. The British ship in the river below rains cannon fire towards the men working on the lower, Breed's Hill.

Stark, rubbing his face slowly shakes his head as the words form in his throat, "Damnation, what is going on here? Colonel

Prescott was ordered to fortify Bunker Hill! What's Prescott doing fortifying Breed's Hill? Alright.....if the hill has changed what is Putnam doing starting to dig trenches on Bunker Hill when the fortification on Breed's is not yet completed? Is Putnam planning on defending two hills? What is he thinking?"

Stark begins a quick pace towards General Putnam's position on the hill. As we approach Putnam directing his men, he looks up and greets us, "Fine morning, Colonel Stark," shaking his hand. "I have these men working on a secondary fortification here on Bunker. As you can see our primary defense is over on Breed's Hill that Colonel Prescott has nearly completed. I believe we may need this secondary fortification, if necessary to cover our retreat."

"Thank you General Putnam, I hope to have my men here soon to help. I'm still waiting orders."

"Colonel Stark, I'm riding to Cambridge this morning to ask General Ward for more men and supplies."

"Good luck with that sir, Ward is afraid the British will bypass Bunker Hill and march on Cambridge; until the British intentions are clear, my New Hampshire men are ordered to wait in Medford. I would like to inspect the redoubt on Breed's Hill before I return to Medford."

"Very good, and when you receive those marching orders bring your men quickly; we will have a fight here today!"

THE REDOUBT ON Breed's Hill is only half completed.

This hill is not as tall or steep as Bunker; more difficult to defend. The front of the hill, covered in tall grass, has a long gentle southerly slope in the direction of Boston; not difficult to climb. The sides of the hill, left and right, are steeper, more treacherous to climb. Down the right side of the hill is the small village of Charlestown, which lies along the banks of the Charles River. On the left of the hill is a pasture and hay field reaching to the beach at the banks of the Mystic River.

Colonel Prescott boldly walks on top the outer edge of the earthen fortification as his men are digging, showing no fear of the loud cannon fire that unnerves his men. He stands fully exposed to enemy fire, and calmly shouts words of encouragement to his soldiers, “Boys keep digging, throw your backs into it; the British are just waking, but we have their attention now!”

Stark circles to the left around the uncompleted earthen fort and calmly walks along the top front edge of the trench towards Prescott. We follow. “Good morning Colonel Prescott, your men have done a fine night’s work.”

“Thank you Colonel Stark, but I was hoping you’d have brought a few more men with you.”

“I’m still waiting on Ward. I have eight hundred good men, waiting for a fight; we will march here when I get the word. Prescott, what is your plan? The British will attack!”

“I have a few small cannons for the redoubt on the right, and when the trench to the left is complete, I have soldiers to man it.”

Stark studies the sloping sides of the hill before he asks “And your right and left flank?”

Prescott points to the town below his hill, “Captain Nutting’s Company is already in Charlestown.[\[14\]](#) When more troops arrive, I’ll send what men I can spare into the town to protect my right flank, but to my left in Breed’s pasture I’m wide open; the main British forces may land on the beach by Moulton’s Hill and attack my left flank.”

“Prescott you’re quite right; the British main attack will be on your left, to sweep behind, encircle your position and cut off any retreat. Your weakness is the left flank.”

“John, have you any thoughts on how to best defend my left flank? I don’t have enough men to cover that open field.”

“William, when you complete your trenching, sent men down to those split rail fences,” Stark points to the north east. “Those on both sides of that farm lane running down to the Mystic River, have them pull the rails from the back fence to wedge between the rails of the front: stuff, hay, rocks, grass, anything to make it look fortified. I will inform Colonel Reed of your needs. His men of the Third are camped just beyond the neck. I’ll have Reed send a company of men into Charlestown, with the remainder of his regiment taking a position along the rail fence, as soon as he receives orders from Ward to move. Upon my return, I’ll position the First on Reed’s left, and we will defend all the way from your hill to the water.

While the men talk, the British ship anchored off shore sets a second anchor so they now can swing the ship and train its line of cannons more accurately on this hill. But the height of the hill is above the elevation of their guns as they pound the sides of Breed's Hill below us. Prescott's men look uneasy as the ground shakes and the guns roar, but the two Colonels calmly talk as if the ship and its guns were not there. These are two wise soldiers and set the men at ease.

THE MASSACHUSETTS COMMITTEE of Safety, on the 26th of April commissioned Colonel John Stark command of the New Hampshire First Regiment, Enoch Poor of the Second, and James Reed of the Third, "till New Hampshire should act."[\[15\]](#)

On June 3, 1775, the New Hampshire legislators, appointed John Stark, colonel of the First Regiment. Colonel Reed of the Third is camped just beyond the Charlestown neck. Colonel Poor of the Second has yet to join us and remains in New Hampshire. There is no fight in New Hampshire, the war is here.



[\[14\]](#) Moran, *The Battle of Bunker Hill*, published March 1985, article: Valley Compatriot Newsletter

[\[15\]](#) Lyford, *History of Concord, New Hampshire*, (Vol. I), published 1896. page 257

Chapter Seven

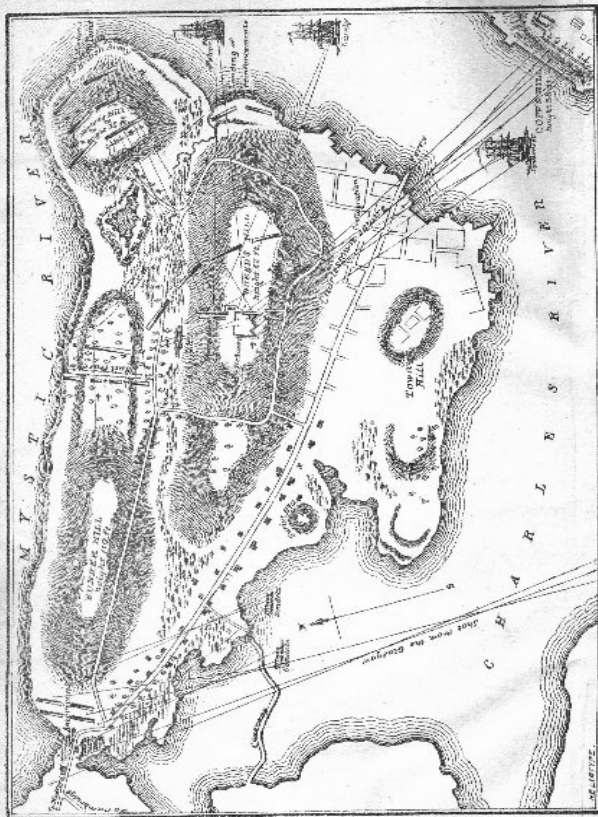
Beside the Mystic

WITH THE MORNING sun casting long shadows, we arrive back at Medford a little more than an hour after sunrise. Molly Stark is having breakfast with the men, and greets us upon our return to camp. Molly enjoys spending time with the men, laughing and talking to “her boys” in camp; she knows today, some of us will die. Molly makes us think, “this morning is a good time to write a letter home,” and she is willing to help any of us write one. So as we melt lead to form musket balls and pack cartridges; Molly helps “her boys” write letters home. She cares for us and our sick. The men of New Hampshire’s First Regiment love Molly Stark; I enjoy her laughter and soft touch, because they remind me of Mehita. I’ve tried not to think of Mehita during these past few weeks, but I miss her this morning. I want to write her but have no words of comfort. After waiting so long for our love to begin, I may die today. The thought of dying fills me with pain and sorrow, but not for myself. I have little fear of my own loss, just the pain it will bring Mehita. Being in love during war provides a man another reason to fear. Fear for the ones we love. Molly helps others write letters home to sweetheart, wives and mothers. I put Mehita out of my mind and ready my rifle.

Each man receives a gill cup full of powder, fifteen balls and one flint; there are scarcely two muskets in a company of equal caliber, leaving many men to melt or resize the balls to match their

muskets. Only a small portion of the men have cartridge boxes, so the remainder makes use of powder horns and ball pouches.[\[16\]](#) The fifteen balls given to me are for a musket, so I melt and pour the lead to fit my rifle. With my work complete, I sit with my back to a tree listening to the sounds of cannon fire in the distance. The officers of our regiment are called to meet with Colonel Stark; he informs them of his early morning ride to Bunker Hill, Colonel Prescott position on Breed's Hill, the rail fence and the need for a strong defense on the hill's left flank. The morning sun is clear, hot and comforting. As I bask in its power, it calms me to sleep.

I WAKE TO sounds of gathering men talking loud. General Ward has ordered Stark to send a detachment of two hundred men, with proper officers to assist in the defense of Charlestown Hill: Colonel Prescott's hill we visited this morning by Breed's pasture. Colonel Stark appoints Lieutenant Colonel Wyman to lead the detachment to Breed's Hill.[\[17\]](#) Captain Abbot's company is one of ten that remain behind, so when Joseph finds me, we sit together under the shade of my tree now that the sun has moved closer to midday.



AT ABOUT TWO p.m. an express rider arrives with orders for the whole of the regiment to proceed to Charlestown.[\[18\]](#) We are ready to march to war. Not one of us, officer or soldier, is dressed in uniform, just plain ordinary clothes of a citizen. Nor is any officer on horseback; we all leave together on foot with Stark out in front.

WHEN WE REACH Charlestown Neck we find our path blocked by two regiments of men held from crossing the narrow strip of land by both the cannon balls raining on it from the British frigate *Symmetry*, and the two floating batteries anchored in the Charles and Mystic River. As our regiment stops, the men jam together. Captain Dearborn's company is in the lead with its Captain walking beside Colonel Stark. Our company follows behind Dearborn's and we press into them as the troops stop.

I am but a few yards behind Stark when Major McClary, *the fearless giant from Epsom*, with not a word from the Colonel, moves forward to the stalled regiments and in a commanding voice addresses them, "If you do not intend to move, open and let our regiment pass!" Immediately the men ahead of us move aside like the parting waters of the Red Sea.

With Dearborn at his side, Colonel Stark leads the regiment forward at a steady, deliberate pace into the enemy's cannon crossfire. Because of Stark's slow pace, and with his men under fire, Dearborn turns to Stark and says, "I suggest it proper to quicken the march of the regiment that we might sooner be relieved from the galling crossfire of our enemy."

Stark, with a peculiar look, fixes his eyes on Dearborn and states with great composure, “Dearborn, one fresh man in action is worth ten fatigued ones.”[\[19\]](#) In the same cool collected manner we continue to march across the neck until our regiment is safe on the other side; not a man hurt. From the neck, our march continues up the back side of Bunker Hill until we reach its top and General Putnam’s station. The regiment halts as it takes a few moments for the rear to come up. Major McClary, with a wave of his hands and one word -“sit”- the whole regiment goes to the ground. With another wave of his hand as he calls out “captains,” the company commanders come forward and huddle around Stark. Stark points to the rail fence where a few hundred of our men are already stationed, and gives his officers orders, we’re too far back to hear them. Stark then leads Captain John Moore and our Captain Abbot aside and points to the shore of the Mystic River; they shake their heads with understanding.

With the officers beside him, Colonel Stark turns and addresses the regiment, “For us, the men of New Hampshire, these hostilities are about to commence. We endeavor to prevent our country from being ravaged and enslaved by a cruel and unnatural enemy. I am honored to be here today with the men of New Hampshire, there is none finer. Facing such an enemy as we will today, there is no other I would rather stand with or be more proud to fight and die with than you. New Hampshire men know how to fight; show me your very best today. In this important crisis, our country calls for the utmost exertions of every American. We must give everything we have to the cause of freedom, even our lives. We must live free! Death is not the worst of evils. **Live Free or Die!**”

Stark directs us to give three cheers, turns and starts walking alone towards the field of battle. We cheer, and follow him, not knowing if we will return. Where Stark goes, we will follow.

A field of red is visible along the shore on Moulton's Point; the British are beginning to ready their men for battle. We are told the Redcoats had their lunch on the beach when first ashore around one o'clock. They think we can't fight.

Stark leads us down Bunker Hill to the left side of Breed's Hill. Colonel Reed and his New Hampshire men are already working to fortify the rail and post fence along southerly facing side of the farm lane. This farm lane, with rail and post fences along both its sides, runs from the left of Breed's Hill to the beach of the Mystic River. The fence line starts partway up the side of Breed's Hill, about forty yards to the rear of the redoubt Prescott's men dug during the night.[\[20\]](#)

Colonel Reed's small regiment, along with Captain Knowlton's two hundred men, removed sections of the rear fence, running its rails through the front. The grass, having recently been cut, lies in windrows and cocks on the field. The men gather the tall cut grass and stuff it between the rails of the fence, making it appear like a wall: a deception to the enemy.

As Stark's men begin converting the remainder of the rail fence, Captain Moore and Abbot call their companies down to the waters edge of the Mystic River.[\[21\]](#) Just beyond the end of the rail fence an embankment drops eight feet to the beach. Concealed by the high embankment is a thin strip of beach, upon which the

British could slip a column of troops behind us, as it is obscured from the view above. Stark leads us as we climb down the embankment onto the small beach below. The Colonel draws a line in the sand with a stick and instructs us to gather large stones from the shoreline and erect a stone wall upon it. The stone wall we construct will run across the beach, from the high embankment to the waters edge, to provide a strong defense if the British charge up the beach. With two companies of men working, we complete the crude stone wall in short order and Stark calls for every man to observe him closely. With a large stick in hand, Stark counts out fifty paces from the front of the wall. He turns and presses the large stick deep into the sand about one hundred thirty feet from our wall.

Stark walks back to the wall, making sure all eyes are on him, before he says, "There," and points to the stake, "don't a man fire till the Redcoats come upon that stake. If he does, I'll knock him down! Is this clear?"

The men all agree, "Yes sir," as Stark eyes us up and down.

"Men, you're on this beach because you are my best! I've heard you call yourselves, 'Stark's dread marksmen of the Merrimack'.[\[22\]](#) You must be all of that today; on this strip of sand, the British will send their best to take this wall. You men will hold this ground or all is lost today. Captain Abbot and Moore, retain enough of your best marksmen to form three ranks behind this stone wall and send the remainder of the men above to the rail fence. When the British charge, keep your back two ranks hidden behind the first to conceal our true strength."

Joseph is chosen to stay, with a position in the third rank right next to the water. With my rifle I am sent to the ground above, along with my friend Rano. We take our place beside William Mitchell, at the edge of the embankment on the open ground situated before the start of the fence.

As we study our lack of cover, Stark climbs up the embankment, “Rano, Lovering, each of you take hold of two fence posts, pull them up and follow me.

The men of New Hampshire have filled in all along the fence line among Captain Thomas Knowlton’s tired Connecticut men. Knowlton’s men, a work detail of two hundred sent by Putnam to help Prescott dig the redoubt on Breed’s Hill, have been awake all night and into the day laboring to dig the redoubt, before Prescott sent them down to defend his left flank. They are mixed in among New Hampshire’s men, by Dearborn’s Company, up on the side of Breed’s Hill.

Stark marches out in front of the rail fence our men fortified; Rano and I follow carrying the posts. He walks a short distance in the open field towards Breed’s Hill before he stops, grabs a post from me, and places it into the ground fifty yard in front of the rail fence our men will defend.

“Officers, make sure every man understand they are not to fire until the British reach this stake. Direct them to reserve their fire until they can see the enemy’s half gaiters.[\[23\]](#) Make this clear or I’ll have a piece of you!”[\[24\]](#)

As Stark continues towards Breed's Hill, walking a line fifty yards in front of the fence line, he places a series of rail posts into the ground to serve as marker to guide the actions of his men.[\[25\]](#) With each post placed, Stark repeated his same instructions of holding their fire until the British reach this marker.

Stark climbs the side of Breed's Hill with Rano and I following close behind, locates Colonel Prescott and reports, "Colonel Prescott, we are ready on the left."

"Colonel Stark, I wish I could say the same. My men have been up all night digging; they are hot, tired, with no food or water. I've sent Putnam messages asking for reinforcements, but he hasn't sent down any fresh men. With this heat, no sleep or water, a number of my men have begun to slip away. Since noon there leaving has been noticeable, I'm down to less than five hundred men. Putnam agreed last evening he would send down reinforcements. My men are tired, but he just sits up on that hill. I lost even more men when Putnam rode over demanding his entrenching tools be sent back to him fearing they'd be lost. I told him if any of the men are sent off with the tools, not one of them would return. He assured me the men are brave and they shall every man return. A large party was sent off with the tools and not one of them returned.[\[26\]](#) These men are gone. It's Putnam's plan to defend two hills. We don't have enough men for that plan. He thinks we'll make our final stand on Bunker Hill to win the day. He is directing his troops to dig in upon Bunker, instead of sending them down here to fight. You know if the British break through our line, the men will retreat, and they won't stop on Bunker Hill to have supper. If our men retreat, Putnam won't be

able to hold his men from doing the same.”

All the while Prescott and Stark talk, the British cannons continue to pound our hill. The ships off shore have heated their shot and fired it upon Charlestown, starting the town burning in an attempt to drive our marksmen out of the buildings they use for cover. The red hot shot starts the wooden building of the village ablaze, making it more difficult for our troops to remain.

“Colonel, what troops do you have in Charlestown?” Stark asks as we watch the town burn.

“I’ve sent four companies to fortify Charlestown: Wheeler’s, Crosby’s, one from Colonel Woodbridge’s Regiment, and Captain Nutting from mine. Nutting is stationed in that old barn and behind the rock wall.” Prescott points down the hill towards the rock wall and barn.[\[27\]](#)

“Colonel Prescott, this is Rano and Lovering, they will be my personal messengers during the battle.”

“Very good, thank you Colonel, and your men, I value your leadership and support.”

As we prepare to depart, the four of us stand together on the front edge of the redoubt, on top of this hill, fully exposed to our enemy; time slows as we take in the scene before us. British troops cover the fields in the distance. Their ships and the batteries on Cobbs Hill produce a heavy cannonade; the sound is like thunder. Smoke drifts across the open fields below us, as Charlestown

burns. *The church steeples, being of timber, were great pyramids of fire above the rest.*[\[28\]](#) The rooftops of Boston and the hills round the country are covered with spectators hoping to witness perhaps a defeat, a final loss to the British Empire in America.[\[29\]](#)

ALONG THE FENCE line Major McClary steadies the men, repeating the same instructions as he moves to each company: “Fire low, aim at their waist bands! Steady your musket on the fence rail. Stark wants you to shoot down every officer, make them taste your lead. Remember; don’t fire until you can see the enemy’s half gaiters.”

I return to my position at the edge of the embankment, beside William Mitchell. The men around me have the look of fear etched upon their faces. It will all start soon. I check Joseph; he is still in position on the waters edge below me. We wait.

[16] Dearborn, An account of the Battle of Bunker's Hill, published 1818, paper

[17] Stark, Memoir and Official Correspondence of General John Stark, published 1877, page 112

[18] Stark, Memoir and Official Correspondence of General John Stark, published 1877, page 112

[19] Dearborn, An account of the Battle of Bunker's Hill, published 1818, paper

[20] Stark, Memoir and Official Correspondence of General John Stark, published 1877, page 30

[21] Lyford, *History of Concord, New Hampshire* (Vol. I), published, 1896, page 258

[22] Lyford, *History of Concord, New Hampshire* (Vol. I), published, 1896, page 258

[23] Wilkinson, A rapid sketch of the Battle of Breed's Hill, published 1816, article

[24] Note of Information -- Horwitz, The True Story of The Battle of Bunker Hill, Nathaniel Philbrick takes on one of the Revolutionary War's most famous and least understood battles, May 2013, article

“However, there's no evidence that Col. Israel Putnam told his men to hold their fire until they saw “the whites” of the enemies' eyes. The writer Parson Weems invented this incident decades later, along with other fictions such as George Washington chopping down a cherry tree. In reality, the Americans opened fire at about 50 yards, much too distant to see anyone's eyes. One colonel (Stark) did tell his men to wait until they could see the splash guards –

called half-gaiters – that British soldiers wore around their calves. But as Philbrick notes, “Don’t fire until you see the whites of their half-gaiters’ just doesn’t have the same ring.” So the Weems version endured, making it into textbooks and even into the video game Assassin’s Creed.”

[25] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 60

[26] Little & Brown, *History Of The Siege Of Boston*, published 1849, page 129- 130

[27] Moran, *The Battle of Bunker Hill*, published March 1985, article: Valley Compatriot Newsletter

[28] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 65-66

[29] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 66

Chapter Eight

Uniforms of Red

I THINK OF Mehita, our night spent together, her long golden hair and soft kisses, as the British begin their march to battle. I struggle to keep thoughts of war out of my head, but they rush in and Mehita fades from my mind. In the distance several thousand British soldiers, advance towards our rail fence fortified with sticks and grass.

I holler down to Stark, “We have a column of British troops coming towards the fence.”

The twenty-six companies of British soldiers advanced in three columns[\[30\]](#) before breaking with parade precision into lines, forming a wide wall of troops, two lines deep, stretching across the entire field before me.[\[31\]](#) Yet as the wall of troops advance, the men have difficulty remaining together due to the high grass, uneven ground, clay pits, kilns, swamps, and fences they must cross.[\[32\]](#)

The British soldiers I view in the distance marching fast on the smooth narrow beach below me will reach Stark and the stone wall first. “Coming up the beach, you have a single column of men, four wide; by the number of officer, it looks like eleven companies advancing your way, they’re moving fast!”

Stark reassures his men on the beach, “Here they come boys; it’s the Royal Welch Fusiliers, their best light infantry. You men

stay down, remain silent, I'll give the order for each row to fire. Just like we practiced, first row will stand and fire on my order, when they drop to reload second row stands and fires on my command. Third row, don't stand and show yourselves until I tell you too. We will surprise the British with a third row of death. First row be reloaded and ready to stand when the last row finishes. We will give them continuous fire. Ready now, the Fusiliers are charging with bayonets fixed, they want to overrun us, they're not going to fire. Front row stand, take aim.....Fire!"

The men unleash and smoke fills the air, as the Fusiliers reach the marker in the sand. Our front men drop to reload, as the next row springs to their feet.

"Wait, ready.....Fire!"

At this close range, and into a dense column of men, Stark's boys do not miss; the front ranks of Fusiliers disintegrate, pitched about by the heavy musket balls.[\[33\]](#)

"Third row stay down! Wait!"

The fearless Fusiliers, unaware of a third row of men, think they have an opportunity to advance quickly and overrun Stark's men before they reload. The British are taken back when the third row stands and fires followed by the front row as the process repeats. The British struggle bravely, but not even the highly disciplined Fusiliers can withstand this slaughter for long, and in a minute or two they pull back, retreat.[\[34\]](#)

Us men along the rail fence line hold steady; wait and watch as the British troops carrying full packs advance through the open field towards our position. Their numbers are great, powerful, unstoppable, showing no fear of us they march to crush us; the might of the British Empire. Not one of us turns and run. We hold steady, silent, waiting. Our silence gives us strength.

“Men! Hold your fire till they reach the markers! Wait for my command!”

Sweat drips from my face and onto my rifle. It runs into my eyes, stings and blurs my vision. I wipe the sweat from my face to clear my sight.

“Front row.....Fire!”

The muskets roar and smoke fills the battle field. My hands shake as I reload.

“Back row.....Fire!”

The men standing behind me discharge their weapons just above my head. The sound is deafening! We reload as fast as possible, now firing at will, with the front row kneeling and the back standing. We lay down a continuous heavy fire. The first line of British troops begins to stumble and fall, crowded by the second line, the troops become entangled and fall into disorder. The British begin to retreat. We hold our fire.

On the beach below, Stark is in the throws of a second

attack. Their fire mows down the British soldiers in a devastating hail of lead. Hundreds of Welch Fusillers meet their death at the hands of Stark's sharpshooters and lay in piles on the beach. The Fusillers retreat a final time. Eight out of every ten men in their battalion lay dead or wounded on the sands below me.[35] Joseph remains at his station, unharmed by this action. He looks my way and gives me a wave. I've never seen death in such numbers before.

Stark walks to the base of the embankment and hollers up to me, "Lovering, go check on Prescott. Report back how many men are still defending the redoubt and rounds of shot remaining. Go now!"

As I make my way towards Prescott's position on the hill, the British still carrying their knapsacks begin their second charge on the rail fence. By the time I reach Dearborn's Company, positioned part-way up the side of Breed's Hill, we are in the thick of battle. This position affords me a fair view of the whole scene of action.[36] The largest mass of British troops advance on the fence in an area down the hill to my left, leaving Dearborn's men under little pressure and they are able to pick their targets at leisure.

"There, see that officer!"

"Let's have a shot at him." When two or three men with muskets resting over the fence are sure of their aim they fire in the same moment. Dearborn's men are intent on cutting down every officer they could distinguish in the British line.[37]

“There! There, see that officer on horseback!”

A British officer on horseback more than 200 yards off rides toward his troops, sword in hand, and attempts to turn them from their endeavor to retreat. Several of our men took the officer as the object of their fire, but missed.

“No, not yet, wait; wait until he gets to that little knoll!”

I step to the fence, steady my rifle on the top rail and draw the officer in my sights. As the officer’s horse hits the crest of the knoll I squeeze the trigger and guns go off around me. The officer instantly falls dead from his horse.

Colonel Prescott remains at his post on Breed’s Hill with barely a hundred-fifty men remaining to defend the redoubt. Low on powder and lead, they have turned the British back a second time. When I reach the edge of the earthen fortress, Prescott’s men are busy breaking open a few artillery cartridges and distributing the powder among them.[\[38\]](#) Many are out of lead and gathered rocks for throwing. Only a few men have bayonets.

Colonel Prescott barks out to his men, “Careful with that powder! Not to waste a kernel of it, but to make it certain that every shot should tell.”[\[39\]](#)

I approach Prescott and gain his attention, “Colonel Stark is requesting a report on your status, sir.”

Colonel Prescott pulls me back away from his men and

addresses me in a hushed voice, “Tell Stark that I am in need of more men and rounds or we will not hold this hill. I’ve sent General Putnam three messages stating I need more men and yet he sends me none. Inform Stark of my situation. Now be off with you!”

As I leave the fortress Prescott calls out to his men, “Are you ready for the Red Coats?” and his men answer back, “We are ready for the Red Coats!” Most of Prescott’s men have but one round of ammunition; a few more than three rounds.[\[40\]](#) With no ammunition to defend the hill, Prescott will not withstand a third charge by the British.

Boat loads of fresh British troops have landed from Boston and prepare to join in the next attack. The British troops are removing their knapsacks and stacking them as they ready themselves for another charge.

A large apple tree stands tall behind Dearborn’s men on the hill side. The British musket balls have fractured its upper branches, racked and tattered leaves in the tree at points higher than my head.[\[41\]](#) To our benefit the enemy’s fire has been badly directed. We have but a few men killed defending the fence line, with many more wounded. William Mitchell is no longer covering the wound in his chest. His hands appear peaceful while the other wounded are crying out. I make my way along the fence line and back to Stark. Rano is wounded and struggling to live; blood is soaking his shirt. I was not here to help them as they fought.

Colonel Stark is off the beach, pacing the fence line waiting

for my return, “Well boy, lets have it!”

“Sir, Colonel Prescott has less then one hundred-fifty men able to fight with about one round of ammunition each. The Colonel said if the British charge again he will not be able to hold the hill. He sent three messages to General Putnam requesting reinforcements with no reply.”

“Lovering, I want you to hot foot it up to General Putnam and tell him Stark wants him to get his bleeding thumb out of his arse-hole and send men down to Colonel Prescott!”

I let out on a dead run for the top of Bunker Hill. My rifle is heavy in my arms when I reach the crest of the hill and find General Putnam waving his sword above his head, yelling orders to no one in particular. Colonel Gerrish lay at Putnam’s feet, hands covering his face, moaning. Hundreds of men are milling around the top of the hill in disarray. Anger flashes in Putnam’s eyes as he yells. The General has clearly lost the confidence of his men. He appears old, his men out of control. Putnam no longer has what it takes to get men to follow him to their deaths. He no longer has what Stark still possesses, great leadership! Putnam is a sorry sight.

“General Putnam, Colonel Stark has sent me to request reinforcements for Colonel Prescott. Colonel Stark feels the hill will be taken on the next attack without more men and ammunition.”

“Damn! I am well aware of Prescott’s situation! Go tell that

to Stark!”

The run down Bunker Hill is difficult, trying to keep my footing on the steep slope. Out before me in the distance, the British are forming for their third assault and it appears the attack will be directed at Prescott’s position on Breeds Hill. I need a drink of water. I can not remember a day as hot as this in June. We have been under assault by the British for a little more than an hour. It feels like days.

IT IS CLEAR to me that when the British troops let out a scream and charge Breeds Hill with the whole of their force, bayonets fixed, the hill will be taken. Stark orders us back from along the rail fence and beach to the rear corner of Breeds Hill to provide protection for Prescott’s retreat.[\[42\]](#) As the British storm the fortress, fierce hand to hand fighting ensues and Prescott’s men struggle to retreat out the lone door of the redoubt. We provided a steady cover fire to protect our troops retreating down the back side of Breeds Hill. Colonel Prescott, with his sword swinging, is one of the last to exit the earthen fortress. With the troops off the hill, we began an orderly retreat, stopping every few hundred feet to fire, reload, and retreat again on our way back to Bunker Hill.

On this day, we men of New Hampshire, stationed along the rail fence and beach, held our ground stopping each attack the British forces made in their attempt to break our line. We held our ground and they learned we can fight.



[30] Prescott, *William Prescott's letter to John Adams*, dated Aug. 25, 1775, letter

[31] Dearborn, *An account of the Battle of Bunker's Hill*, published 1818, paper

[32] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, published 2005, page 296

[33] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, published 2005, page 296

[34] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, published 2005, page 296

[35] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 61

[36] Dearborn, *An account of the Battle of Bunker's Hill*, published 1818, paper

[37] Dearborn, *An account of the Battle of Bunker's Hill*, published 1818, paper

[38] Little & Brown, *History Of The Siege Of Boston*, published 1849, page 148-149

[39] Little & Brown, *History Of The Siege Of Boston*, published 1849, page 149

[40] Little & Brown, *History Of The Siege Of Boston*, published 1849, page 149

[41] Dearborn, *An account of the Battle of Bunker's Hill*, published 1818, paper

[42] Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, published 2005, page 298

Chapter Nine

Canada

We don't speak of friends killed today or of death. Our evening meal occurs in silence. My hand still trembles as I stir the fire aimlessly. How many hours have I been awake? Death lives in our heads; we saw too much of it today. Stark says there will be no more fighting this day; the British had a belly full of it. The Red Coats lost too many officers and men taking Breed's Hill, so they'll remain on that piece of high ground tonight, not willing to follow our retreat.

I am thankful my brother Joseph survived the day. His loss would have broken Mother's heart. I fear my loss would have been difficult for Mehita. Why she would love a man like me is beyond my understanding. As she drifts into my mind, dressed in her blue dress, I allow myself to think of her: the smell of her hair, the feel of her lips on mine... We lost too many good men today for me to be thinking of my wants. The fearless giant, Major McClary, so beloved by us, was killed just after the end of battle. A cannon ball is said to have taken off his head.

Our outfit did not have the high number of casualties suffered by Colonel Prescott, while retreating from Breed's Hill. As the British staged their final assault on his hill, with no ammunition, Prescott and his men had nothing left to defend it with but their lives. Hand to hand fighting ensued; it was bloody

and fierce. While using their guns as clubs they were forced to pull back from the British; too few of Prescott's men made it out of the earthen fortress alive.

When Colonel Prescott and his battle worn men reached General Putnam's position on Bunker Hill, Prescott was furious to find so many of our colonial troops waiting there not having come forward to help him during the battle. Over a thousand men stood with General Putnam on Bunker Hill watching us fight and die without a shot fired in our support. Even during our retreat they looked on, their guns silent.

Colonel Prescott stormed up to General Putnam, finding him standing with a sword in one hand and in the other a shovel he leaned upon. Prescott grabbed the spade from Putnam and threw it to the ground. "Why did you not support me General, with your men, as I had reason to expect, according to our agreement?"

General Putnam's face reddened, sputtering, "I could not drive the dogs up!"

Colonel Prescott's eyes flashed wild and his hands shook with rage as he vented his anger at Putnam, "If you could not drive them up, you might have led them up!"[\[43\]](#)

Oh our retreat would not stop at Bunker Hill as General Putnam planned; it continued on across the neck, back to camps in Cambridge and Medford. General Putnam tried to hold his men from retreating by waving his sword above his head barking commands "Make a stand here! We can stop them yet! In God's

name, form and give them one shot more!” His men not heeding his words retreated; our battle weary men followed.

RANO WILL LIVE, and rests along with the other wounded cared for by Molly Stark. E will return home to Salisbury when he is able to travel. He is hopeful for a quick recovery. I have time to visit E, as we are again waiting on the British. While they sit tight in Boston, we just wait and watch.

WITH OUR THREE month enlistment almost up, Joseph is not talking of going back to Kingston to help Father with the harvest, but speaks about staying on to fight. There is chatter in camp of an expedition to Canada this fall, and Joseph wants to be part of it. I only want to marry Mehita. I now believe marriage is possible; the thought of our union fills my mind with visions of her and I trouble sleeping. My only comfort is found while I write to her and express my love. To calm my soul I need to touch Mehita's face, look into her eyes sparkling with love for me. I burn with desire to make her mine, to hold her...sleep in my arms...head upon my chest...smell her sweet hair..... never let go; but I only wait, bide my time with camp chores and duty.

BY LATE JULY, having taken no leave or given any pay, affords me enough time served to be discharged. We part ways, Joseph remains to serve, I to Salisbury and my Mehita. I have a dreadful feeling I'll never see Joseph again, but I will not let him read this in my eyes as we part.

It always seems a walk home is faster than the journey away and my legs feel fresh as I enter the village of Salisbury. There is

no time to clean up or shave as I must return directly to Mehita's embrace.

Hannah first spots me as I pass the large oak not far from their cabin. She runs to me, gives a long tight hug with a kiss on my whiskered cheek and whispers, "Mehita has gone out after the cow." Hannah wipes tears from her eyes, "I knew you would return. You had to, or it would have broken my daughter's heart."

"Mehita still loves me?"

"Samuel, you have no understanding as to the depth of her love for you!"

"I plan to find out."

"Just love her with all your heart."

As I meet the crest of the hill, I spot her below, sitting in the tall grass by the stream, the cow not far off. Her hair shines golden in the sun. My heart pounds wild in my chest and I feel dizzy, making it difficult to recognize the sad song she softly sings to herself. Her voice is sweet against the rushing sounds of the stream. I love this woman!

I watch as she stretches forward, lays face down almost hidden in the deep sweet green grass, before rolling over to watch the puffy white clouds float by in the blue sky above. As I approach she faces my way on her back looking up, yet has not noticed me. I calm my heart before speaking, "It appears to be a

fine day for lovers,” in a tone soft and gentle.

“It would be an even finer day if you were lying beside me sharing my soft green grass,” she states, steady, sure and calm.

I drop to my knees beside her; love shines clear and deep in her eyes. Wrapping my arms around her, we roll in the tall grass as she screams with delight.

“I love you Samuel Lovering!”

“Marry me Mehita! I can no longer live without you!”

“I will be yours,” she whispered between kisses.

In the tall grass she became mine, I forever hers.

WE BATHE TOGETHER in the cool stream before walking the cow home at sunset. We will talk to the minister tomorrow about being wed, it will happen. I am now a man not to be reckoned with. I have a good woman to love and protect. Don’t stand in my way.

ON AUGUST THIRD, in this year of our Lord 1775, Mehita and I become Man and Wife in the church on Searle’s Hill. Before her family and friends, we are wed.

I WRITE HOME to tell my family that I have taken a wife. Mehita is working close by me as I write my letter. She is kneading the dough to make bread and has already baked two pies of apple. She loves to feed me such good food; I fear I’ll get fat

from her love. I am happy and don't want to think of war and the men that are dying. I only want to love my woman and live in peace. I'll warm my bed with this good woman and our cabin with the logs I've cut by my own hands. I have a fine life, and my good woman to share it with. She makes me feel like a man. I have no plans to hunt and trap this winter or go back to war. I miss my brother Joe.

IN OCTOBER, FATHER writes to inform me Joseph enlisted in Captain Dearborn's company under Benedict Arnold's command for an expedition to Canada.^[44] Father thinks they plan to attack Quebec.

After reading Pa's letter, Mehita often finds me sitting quiet, looking far off like the way Ma caught me dreaming. Mehita has never seen me like this. How can I tell her I have to leave? How can I leave her?

I don't have to tell her. Long before first light she slips out of the bed we share and I hear her making a racket by the fire. I think of Joseph and return to sleep but I'm awakened by Mehita's kisses as we make love. Mehita knows I'm leaving. She has my bag packed with my rifle by the door.

^[43] Fellows, *The Veil Removed; or, Reflections on David Humphrey's Essay on the Life of Israel Putnam*, published 1843

^[44] Hammond, *The State of New Hampshire – Rolls of the Soldiers in the*

Revolutionary War. published 1885, page 211, 215, 220

Chapter Ten

Lovrien

Salisbury, New Hampshire, October, 1775

John's gone too long hunting, the dish water's cold and Hannah's heart aches. A dreary misting rain has lingered for three days, leaving the wet earth covered with a heavy soggy mat of fallen leaves. The autumn foliage showed their colors but now the trees stand stark and bare against the gray fall sky. The chill of the air makes Hannah shiver and she can see her breath while she stands in her doorway, staring at the soft falling rain. Winter will soon be upon her; she dreads the cold lonely months ahead and longs for her daughter's company. Hannah had not realized how much she'd miss her Mehita until now, alone watching the bitter rain.

The cabin feels dark, the chilled air damp, so she puts another log on the fire and opens the family bible for comfort. Turning to the back of the Rowe Family Bible, Hannah finds the recorded birth of her daughter:

Birth: Mehitable Rowe, November 17, 1757,
Danville, New Hampshire

Her eyes fill with tears as she stares at the writing, penned by her own hand so many years ago.

Laying the book open on the table, Hannah carefully removes the ink and pen from its place on the shelf; *Mehita's marriage must be recorded in the family bible*. She leafs through the front of the bible and pulls out Samuel's enlistment papers. They are difficult to read, the handwriting poor, but she can make out the spelling of Samuel's name and his date of birth. Hannah steadies her hand, dips the pen in the ink and records the marriage under Mehita's birth.

Birth: Mehitable Rowe, November 17, 1757,
Danville, New Hampshire

Marriage: Samuel Lovrien, August 3, 1775,
Salisbury, New Hampshire

Birth: March 14, 1754, Kingston, New Hampshire

Chapter Eleven

HOME AGAIN

Rutland, Iowa, March 11, 1877

Frank pushes back his chair from the kitchen table; the cold wooden floor chills his feet through the holes in his worn pair of socks as he makes his way to the cook stove to add wood and warmth to the kitchen. Frank rocked the handle on the front of the stove, knocking the collection of ash through the fire grate into the tray below before placing a log on the few remaining embers. The long night of story telling left the fire unattended.

WITH THE FIRE crackling, the kitchen warming, Frank turns toward Hannah Hoyt, “Aunt Hannah, are you telling me that our name is spelled wrong? That it was spelled, L-O-V-E-R-I-N-G?”

“Yes Frank, that is my understanding. I am not sure how it happened, but I saw the Rowe Family Bible and each of Samuel and Mehita’s children were recorded with the same spelling as yours. Somehow between Samuel and his father the name changed. The spelling on maps of Samuel’s Lovering Hill, differs from the Lovrien spelling on his grave stone. Back in those times, people were not as careful with spelling as we are now!”

“What happened to Samuel’s brother Joseph? Did he live

through that winter expedition to Canada? I heard a lot of our soldiers died or were captured during that trek to Canada.”

“Captain Dearborn and most of his men were captured by the British at the battle for Quebec. Although before they surrendered, Dearborn gave the order to escape if possible, which Joseph did into a blinding snow storm through endless wilderness; but that’s another story. After several months in the wilderness Joseph made his way back to Boston and his brother Samuel. Their reunion occurred just after the British evacuation of Boston in the spring of 1776.

It was artillery that drove the British out of Boston: the cannons captured by Arnold, Allen and Warner at Fort Ticonderoga. Henry Knox transported those big guns south to Boston through the wilderness during the heart of winter across the Berkshire Mountains through ice and snow using forty-two strong sleds and eighty yoke of oxen. Henry placed those large cannons on Dorchester Heights overlooking the city of Boston. With America’s biggest guns trained on the city, the British agreed to set sail and leave Boston. They would be allowed to evacuate “without molestation” if they did not destroy the city upon their departure. When the British fleet lingered in Boston Harbor the Americans felt they had been duped, so John Stark was ordered to cross the water into Boston and capture the battery on Copp’s Hill. As Stark and his men descended to Long’s Wharf, the British ships sailed.[\[45\]](#) After our cannons drove the British out of Boston, the brothers were sent, I think it was in May, to the city of New York. Troops were needed to fortify the city against a possible return of the British fleet and invasion. The boys

continued to serve under Colonel Stark while fortifying New York, although before the eventual British attack on the city and the Battle of Long Island that ensued, Stark was ordered north to Canada. Joseph wanted no part of another trip north and Samuel, still moonstruck, had not the desire to be far from Mehita, so the brothers parted ways with Colonel Stark at the end of their three month enlistment.

It is unclear what happened to the brothers during this time in the war. Samuel did not speak of it. The very mention of New York turned Samuel's face hard and cold, so I've often wondered if Joseph might have died or was badly wounded at the Battle of Long Island.

All I am certain of is that Samuel and Joseph did not go north with Stark, however I'm not rightly sure if they fought at Long Island or not. After leaving Stark's outfit, Samuel's desire was to remain in New Hampshire close to Mehita and yet still serve the cause of freedom. He attempted to accomplish this by joining Colonel Poor's Regiment. Poor's men spent most of their time in New Hampshire, yet shortly after Samuel joined the regiment they were sent to serve under Washington, and were to cross the Delaware River on that cold snowy night to capture Trenton. Colonel Poor was not a fighting man like Stark. Poor did not cross the river or advance on Trenton, so Samuel saw no action during that battle. On the other hand Stark's men, having returned from Canada, led the assault on Trenton capturing many Hessian mercenaries; Samuel regretted not being part of Stark's outfit at Trenton.

The story goes, that after Trenton, with enlistments up, Samuel received a milk cow in part payment for his services, which he drove home from New Jersey as a present to his beloved wife Mehita.

It was late on a warm day in March, when Samuel trailed that cow home to Salisbury, a fine day like the one we had yesterday, only it occurred one hundred years ago, in March of 1777. During Samuel's long absents, Mehita moved home to live with her mother. John Rowe was also off to war, so with Father gone Mehita needed to be home with Mother for their mutual comfort and safety. Those were hard years; the fear of war and their lack of purpose made each day difficult for the two women living together while their men served the cause. Mehita and her Mother struggled as one, waiting for news and their men's return."

THE MORNING SUN felt warm on Mehita's face and the hot cup of tea gave her comfort as she sat with her mother on the edge of the cabin's front porch. The snow had melted in all the open areas, with patches of white only found in the shade of the pines and on the protected sides of the hills. The soft muddy ground made for a slippery walk to the barn.

"Ma, I don't feel like doing a thing today?"

"Mehita, if that's how you feel then we'll just have us a tea drinking, sitting in the sun kind of day. Go put on some more hot water and we'll get to working on doing exactly that."

Mehita went inside to heat the water. Hannah remained seated with her legs overhanging the edge of the porch when a sudden chill of fear ran through Hannah's hair. Turning she gasp. A stranger had crept up beside her. The pungent smell from the man's breath filled Hannah's nostrils, as he softly spoke, altogether too close to her face.

"Pretty Lady, you and me are going to have us a fine time of it," he spoke while sitting down on the porch edge beside her. The stranger, clothed in dirty leather skins, held his large hunting knife in his hand. He calmly began scraping the mud off his boots before he spoke again, "I'll make a fine day of it. If you're real good I might let you live."

As Mehita filled the kettle and hung it over the fire burning in the cabin's stone fireplace, she heard her mother talking to someone outside. Who was here? Hoping for Samuel's return, Mehita hurried to the cabin door only to find a woodsman clad in dirty hides; tobacco chew draining from the corner of his mouth and the few teeth he had were yellow as he spoke quietly to Hannah. He softly spoke while using his large skinning knife to scrape the layers of mud off the bottom of his boots, looking up occasionally to give Hannah a wicked toothless grin.

"My husband, Big John Rowe is known in these parts for his bad temper, so you best be moving on before he returns home." Hannah struggled to keep her voice calm trying to conceal her concern.

"You got no man here," he spoke in a breathy quiet voice.

“You’re a fine looking woman and I’ll have me a real good time with you.”

Mehita stepped back and grabbed the musket from its place by the door, cocked the hammer and primed the pan. Pointing the weapon at the dirty woodsman, Mehita stepped out onto the porch, careful to remain more then his arms length away from the end of her gun as Pa had taught her to do. The intruder turned his head and gave Mehita an angry look as Hannah backed safely away.

“You don’t mean to use that little missy.”

“You’re not welcome here! Move on! Now!” As Mehita spoke and stood her ground, Hannah retreated putting herself out of the scoundrel’s reach. Mehita’s strong steady voice, firm stance and musket pointed at his back seemed to make a believer out of the woodsman.

As he slid off the porch, turning to depart, the man slipped his skinning knife back into his belt and began walking a wide circle to his right to a spot behind the cabin where he left his musket leaning against a tree. With his musket in hand, the rogue hollered out, “I’ll be back real soon for a longer visit! Next time, taking what I want! Sleep well tonight, you whores!”

Hannah scrambled back up onto the porch. Her shoes caked with mud, made the crossing of the porch awkward as she struggled to stand beside her daughter that held the lifesaving weapon.

“Mehita! Where is he?”

“He’s working his way along the top of the hill. Can you see him there in the trees?”

Mehita pointed and Hannah spotted the man walking the ridge of the hill barely visible among the trees. When the woodsman reached the top of the tall hill, directly in front of the cabin, he sat on a large rock in full view of the women, and waited.

“Ma, he has us trapped! He’ll come for us tonight; burn us out or do whatever to make us leave our cabin and take us both in the dark.”

“If we make a run for town, he’ll get us before we reach the far hill. If we stay put, at dark he is sure to move up by the barn to keep us from slipping out. Mehita, the only chance we have is if I light out now from the cabin to draw him off. Once he follows me, you’ll take the gun and run for town.”

“Mother! What kind of a plan is that?”

“The only one that will work!”

“It certainly won’t work very well for you Mother! No! We’ll get ourselves a cup of hot tea and sit on the porch to show him we’re not afraid. We are well out of his musket range with nothing to fear. Maybe he’ll leave.”

THE HOURS PASSED slowly and the strain of siege took its toll on the two women as the woodsman remained on the hill

throughout the day.

“Mehita, it will be dark soon, it’s time for me to draw him away.”

“Mother, I won’t let you do it! It’s best if we both leave together when he makes his move off the hill. We’ll head into the woods behind the cabin and run till it gets dark, then double back towards town.”

“Mehita, someone is coming! There on the path from town. See him?”

“Ma! That’s Samuel!”

“Are you sure?”

“I know my own man!”

Mehita handed the musket to her Mother, and charged through the slippery mud towards her man. The mud was thick and viscous. She found the run treacherous; difficult to keep her footing. Twice Mehita slipped and fell. Covered in mud she continued on.

Samuel with his milk cow in tow came upon the big oak tree. He watched Mehita running towards him. He knew something was not right; Hannah stood on the porch with a musket, an armed hooligan was sitting on the hill and Mehita was running to him in fear. Samuel checked his rifle. Pacing on towards his woman he spoke calmly to steady the haltered milk cow.

“Easy Bossy, we’re almost home, easy now.” Samuel and his milk cow kept a solid, even gait through the slippery mud toward Mehita.

When within ear shot, Mehita called out, “Samuel we have trouble!” She looked to the man on the hill.

Without hesitation, Samuel stepped alongside the cow to brace and steady his rifle across Bossy’s back. He spoke calmly to her, “Boss, easy now Boss.” With the cow at a stand still, Samuel squeezed the trigger and the rifle reported with a loud bang; black smoke filled the air and the man on the rock fell back.

“Mehita, run back to the cabin, bolt the door and wait for me!”

The cow jerked at the sound of the rifle, but calmly walked away when Samuel slipped off her rope halter. Samuel took flight for higher ground, reloading his rifle on the run. Following the crest of the hill, Samuel skillfully made his way to the rock where the man had been sitting only to find the wounded man gone; leaving a blood trail to be followed. Through the hills and hardwood trees, Samuel dogged the bleeding man’s escape. Samuel slowed often to locate the wounded man’s bloody trail, it would be hours before he would overtake him and long after dark. Unable to track in the dark and with a chance the man might double back on the women, Samuel gave up the chase. He headed straight through the rugged wooded hills to the cabin and his love.

It was just after dark when Samuel returned to the Rowe

cabin. The cabin stood dark. He called out from a short distance off, "Mehita, it's Samuel!"

Blocking the entire cabin doorway stood Big John Rowe, musket in hand, ready for a fight. "It's good to see you well Samuel Lovrien. Did you kill him?"

"No, but I clipped him good. He may double back in the night. I know his kind. We haven't seen the last of him."

"I figured as much. I'll take to the high ground in the morning before first light and wait for him. I know he'll be back. Sam, you'll stay here to protect the woman folk. He has not seen me so I'll catch him off guard."

"John, if I have enough hours of sunlight to track him, I'll run him down. I'm younger and better able to dog that man into the ground."

"Sam, this is my land, my home and if there is any killing to be done to defend my women, I'll do it! Is that clear or do I have to yell a little louder!"

"Pa calm down! Samuel is just trying to help! Move out of the doorway and let me kiss my man."

Mehita swept into Samuel's embrace. Fear drained from her body as his long loving arms encompassed Mehita's very being with his warm powerful body. She felt safe, loved and hungry for his kisses.

John Rowe smiled as he watched his daughter's joy, "I reckon you two will turn in early tonight."

"John, leave the young lovers alone. Come in here and give me another kiss."

With the men tired, the meal was served cold and quick leaving more time for the ways of marriage. John planned to remain alert the first half of the night, Samuel the second, yet no one slept. The year's loss of loving kept them awake. Samuel's touch made Mehita burn with passion. John and Hannah loved with less ardor, but with no less pleasure; their years of shared intimacy gave them a greater depth of love. There was lots of loving at the Rowe cabin that night.

After midnight, Samuel put on boots and a blanket to take his turn guarding the cabin door. Samuel sat on the floor, back to the wall with his rifle beside him, naked, wrapped in a blanket. Mehita joined him in just her stockings. Warmed by the shared blanket they talked, kissed and loved again by the light of the fire.

Hours before first light Samuel pulled on his britches and Mehita returned to bed with the blanket. Samuel stirred the fire, added a log and put on the water for coffee. Big John Rowe stood shirtless beside him, still sweating from having just left his warm bed and good woman. He looked muscular, powerful and tougher than boiled owl shit, truly a man you did not wish to ever piss off. John scratched his hot, massive, hairy chest and stood wanting for coffee to start his day.

“John, are you still going after him?”

“After I check my livestock.”

“I’ll go to the barn with you.”

The shirtless men stood by the fire, drank coffee and ate cold biscuits. The women, tired, safe and warm after a night of loving, fell asleep in their beds.

Before Samuel could dress, John pulled on his mud covered boots, unbolted the cabin door and headed shirtless out into the crisp, still dark predawn air. The bare-chested walk to the barn felt good for John; when he got too hot it was often hours before he could cool down. Samuel pulled his blouse over his head and grabbed his rifle. The light from the moon outlined John’s form and made him easy to follow. Without a gun or a knife, John made his way across the muddy ground to check his stock. As John reached the corner of the barn, a man with a knife lunged out at him from the shadows. It was the woodsman, intent on making a kill. In rage the man came at Big John. Defending himself, John raised his right arm and the blade plunged in deep. As the knife sank into his massive shoulder, John swung hard at the man with his left arm. Big John let out a yell as his fist struck the woodsman with all of his strength. This one punch dropped the attacker at his feet like the cow John once fell in anger.

John stood over the lifeless man with the knife still dangling from his upper arm, “Samuel, drag this sack of shit off my land and bury him before the women wake!”

When Samuel returned with the shovel over his shoulder the morning sun was well up in the sky. Mehita greeted him at the cabin door with a kiss and led him inside for the hot hardy breakfast that awaited him. Samuel sat and Mehita served him food like a king. John held Hannah on his lap by the fire, his upper arm bandaged and no longer bleeding. No one spoke of the woodsman. The men were home and safe. Samuel gave Mehita her gift, a milk cow.

“John, this afternoon Mehita and I will walk our milk cow home.”

With cow in tow, the young couple returned home again to their place on Lovering Hill.



[45] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 78-79

Chapter Twelve

STARK

Rutland, Iowa, March 11, 1877

Frank took a small sip of his cold coffee before asking, “Aunt Hannah did Samuel serve again during the war?”

“Yes, Samuel had the honor to serve once more under Stark, but that’s a bit of history about Stark. Would you like to hear it?”

Frank Lovrien and Aunt Hannah Hoyt remained seated at the kitchen table, the hour late. Aunt Hannah appeared old and tired, yet she could not sleep. Hannah needed to talk, Frank listened. Everyone else slept. Her best friend Sophia has passed, laid out in the parlor for viewing; candles were kept burning. Frank, a hard man that others often feared, showed no signs of grief from his mother’s death. Aunt Hannah knew his ways; he was hurting. She needed to talk. They gave each other comfort late into the night; Frank listened, Hannah talked.

“Frank, I wasn’t ready for your Mother’s death.”

“Are we ever ready for death?”

“I know.”

“Aunt Hannah, you need sleep.”

“I’ll rest when I’m dead; I want to talk about Stark.”

“Then talk about him.”

“Frank, it is important to understand, that after the victories at Trenton and Princeton, most of the enlistments for men of the Continental Army ended, so Colonel Stark returned to New Hampshire to raise another army of fighting men. While recruiting men in New Hampshire, Stark learned that he was passed over for a promotion; Colonel Poor who had not fought at Bunker Hill or engaged in any real action, was promoted to the rank of brigadier general.

Stark, not an easy man to get along with had many political enemies that kept him from his promotion. One such enemy was Samuel Hobart. Back in December of 1775, Stark’s request for backpay for his troops was met with resistance from this paper shuffling Samuel Hobart, New Hampshire’s paymaster. When Stark’s men learned of Hobart’s refusal to pay them, they gave the paymaster a visit and forced him to march in the cold to Stark’s Winter Hill headquarters to meet with the colonel. The twenty or so angry men that abducted Hobart forced their way into Stark’s quarters to witness the encounter between the two men. Hobart asked Stark if he had ordered his arrest. Stark told the paymaster he had not stopped his men from visiting him, and it was well they had not hung Hobart from Mystic Bridge. Stark in his anger proceeded to insult Congress by stating, “There is a pack of damned Tories at the head of the Congress!”

The politically well-connected and angry Samuel Hobart

wrote a letter of complaint to the New Hampshire's legislators, who requested George Washington for an official inquiry into the matter, which forced Stark to write Hobart a letter of apology.[46]

It was February of 1777; Congress announced the promotion of Enoch Poor to brigadier general. By March, Stark tendered his resignation to Congress and wrote "...at this important Crisis when our Country calls for the utmost Exertion of every American, but am extremely grieved, that I am bound on Honor to leave the service, Congress having tho't fit to promote Junior officers over my head; so that least I should show myself unworthy of the Honor conferred on me and a want of that Spirit which ought to glow in the Breast of Every officer appointed by this Honorable House, in not suitably Resenting an Indignity, I must beg leave to Resign my Commission, hoping that you will make a Choice of some Gentleman who may Honor the Cause and his Country, to succeed." [47]

Stark, at this time having nearly raised another regiment of men willing to serve under him, left the service. He returned to his home in Dunbarton, New Hampshire, dejected. Overtures from New Hampshire's senior brigadier general, John Sullivan, could not bring Stark back into service for our country; it was British General John Burgoyne on the northern frontier that changed Stark's mind.

In early April, General Burgoyne set out with his troops from Canada, a force reaching a mass of over ten thousand men and women, leading them as they slowly slashed their way through dense forests on a steady path toward Vermont.[48]

Seth Warner's Vermont militias and Green Mountain Boys were given the task of holding the advancing British forces while the Continental Army retreated. The hopes for the Americans were to retreat, regroup and fight again in a more favorable location. Warner's men were in effect human shields, and sustained heavy casualties by their actions to delay the pursuing British on the fleeing American troops.[\[49\]](#)

Warner sent word of their desperate situation to the leaders of the newly created Vermont legislature. Ira Allen, brother of the leader of the Green Mountain Boys and a member of the Vermont legislature, sent several pleas for help to New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

The New Hampshire legislature met in a special session to discuss assistance to Vermont. But with no troops to send and their treasury depleted, aid to meet Vermont's request for help seemed impossible until speaker John Langdon took to his feet pledging three thousand dollars in hard money and demanding that, "Our old friend Stark, who so nobly maintained the honor of our state at Bunker's Hill, may be safely entrusted with the conduct of the enterprise, and we will check the progress of Burgoyne."

The legislature offered Stark an appointment as brigadier general that he accepted on the condition that the New Hampshire Legislature would be whom he answers to, with the understanding that he might act independently from Congress and the Continental Army.

Within the first six days of his appointment General Stark

raised nearly fifteen hundred men to serve under him. From the town of Salisbury, New Hampshire, Captain Ebenezer Webster, the father of Daniel Webster, who you remember as one of our nations foremost statesmen and orators, recruited fifty-four men for his company[50] with Samuel Lovering enlisting as his 3rd Corporal. [51]

General Stark acted quickly by moving his troops to New Hampshire's Fort Number Four in Charlestown that lays on the Connecticut River and the boarder to Vermont. General Stark disregarded an order, from the Continental Army, to move his men to Stillwater, New York; instead he led them to Bennington, Vermont to stop a contingent of Hessian mercenary troop sent there by British General Burgoyne to resupply his hungry army. Bennington, Vermont held important supplies and food badly needed by Burgoyne's army of ten thousand; without said supplies the strength of British troops struggling in the wilderness would fall.

Just prior to the battle, Stark gathered his men and playfully chide them into a call for action. "My men, yonder are the Hessians. They were bought for seven pounds and tenpence a man. Are you worth more? Prove it! Tonight the American flag floats from yonder hill, or Molly Stark sleeps a widow....."[52]

Samuel Lovering was part of Colonel Thomas Stickney's Regiment that attacked the Hessians' right flank. The first hour of the battle was so fierce that Stark later recalled it as the "hottest engagement I have ever witnessed, resembling a continued clap of thunder." [53]

Molly Stark did not sleep a widow that night due to a brilliant victory by General Stark and his hard fighting New Hampshire men. This battle led to the first major defeat of a British general and a turning point in the war, convincing the French we were worthy of their military aid.

Your father sat on Samuel's lap and listened to his stories of war. When he told of the men that fought, the pride they had, and the accomplishments of a rag-tag bunch of boys from New Hampshire's back hills that took down one of the greatest armies in the world, Samuel's life was near its end. His years of hard work and struggle were written on his face and captured in his eyes; he looked tired. Yet when he talked of Stark his face grew younger, his eyes again danced. The name John Stark passed from his lips like a prayer spoken in reverence.

Even after all the years that passed since the war's end, Samuel still harbored anger that his hero John Stark was not remembered; the nation did not understand or respect the man he had grown to love. He felt sad that John Stark was, by so many, overlooked in life and forgotten in death."



[46] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 74-77

[47] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 100 (Spelling corrected from original text)

[48] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 103

[49] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 105

[50] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 108

[51] Dearborn, *The History of Salisbury, New Hampshire*, published 1890, page 208

[52] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 121

[53] Rose, *John Stark Maverick General*, published 2007, page 121

Chapter Thirteen

Iowa

March 14, 1877

THE WAR CHANGED THE RIVER! It was true. Frank worked the Mississippi River during the Civil War and watched it happen. From the river bluffs above Deer Creek on the Iowa side, it is difficult to discern any difference in her great waters; but, the war had brought change. War encumbered the powerful steamboats that once freely transported goods between the North and South bringing hardships on the lives of those who worked the river. The war brought change to the importance of the river, ending the romantic river life described by Mark Twain in his writings. The river had been an important path to Iowa, but with the cessation of war the railroad would soon be king. The war changed the river!

Also, in the young state of Iowa bordered by this mighty river, the Civil War brought change to the lives of its people. While Iowa's men fought bravely, her women struggled daily waiting for their men to return. The war raged for years taking her best sons and stealing their loved ones' hearts. The war!

However, when the boys finally returned from war, their innocence had been lost and Iowa's people changed forever. Iowa was their Garden of Eden, with rich black soil, hills, trees, rivers and abundant rain; any fool that worked hard could feed his

family. Iowa now knows the pain of war as her people struggled to regain their paradise lost.

With the end of war came a rush of new settlers for the land promised them for their military service. They rode the trains west to the state of Minnesota, traveled south by horse for the promised lands of Iowa. Some folks came from New England, like Frank and his brother, with accents and apple trees to plant. Others came with mothers, wives and children. Many journeyed alone looking for land and a new start. Little towns and churches sprang up as part of the landscape.

Iowa and its politicians became Republicans, the party that freed the slaves and won the war. Laws were passed giving rights to Blacks, so they could vote and their children attend schools. These Republicans of Iowa gave the Black man the right to vote before a nation did. Only, it was not the politicians, but rather the farmers that made Iowa great. The good earth, its abundant grain and livestock gave the farmers of Iowa their livelihood. However, during the Civil War, while their husbands and fathers carried guns, the women of Iowa ran the farms. They bought new equipment drawn by horses to do the work of the absent men. When the men returned, they were heroes. They marched in parades, told stories of their battles and soon became local heroes. But during their absence, the shrewd hard working Iowa farm women were forced to purchase new equipment needed to replace the labor of their men at war. Ironically, farm production was set to soar due to this modernization equipment promised.

The abundant rain and rivers of Iowa have always defined

the state. Our country's two largest rivers establish Iowa's east and west borders. Iowa is locked between the banks of these two mighty rivers, Missouri to the west and Mississippi by the east. Across Iowa's lands, between these two great rivers, there flow many smaller streams. One such stream is the Des Moines River; it meanders south east from the state of Minnesota, flowing across Iowa and empties into the Mississippi River just downstream from the town of Keokuk, located on the boarder of Illinois. As the Des Moines River takes its path south from Minnesota, and before it reaches Iowa's capital city, it passes by the small village of Rutland, Iowa.

From the hills overlooking Rutland, there is a view of the river, Indian burial mounds, farms, apple trees, and a white church with a tall steeple that stands alone.

Inside this little white church an older woman, Hannah Hoyt, quietly sits waiting for the funeral to begin of her beloved friend, Sophia. As she waits in her pew, Hannah reflects on her life and Sophia's; a life that has passed by too quickly.

Outside, a team of black horses stand ready, hitched to a hearse. The horses wait to take a good woman for a final ride to her place of rest.

Chapter Fourteen

Sophia's Funeral

Rutland, Iowa, March 14, 1877

“Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be” and I suppose Lincoln was right about that, but some days are harder to have a mind to be happy. Like today, when all I want is to be far from this church, back home, away from all these people, to be alone to cry. Cry for Sophia, who we will bury today. Cry for myself, a strong woman, with a body that has aged around me for ninety years, trapping me inside. I’ll be all alone with Sophia gone, stuck in this old, frail woman’s body, with no one left that can remember me when I was young, strong, and could work any man into the ground. Sophia remembered me when I was not old, and worthless. Sophia, I’m so old and should not have outlived you. You know I’ve always been strong for you, Sophia. I’m still here, but I’m feeling heavy, very tired, and afraid I will cry. Oh child, you and I shared some good cries in our past and Lord knows we had a lot to cry about. Yet so often you just wouldn’t find time to cry, ‘cause Heaven knows, you were too busy laughing. I guess that was just your way. When life got really hard, it was either an occasion to laugh or cry and as you’d say, laughing just took less time. Oh, my good friend, we shared a lot of laughing in those early days because there was just too much to cry about. Sophia, you made up your mind to laugh. For that reason Sophia, I will not cry; not at your funeral. I love you and will miss you!

THE PASTOR STEPS to the pulpit and clears his throat. "Friends and family of Sophia Willey, we have gathered, for this child of God has passed to the great beyond, on March 10, this year of 1877, at her home in Rutland, Iowa. She was born, Sophia Maria Bixby in Chelsea, Vermont on February 1, 1822 to Jonathan and Sally Bixby. Sophia's childhood was spent in her beloved Green Mountains of Vermont on her parents' farm. In her youth, she lived with relatives in Lowell, Massachusetts so she could attend school. In Lowell, she met and later married, George Washington Lovrien on May 1, 1842. To this Union were born three sons and two daughters..."

...To this union... this union, Sophia and George... Why have I outlived these children?... They were both my children, given to me to care for, watch over, and love... Without Sophia and my Little George, I would have lived most of my life alone... Without my Little George, I never would have known Sophia. Yet, without Little George, maybe I would have married and found love, but probably not. I just was never comfortable with men I was attracted to: not pretty enough, too head strong, too independent, too outspoken, too well read, too competitive. I had no mind to change for a man. Not me, Hannah Hoyt! I could take care of myself and everyone else in my life. That's what Hannah Hoyt was born to do; look after others. It was my duty to care for mother. I was not the oldest. My sisters all got married. But I worked and cared for Mother... All I wanted was to be loved, needed, and... I was. I'm afraid needed more than loved. Yes I was needed!... Was I loved?... Caring for others and being needed by them has been my whole life. I have loved them all! All of them were given to me to care for... Why have I given them so much?... Why am I so alone? I have lost so

many. Yet, every time I lost one I loved and cared for, there was always someone new needing my love. Each death brought a new life for me to care for. I am a caretaker! Why someone as strong and independent as myself would spend their entire life loving and taking care of others, is something I'll never fully understand... What about me? Who will care for me? When will it ever be my turn? I am getting so old and I hoped for just once, it would be my turn to be taken care of. I hoped Sophia would take care of me. Help me die. But my Sophia is gone. She died before me. Why should I think my life would ever change? I care for others, it is what I do and have always done. I have loved and cared for Sophia all these years and I have felt needed. Being needed is what has given me life. I care for others, to be needed. It all sounds so simple. I love to be needed. It makes me feel loved. But my life is over, Sophia is dead and no one will ever need me again. Make me feel loved. But I want to be needed again! Oh God, please let me be really needed, just once more before I die. I want another chance to take it all in, enjoy and appreciate every moment. Not like in the past...all the times I found myself really needed, it all happened so fast, I was not prepared or had the time to enjoy, cherish and savor every little detail of being needed. Being loved!

Chapter Fifteen

The Locket

Rutland, Iowa, March 14, 1877

In the small white church in Rutland, Iowa, folks gathered for Sophia Lovrien Willey's funeral service. Sophia's dearest friend, Hannah Hoyt, has fallen asleep during the service. Hannah, with her white hair and thin body, appearing frail, weak and old, rests asleep on the shoulder of Sophia's oldest son, George Henry. Sleep takes Hannah often now at this age and not always by her choice.

"Aunt Hannah, let me help you with your cloak."

Hannah opens her eyes and stares; everyone is starting to leave the church. She had not heard the service end, but it is over. Hannah struggles to bring the people around her into focus as she wakes. George Henry, seated beside her, with his comforting arm extended across her shoulders, held her while she slept. George woke her, whispering her name at the end of the funeral service. George maneuvers Hannah's arms into her warm winter coat. George Henry, always such a good man, slides his long arm around Hannah's frail body and helps her up.

George is tall, taller than most men, and by the way he stands it makes him look so proud, even on this day, at his

Mother's funeral. Other men in town just give him respect. George Henry Lovrien is chosen each year to carry the flag and lead the Decoration Day parade. The other Civil War Veterans have always walked behind him. George stands so tall and straight and walks with such dignity; everyone thinks him truly handsome. Hannah thinks he looks so much like her Little George when he was 32.

George Henry pulls out that darn silver pocket watch that was his father's and checks the time. "We'll need to get going to Humboldt, if we want to return before dark." George Henry is always checking the time, never wanting to be late, trying to keep the Lovrien family organized; it's been his role for so long.

Hannah is comforted having all of the Lovrien children gathered here in Rutland for their Mother's funeral. During the service, Marcella and James sat in front of Hannah; George Henry and his family beside her; Frank with his, behind her.

Aunt Hannah watches Sophia's daughter Marcella, "Cella" as she was lovingly called by Mother, and James, as they walk together toward the church door. They are the youngest of Sophia's children by her first husband, grown but not yet married. James Lovrien holds his sister Cella as she sobs; tears running down her face. James pulls out his large red farmer handkerchief, handing it to his sister. Cella laughs when she sees the red handkerchief; she was raised back east, appearing more refined than the other women of Rutland, Iowa. Cella smiles, wipes her eyes, and pulls James in tighter to her side, holding his hand. Cella gives James a kiss on his cheek, as they walk together from the church.

George helps Hannah shuffle to the door, her legs struggling to wake up. The bright morning sun makes Hannah close her eyes as they leave the church, but George is there to guide her. When accustom to the light Hannah finally opens her eyes to see James helping Cella into the front seat of the lead buggy, just behind the black hearse that waited outside the church. This hearse, pulled by two black horses, will carry Sophia to Humboldt, Iowa, to be buried in Union Cemetery. Hannah stands alone and watches, as Sophia's boys carry their Mother's coffin to the black hearse, drawn by the magnificent pair of horses. John Willey, just age fifteen and Sophia's youngest son, struggles tearfully with his corner of her coffin. His Mother's death has drained the strength from his young arms and he looks half grown beside the older Lovrien men.

Frank Lovrien, Sophia's second oldest, helps his wife Agnes, whose belly is about to bust with their third child, into George Henry's wagon for the ride to his older brother's farm. Agnes needs rest and will not make the trip to Humboldt. Agnes will only travel a short distance to find the rest she wants, at the home of Frances and George. Frances, George Henry's wife, will see to Agnes' needs, placing her three children and Agnes' two young ones in the wagon for the ride back to her place.

Frank Lovrien steps up onto his horse, his wild eyes flash as if ready for a ride to hell and back, rather than a trip to Humboldt to bury his Mother. That wild look in Frank's eyes always strikes fear in men. Frank, tall in the saddle, with jet black hair, turns his horse alongside the wagon, bends down, and gives Agnes a long tender kiss. Agnes was never afraid of Frank or the wild things

people say he has done. From the first time they met, Agnes knew Frank was a hard man, but she looked past that and could see his good heart.

Frances Lovrien sits ready in the wagon beside Agnes, as her man, George Henry gives her a nod. She snaps the reins as they begin to roll toward their place just outside of Rutland, with sister-in-law Agnes Lovrien and a wagonload of young children.

James Lovrien steps back from the hearse, reach for the reins, and climbs into the buggy to sit beside his sister Cella. His older brother, George Henry Lovrien, stands silently still, taking in this moment before turning to face Aunt Hannah.

George walks Hannah to the buggy, helping her climb into the seat behind Cella and James for the long procession to Humboldt. George steps up into the buggy, straightens his coat and takes his place beside Aunt Hannah. George pulls the blanket over her lap. The air is crisp; however, the sun feels warm on Hannah's face. It's lucky to have such mild weather on a March day in Iowa.

As the buggy starts to roll, Hannah watches Cella and James, trying to listen as they talk in the front seat of the carriage. She can't make out what they are saying, George feels warm beside her and she falls asleep during the ride to the cemetery.

Hannah sleeps most of the way to Humboldt and back, with the grave side service being the same blur in her mind as the church service. Hannah just wants to sleep, to be alone, and maybe cry a

little if she can.

SOON AFTER THEY arrive back at the Lovrien homeplace, it fills with relatives and family friends, talking, eating, and laughing. Aunt Hannah asks to sit out on the front porch in the sun with that warm blanket from the buggy ride. Frances Lovrien, George Henry's wife, fixes her a plate. Hannah moves the food around on her plate and tries to eat. She sits alone on the porch swing, away from all the noise and confusion that fills the house. As she finishes her food, she feels a little stronger and more at peace. Hannah sits, thinks, slowly swinging alone on the porch for a long while and decides; she must make-up her mind to find something to feel good about. But as she rocks in the swing, she finds no good reason to be happy.

Cella, in her fancy eastern store-bought dress, and her brother James Lovrien, with young but chiseled good looks, join Hannah out on the porch; standing before her, Cella asks, "May we sit with you Aunt Hannah?"

Hannah lifts the blanket, pats the porch swing and invites Cella to share the blanket. James swings his long leg over the back of a wooden chair and pulls it up close in front of Hannah.

Hannah studies the two youngest of Sophia's children with her beloved George and asks "Now, what are you two up to? You both had a lot to talk about on the way to Humboldt."

Cella and James stare at Hannah and say nothing.

“I’m sorry Cella that Sophia has passed before you were ready. You had so little time with your mama, just these last two years together.”

“Oh, Aunt Hannah, much of that time I was too busy teaching.”

“Your mother was so proud of you Cella, being here in Iowa meant everything to her.”

Cella gathers her thoughts and asks, “Aunt Hannah, James and I have come to you because we need to know about mother and father. We’ve already questioned George and Frank about them, but they act like they don’t know.”

“Cella, your older brothers may not know what you ask of them. There is much that has been left untold.”

“Aunt Hannah we need you to tell us! With mother gone, you are the only one left that knows.”

“What is it child? What is it you would like to know about your parents?”

“Was father an orphan? You raised him. Who was his father?”

“Oh child, such questions..... Your father, George Washington Lovrien, “G. W.”, as he liked to be called..... Yes, I raised him. He came to live with me in Lowell when he was about the age of two. But....it’s such a long story. Let’s save it for

another time. I'm tired."

"Please Aunt Hannah, mother should have answered our questions and if you don't tell us, we may never know."

"I must look like I'm going to die in my sleep tonight."

"Oh please, Aunt Hannah, we need your help! Please tell us about father. You said he came to live with you when he was about two years old."

"That was so long ago, in October of 1823, over fifty years ago. It's such a long story, are you both up for it?"

"Oh yes, we have waited a long time to hear this story."

"If I'm going to tell this story then I will have to tell it all..... Alright I'll do my best."

That October, in 1823, I traveled from East Chelmsford, Massachusetts to New Chester, New Hampshire to be with my sister, Lois Hoyt Lovrien for the birth of her sixth child. The 65 mile trip to New Chester took three days of travel. My friend, William Shaw had family in Bristol, New Hampshire, about five miles north of New Chester and I arranged to ride with him that October. We agreed to travel the week my sister was due to have her baby. I was about the age of 35, still young. William even told me I looked pretty..... I so looked forward to those trips to see my sister. It was fall, and the leaves on the maple trees had turned

so red that the wooded hills of New Hampshire looked on fire. We traveled the countryside in William Shaw's wagon, lodged the first night at Manchester, New Hampshire and I think we spent the next night in Franklin. We arrived in the forenoon at New Chester on the third day. Lordie, Lois was so excited to have her sister Hannah with her. Lois looked strong, healthy and fixed us a fine noon meal. William Shaw was invited for the meal and we all sat together at their large table. Around that table sat my sister Lois, her husband Peter Lovrien, their five children, my friend William and me. Oh my there was lots of talking and laughing. This was a happy family. It was clear to me that my sister worked hard to keep this family together and happy."

"Aunt Hannah, was Peter our pa's father?"

"Yes James, Peter Lovrien was your grandfather."

"How old was father when he became an orphan?"

"He never was an orphan."

"But you raised him."

"Cella I feel like a hot cup of tea. Would you please make me one?"

Cella touches Hannah's shoulder as she goes inside to make the tea. Hannah looks at James and their eyes lock together.

"Aunt Hannah, I don't understand. If you and ma knew about pa's family, why weren't we told of them before this?"

“Your father had his reasons. He did not want to talk about his family. Your mother knew his wishes and respected them.”

“You knew my grandfather?”

“Yes, and your great grandfather, Samuel Lovrien. He fought in the Revolutionary War. I told Samuel’s story to Frank the other night when I couldn’t sleep.”

Cella calls out the door for Aunt Hannah to wait until she can return with her tea. Cella wants to hear it all.

“James what are your plans now that your mother has passed?”

“Aunt Hannah, you know I’ll continue to help with the farming and look after you.”

“James, you will not! I know you have other plans and you best get after them; stop waiting here for me to die.”

Hannah knows that James has felt a responsibility to care for the two women that raised him. He has already spent enough time looking after his mother. Hannah did not want James to miss out on life like she had. Hannah had taken care of her mother for so many years, that she never married.

Cella returns with Hannah’s tea. “What were you telling James about the Revolutionary War?”

“I told James that I knew your great grandfather and he was

in the war. His name was Samuel Lovrien”

“I first have to know about father. You were telling us that father was not an orphan. We always thought he was.”

“Cella, go to my room and bring me your Mother’s things; that box with her old letters. Do you know the one I’m talking of?”

“Yes, Aunt Hannah, I’ll fetch it.”

“Thank you child”

Cella quickly returns with an old box, about the size needed to pack a pair of shoes in. Hannah wraps her finger around the package; holding the parcel sends her mind back to when Sophia entrusted these personal items to her.

“Your mother gave me these personal things to hold for her when she remarried.”

Hannah carefully removes the lid, pulls out some old letters and from the bottom of the box she retrieves a small hand carved wooden locket. On the cover of the locket is carved the letters, G. W. L. Hannah slides the wooden cover off the locket and inside is a miniature painting of their mother Sophia. She looks so young. Hannah hands the locket to Cella and asks her to pry the picture out of the locket. Cella removes the painting of her mother and behind the picture is a folded piece of paper.





NOTICE

I S hereby given, that I have given his time to my son, George Washington Lavrien, and have authorized him to trade and transact business for himself, and to take all the benefit of his labor and earnings; and I will pay no debts hereafter of his contracting.

PETER LOVRIN.

New Chester, N. H., Oct. 22, 1836. 5325

NOTICE

IS hereby given, that I have given his time to my son, George Washington Lovrien, and have authorized him to trade and transact business for himself, and to take all the benefit of his labor and earnings; and I will pay no debts hereafter of his contracting.

PETER LOVRIEN.

New Chester, N. H. Oct. 22, 1836. \$625

Cella removes the paper and carefully unfolds a newspaper clipping. Cella slowly reads it out loud:

Notice

Is hereby given that I have given his time to

my son George Washington Lovrien and

*have authorized him to trade and transact business
for himself, and to take all the benefit of his
labor and earnings; and I will pay no debts here-
after of his contracting.*

PETER LOVRIEN.

New Chester, N. H. Oct. 22, 1836

“You see, your father was not an orphan. His father, Peter, outlived him.”

“Aunt Hannah, if father was not an orphan, explain to us how he came to live with you.”

“Yes, and then tell about our great grandpa and the war.”

“All right, now, I told you we arrived at Lois and Peter Lovrien’s home, your grandparents, and Lois was due to have the baby at any time..... We had so much fun when I first arrived; my sister and I talked about everything. We laughed a lot those last days..... Your Grandma Lois died giving birth to her sixth child. The baby was named James and she died the day he was born. The death was more than your grandfather, Peter, could take. After Lois died he sat for hours holding her Bible; often he kept it closed and just stared. I stayed as long as I could, but I had employment

in East Chelmsford and needed to return.

The day I was to leave, Peter asked if I would take Little George with me back to East Chelmsford and care for him. Your father, George Washington Lovrien, was about age two when his mother, Lois died. His father, Peter, was having a difficult time with the loss. Peter had all those children to care for by himself. I felt the need to help out, but I truly did not know how I would live my life in East Chelmsford with a young child to care for. G.W. was a good boy. A boy any mother would want for a son. He became my boy. I raised him. With the loss of my sister, it was a blessing to have someone who needed me. Caring for George gave me a happy heart, and this was so different from the long years I cared for my mother. I always looked forward to each visit with Lois and Peter, because the sun just seemed warmer there and everyone smiled and we laughed over everything that would go wrong. My sister had a good life. The life I wanted to have. I spent years taking care of our frail mother. That was the life I had.

With mother gone and Little George living with me, my life changed. I still read a lot, continued to work for Merrimack, but having George with me was like having a part of my sister with me every day. It felt like she was still with us when George and I laughed and played together. I loved my sister. I still miss her.

Those first few years I wrote Peter often about how his son was doing, but he never wrote us back. I am not sure whatever happened to the other children, but I learned later, that Peter did remarry. I don't think he had any children with his second wife. Peter was not the same man after Lois died. I remember how full

of life he was when I first met him. That was before they were married. I traveled with my sister Lois to meet Peter's family in Salisbury, New Hampshire. Families all met in Salisbury and it was an annual outdoor gathering, much like the Lovrien picnics we have in Humboldt along the river. But this picnic was not along a river; it was on the side of a tall hill, called "Lovering Hill." Peter and Lois were very much in love.... At this gathering I met Peter's father, Samuel Lovrien. Samuel liked me from the first. He held my hand, flashed me that big smile and gave me a wink, and told me that I was about the prettiest girl he had ever met: surely the smartest. Not many men ever told me I was pretty. He was such a flirt with the ladies. Maybe he just liked all women, but I think he really liked me. I'm not sure why we got along so well. I also wrote Samuel after Lois died and I had Little George to care for in East Chelmsford. Unlike Peter, Samuel always wrote me back. In fact, I think he wrote to me first, to ask about Little George. I knew nothing about caring for a small child, but we made the best of our new life together. I was no longer alone. I had a boy to care for...A boy who needed me."

Chapter Sixteen

Rutland, Iowa

GEORGE HENRY, STANDING in the door way, listened to Aunt Hannah as she told of years long past. Sitting on the porch swing, she looks old, cold and tired while sharing her stories with James and Cella. The twilight is fading fast and a cool rush can be felt as the air temperature quickly drops. “Aunt Hannah, bring your stories inside. It’s getting cold out here and you’ve had a long day. I don’t want you to take sick.”

Hannah reaches out to James as she struggles to her feet. She stands for a moment to steady her self before baby-stepping towards George Henry. “Did Frank and Agnes head home before dark?”

“Yes, Agnes was wanting home; she is so uncomfortable with the baby about to come and Frank still has chores to do. He’ll be doing them in the dark. I’ve got mine done, so come inside, sit with me by the fire and finish your story.”

Hannah finds a seat on the sofa and tells James to sit beside her. The radiant heat from the wood burner warms her hands and face, as she realizes just how cold it had gotten while out on the porch.

Cella hands George Henry the wooden locket and the

newspaper clipping she was holding. George Henry carefully studies the items given him, "Aunt Hannah, why was it mother never showed us this locket or newspaper clipping?"

"George Henry, that's the story I'm trying to tell Cella and James. Bring me some of your wife's pie, and maybe I'll let you stay for the story I'm telling them." The twinkle is returning to Hannah's eyes; she so enjoys bossing a good looking man around.

THE CHILL IN the room wakes Hannah. Everyone had gone to bed and the parlor is dark. Hannah had fallen asleep on the sofa again. She often spent the first half of the night on that sofa before making it to her bed. James and George will be up early in the morning, but so will she. Sleep comes only a few hours at time for her now.

WHEN HANNAH WOKE again she could hear Frances in the kitchen. Hannah loved waking to the smell of coffee and bacon in the morning. It is comforting not having to be up first any more. There was a time when she wanted to be up, long before it was light. There was such peace in the early morning hours. To warm the kitchen with coffee, eggs and bacon; to have time to read at the kitchen table before others woke. It was these simple things that once made her life good. Hannah now chooses to stay in bed, smell the coffee and think of those early years when she was first given Little George to care for in Lowell. Hannah remembers how proud she was to be one of the chosen workers, the best of the Waltham mills, and offered a position at the new East Chelmsford mill.

The chosen were needed at the new mill, hired to transform New England farm girls into “Mill Girls.” Young farm girls were again recruited, by the thousands from all over New England, to staff the nearly completed mills of East Chelmsford. The principals of employment called the “Waltham System” would be continued and extended to these new mills, owned by the Merrimack Company. This system worked because it used company-owned and operated boarding houses to protect the character of the young women employed in their mills. This enabled young women to leave the farm, work a few years in a factory and earn her own money, with no degradation to her character. She would remain free to retire, marry and pursue more appropriate responsibilities of her sex, without being condemned to pursue a factory vocation for life. Within a few years the sleepy farm village of East Chelmsford would be transformed, by this influx of hard working young girls, into the factory town of Lowell, Massachusetts. Lumber and bricks for mills, streets, and rows of boarding houses made up the outward most notable part of this change, but the hard working young women were the heart of this transformation.

Hannah’s sister Lois died that October of 1823, when the first of the mills in East Chelmsford were completed and the workforce of young girls began to arrive. It was that same October Hannah traveled with Little George, from her sister’s gravesite in New Chester, back to East Chelmsford, hired to train, mentor, and “mother” those young mill girls; they would become part of her new job and life in East Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Hannah

hoped her new life and job would help fill an empty place in her heart.

THE EARLY MORNING smell of coffee and bacon pulls everyone from their warm beds to the kitchen. George Henry is out doing chores; Aunt Hannah, sitting at the kitchen table, is trying to tell her story to James and Cella.

“Life in Lowell was hard, but the people were good and it helped that Little George was adorable.” Hannah finishes her plate of eggs, sips her coffee and is about to continue her story when George Henry comes in from morning chores. Frances expects him and has his plate of eggs with bacon ready. She plunks his breakfast down on the round kitchen table between Cella and James, across from Hannah. George Henry is the last she needs to feed, so Frances pours him coffee and fixes a plate of food for herself. George Henry washes his hands, wipes them on her good kitchen towel still out from the funeral gathering the night before, and sat himself down in front of his food.

“Aunt Hannah, I thought you told us you lived in East Chelmsford when our Pa came to live with you?”

“Yes James, I did tell you East Chelmsford, but the name was changed to Lowell a few years after the mills were built, to honor Francis Cabot Lowell, the founder of the Waltham System. When my sister Lois died, leaving Little George under my care, I was waiting for the first of the mills at East Chelmsford to be completed to start my new position, training mill girls. Mr. Moody, my employer, was very helpful when he found out about

Little George. He promised me a boarding house keeper position when I completed training that first wave of new mill girls. Before starting as a boarding house keeper, I needed someone to care for Little George while I fulfilled my obligation on the mill floor. Tabitha Bixby helped out in the kitchen of the boarding house where I stayed, and she agreed to look after George while I worked those few weeks in the new mill. Tabitha was a grand old lady and she tried her best to spoil my Little George. I think she loved him about as much as I did. It was because of Tabitha that your parents first met. As a young child, your mother Sophia came to visit her Great Grandmother, Tabitha; that's when Sophia and Little George first met and played together. I wish Tabitha could have lived to see Little George marry Sophia. She would have liked that. We never dreamed it would happen; they were just children.

LITTLE GEORGE AND I became less dependant on the generosity of others when construction on my boarding house was completed and I became its Keeper. Within a few weeks, it became clear to me that I was more a keeper of its girls' lives, than the house we lived in. None of my young ladies had ever lived off the farm, away from their parents; homesickness was written on every face. Little George missed his mother and could not understand why he was not living with his father and siblings. The twenty-six young women entrusted into my care teased and often played with George, giving them a feeling of family that they had left behind. These young women became George's family. George became mine.

FOR THE MOST part, girls that worked the mill were required to live in one of the many factory-owned boarding

houses. In company boarding houses, mill girls were quartered six to each small, half-ventilated, comfortless room. About 25 young women occupied each boarding house; they ate, slept and worked closely together. Few secrets could be kept among the girls in a boarding house. If a mill girl stepped out of line, a Keeper soon found out and the young offender was often discharged from the company. As a Keeper, I managed the lives of those two dozen or more young girls placed under my watch and care. My Housekeeper's room was located at the bottom of the stairs leading to where the girls slept, so a watchful eye could be kept on all their activities. The women living in each boarding house paid their own rents set by the company."

"Aunt Hannah, did our Father have any other contact with his family after he was placed in your care?"

"Oh yes, your Great-Grandfather Samuel continued to write regularly and in the fall of 1826, he invited George and me to spend Christmas at his home in Salisbury, New Hampshire. Samuel sent us money for travel and word that Little George's Father, Peter, was invited for the holiday. I wanted George to spend time with his father, so I wrote back that if the roads were open and if I could arrange help at the boarding house, we would try to be there for the gathering. All worked out and we started for Salisbury on the morning of December 22, hoping to arrive by the 25th. That morning we started out, only a skiff of snow was on the ground and the driver thought we could make a fast trip. The horses seemed to enjoy the cool air as they pulled the coach toward Salisbury. George, now age five, was excited to see his Father, a man he no longer knew. The only memories George had of his

Father were from the stories I told. The trip was fast as the driver thought and we arrived late in the afternoon on the 24th, Christmas Eve.

I remembered Samuel's home, the "Big House" from the visit my Sister Lois and I made back in 1809. The "Big House" sat on the southwest side of Lovering Hill and in '09 the house was still new. I believe the "Big House" was built around 1805. Lois and I stayed in the "Little House" during that visit. The "Little House" was located just down the hillside behind the "Big House." That "Little House", a sturdy log cabin, was Samuel's first home built on his land, constructed in the 1770's.

When the coach stopped, with the light snow on the ground and the leaves off the trees, I was not sure if the home in front of me was Samuel's. As the driver assured us this was indeed Samuel Lovrien's home, Samuel appeared at the door. I was startled by how much older he looked. Samuel's aging reminded me of how much of my life had already slipped away since I was last here; seventeen years had passed by. Little George, who boldly played with all those girls at the boarding house, was shy around his Grandfather. But once Little George became comfortable with Samuel, he sat on his lap by the fire; the questions George asked never seemed to end. George wanted to know where Grandpa got his water, living so far from a town. Where was the pump? Why did he have a well and not a pump? Where was the outhouse? What if he had to go there in the dark? What animals were in the wood? Mehita, his Grandma, brought Little George a Christmas cookie, and George became interested in visiting her kitchen. George held Mehita's hand and they went to see her kitchen.

Samuel and I sat alone together by the fire.

Samuel slowly packed his pipe and lit it. "I don't think Peter will be coming this Christmas to see George. I asked Peter to write if he could make the trip, but he never wrote me back. I have a feeling Peter will not be here this holiday."

"Samuel, let's make the most of this visit; George needs family. Please spend time with George; he'll be hurt if his father is not here this Christmas. Samuel, George loves listening to stories. Tell that little boy your stories. Stories of yourself and his father; they may be all he'll ever know of his family."

Samuel's feeling was right. George's Father did not show up that Christmas. I know Little George was hurt but he didn't have time to show it, because his Grandfather filled his waking moments with laughter, tall tales, walks in the woods and a visit to his saw mill. George was a happy boy to be around a man: his Grandfather.

ONE EVENING, WITH George on his lap, Samuel recalled the years he fought for this county to give us freedom from British rule. As Samuel told his stories of war, I sat quietly and listened. George may have been too young to remember Samuel's stories of the Revolution, but I'll never forget them."

FRANK STEPS INTO the kitchen from outside and a rush of cool air fills the warm room. Frank pulls his muddy boots off at

the door and leaves them beside George Henry's dirty pair. In his socks, with one toe sticking out, Frank pours himself a cup of coffee and joins the family at the kitchen table.

George Henry looks up from his breakfast, takes a drink of his coffee that is now getting cold, and addresses his brother Frank. "I heard you ride up and put your horse in the barn; so I've got just one question for you. With Agnes about to give birth to your third child and her having to chase your two other little bread-snappers around all day, why aren't you mending your own socks?" George Henry can see James smile, but Frank's wild eyes flash. George Henry, being his older brother, loves to make Frank's eyes go wild. No other man could get away with it, but Frank said nothing to George Henry.

Cella gets up from the table and fills everyone's cup with hot coffee. "Frank, who's looking in on Agnes?"

Frank takes a slow sip of coffee before speaking, "Boyden rode over at first light. He wants to do my chores and his wife is staying with Agnes." Frank takes another sip of coffee and a long pause hangs before he finishes, "Agnes told me to go be with my family. So I'm here. I think it was her plan all along; you know she's a headstrong woman."

"Frank, can I fix you some bacon and eggs?" Frank does not reply so Frances gets up, moves to the stove and puts on the bacon to fry; because Frank had not said "No", she knew he is always willing to eat.

Cella sets the wooden locket and newspaper clipping on the table in front of Frank. He studies them both for a long time. When he looks up, Cella fills in the details they had just learned, as to why Hannah had raised their Father. “Peter was our grandfather and Samuel our great-grandfather. Samuel fought in the Revolutionary War and he told Hannah stories of those times.”

Frank sips his hot coffee and looks directly at Hannah. “Aunt Hannah, I sure would like to hear stories of when you were young; the time before Father was born.”

Hannah pauses for a moment then replies, “I’ll try, but I don’t care to talk about myself. Let me finish Sophie’s story first.”

Sophie’s children sat together around a wooden table in the warm kitchen, finishing breakfast, drinking coffee, but not in agreement as to what story Aunt Hannah needs to tell first.

George Henry settles the matter. “Frank is right, Aunt Hannah, start at the beginning and tell us your story. We will spend this entire day if need to. Start far back as you remember, and tell it all.”

Chapter Seventeen

Hannah Hoyt

Life for me, a single woman with a child in 1823, was not easy.

My parents had both passed away years before. Father died first, in 1813, at Amesbury, Massachusetts leaving me to care for Mother. Amesbury, of 1813, was a busy town with opportunities for employment, if you were a man. Women at this time were considered a financial burden: an “encumbrance,” a ward, an appendage, a relict, rather than a money-earning member of the community. Without a man, we women had no right to property, or even our own money. Men did not recognize women as capable of spending money, so a woman did not need to earn it. Work as a tailoress or a domestic servant was about all a decent women could do to earn an income. The fifty cents a week I earned stitching for others was not enough to support Mother or myself. The little money Father left us, would not last us long. It was by God’s will, or my good luck, that in our town of Amesbury there lived a fine mechanic, Mr. Paul Moody, who had been a friend of Father’s. After church, Mother would often converse with Mr. Moody and his wife. During one such conversation, I learned that Mr. Moody had entered into a partnership with a Mr. Lowell, and several other important men, forming the Boston Manufacturing Company, and planned to open a large cotton mill in Waltham. The Waltham mill would be the first of its kind in America. Mr. Moody explained to

me that every process of the manufacture, from raw cotton to finished cloth, would be performed in this one mill. Modern machinery, and Mr. Lowell's ideas, would make this all possible. Francis Cabot Lowell, Mr. Moody's partner, made an extended tour of the cotton mills in England to study the power looms and manufacturing process, which had become so successful there. It was at that time, illegal to export from England the power loom or its design, so Mr. Lowell returned to America with his detailed notes and drawings from the English mills and asked the skillful mechanic, Mr. Moody, to produce a working power loom like the ones he had studied in England. With the aide of Mr. Lowell's memory of the working machine, his notes and drawings, Paul Moody was able to build the first power loom in America. The company bought an old mill in Waltham and when remodeled, they planned to employ hundreds of young women to work it. Mr. Moody encouraged Mother and me to relocate to Waltham, Massachusetts before the mill was finished, and he insured me I would be hired first. Father always said "Mr. Moody was the most intelligent man he had ever met," so we took Father's words to heart, and made the move to Waltham, Massachusetts later that year.

MOTHER AND I lent a room in Waltham, just a short walk from where the old mill was being renovated. Mother was not at all happy with the move to Waltham. Having lived her entire life in Amesbury, Mother had nothing good to say about our new town or life. Amesbury had been home to the Hoyt family, before the town was even named. It was in 1640, while John Hoyt lived in the town of Salisbury, Massachusetts that the village leaders asked if thirty families would move across the river and form a new

village. John Hoyt made the move across the river and became one of the founders of Amesbury. Father and Mother were both direct decedents of John Hoyt. Mother was born Sarah Hoyt, a cousin several times removed from Father's side of the family.

SO THE WAIT for mill work in Waltham began, and it had me uneasy with fear that our money would run out before employment at the mill would begin. That spring of 1814 was most difficult for us, with no work and little money for food or coal; we spent many days in bed. Days in bed enabled us to eat less, stay warm and use less coal. Our money had to last. When Mr. Moody and his family finally made the move to Waltham, our situation changed. Mr. Moody was good to us, having his wife hire me to help set up their household. Through their friends, some tailoring work was found for me. Mr. Moody was good to his word, and I, Hannah Hoyt, was one of the first "Mill Girls" hired at the Waltham Mill by the Boston Manufacturing Company. This employment, enabled Mother and me to live on my income, giving me a sense of freedom and pride I had never felt before.

THE WORK AT the mill was not more than we could do, but the long hours made the workday difficult. At my loom, I was often able to read during the middle of the day when the light was good. The other girls employed at the mill were interesting and most well read. We were not like those poor mill girls of England that were beaten and treated like slaves. Our fathers were born free. We were Yankee girls! The company had no hold on us. We were too valuable to be ill treated. With so many workers needed to run their mill, young farm girls were recruited from all over New

England to fill the ranks. To ensure the company a large work force of young farm girls, the confidence of the rural population had to be gained. Factory-controlled boarding houses were built, with a matron of tried character in each house to enforce the stringent company regulations. These regulations were designed to protect the young mill girls' honor, character, as well give comfort to fathers who were afraid to trust their daughters while employed in the mills of a large town. These farm girls already knew how to work hard, long hours without complaint and did so from their first day at the mill. Unlike Samuel Slater's Rhode Island spinning mills that paid his girls in credits to the company store, we were paid in cash, to be spent how and where we choose. Our spending gave us power and importance in the community.

Most mill girls lived in the company boarding houses where their lives outside of the factory were carefully watched and scrutinized for any lack of character. Any employee habitually absent from Sunday worship, or known to be guilty of immorality was discharged. The long hours of work and the six or more girls to a room at the boarding house left them little opportunity for immorality.

WHEN THE FACTORY began to produce cloth, it had no market to sell such large quantities of goods. There was only one shop in Boston, kept by a Mrs. Bowers, where such domestics were sold, and she alone could not dispose of the Waltham goods. The company had no choice, but to hire an auctioneer to sell the cloth. The first auction brought more than thirty cents a yard, which was more than the company anticipated. The cloth was soon popular and sold easily through a firm of selling agents.

I WORKED THE Waltham mill and looked after Mother. Sharing that one room with Mother all those years in Waltham was not at all pleasant. She never wanted to live there and I heard about it every day.

BY 1820 MOTHER had passed away; so had the great Mr. Lowell who is credited as the founder of the Waltham System. My father's friend, Paul Moody, was at that time in charge of the mills at Waltham. These mills consisted of three brick manufactories that housed: eight thousand sixty-four spindles, two hundred thirty-one looms, and employed about four hundred persons, mostly females, that produced two million yards of cloth a year. This carefully structured undertaking, now known as the Waltham System, had been highly successful for the Boston Manufacturing Company. But the Charles River, that powered the looms, could not support any further expansion of the Waltham mills. A more powerful water source was needed if the company was to expand.

IT WAS AT this time that one of Paul Moody's old business partners, Ezra Worthen from Amesbury, came to visit him in Waltham. Ezra met with Paul Moody and Patrick Jackson, one of the principal Directors, to inquire if the company wanted to set up a mill in a new location and if so, employ him to establish this new site. Mr. Jackson said he was interested if, a good water power source could be found. Ezra immediately named the Pawtucket Falls, on the Merrimack River at the farming community of East Chelmsford, Massachusetts; and with a piece of chalk drew a map of the river and canal on the wood planked floor. This crude sketch was enough to excite Mr. Jackson and he insisted Paul Moody visit this location with his friend, Ezra Worthen. Their visit to

Pawtucket Falls would open the door, to my life in Lowell.”

Chapter Eighteen

East Chelmsford

Paul Moody packed a canvas bag for the trip to Pawtucket Falls at the village of East Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Paul's wife Dearest, laughed when she saw how he was dressed. Paul looked more like a poor farmer than the successful mechanic and business man that he was.

“Now Dearest, don't laugh at me. You know I come from a humble background and I rather enjoy this look.”

“Husband, you won't fool anyone with that gold watch and bob. I know you're dependent on that watch and check it often, but leave it at home. If you want to pass as a farmer looking to buy land at a fair price, don't carry a gold watch!”

Paul knew if word got out, that a group of rich investors were looking to buy all the land by the falls, the price would soar. So he removed the watch and placed it in his top dresser drawer. “Ezra and I will return next week and yes, I still remember how to act poor. I have much more trouble trying to fit in with the rich.”

“Paul, be careful, you are not so young and I worry when you travel.”

“Dearest, it won't be a difficult trip. We plan to travel by

way of the Middlesex Canal. When the canal boat arrives at the village of East Chelmsford we will look and smell every bit the part; no one will take notice of us.”

WHEN THE CARRIAGE arrived that would carry him to the canal boat, Paul gave Dearest a passing kiss as he strolled out the front door to the street and his waiting ride.

“Mr. Moody, is that you in that garb?”

Paul turned to find he had been caught and recognized so soon, just feet from his front door by Hannah Hoyt. “Please Hannah, say nothing of this to anyone and I’ll explain it all to you upon my return next week. Hannah, do I have your word on this matter?”

“You know Mr. Moody, I would not speak of this matter to anyone, but I will worry that your place in society has been lost.”

Paul smiled at Hannah’s quick wit but asked her, “Why are you not at the mill today?”

“Mary is watching over both of our looms while I market for tonight’s reading circle.”

“Hannah, we will talk when I return.” And with that quick reply, Paul stepped up into the carriage, tapped its side, the driver snapped his whip and down the street the horse drawn carriage raced.

IT WAS SEVERAL weeks before Paul Moody returned from

Pawtucket Falls. Paul was working late at his desk, his oil lamp burning, when Hannah approached him. “Mr. Moody, I am glad to see you back safe from your trip.”

Paul looked up from the report he was carefully writing and smiled at Hannah. “By the look in those eyes, I know, you want to hear a good story. Hannah, I do have exciting news to tell you, but it must wait until I finish this report.”

“Mr. Moody, I love your stories, but don’t keep me waiting too long. I’m about ready to die, wanting to know why and where you were traveling dressed in those old clothes. You were gone over two weeks!”

“Hannah if your anticipation doesn’t kill you tonight, find me at the machine shop tomorrow after the last bell, and I’ll tell you the secrets of my travels.”

Hannah without thinking touched her hand to Paul’s face and kissed his forehead in the same way she had always kissed her father. “Thank you Paul, I will be here expecting one of your great stories.” As Hannah hurried away, her face felt hot and her heart was pounding, now realizing that she had just kissed Paul Moody.

Paul had often trusted Hannah with his business secrets. He was not sure why this was so, but she always seemed to be there to hear them. Hannah had eyes one could trust and so he had.

THROUGH THE YEARS, Hannah often stopped by his machine shop while he was working; even as a young girl she was

so full of questions. Hannah was quick to understand the problems he was trying to solve and bold enough to offer her input on a possible solution. She was so careful to listen as he talked. She hung on every word he said, looking him straight in the eye with such interest. Like the time he told her the story about the “water governor;” his friend Mr. Lowell said they needed to regulate the speed of the turning wheels in the mill, before they could set up the power looms at Waltham.

“This was an apparatus of which Mr. Moody had never heard, and the only information concerning it which his friend could supply was that, having seen one in England, he remembered there were two iron balls suspended on two rods, connected at one end like a pair of tongs. When the wheels were in too rapid a motion, these balls were driven apart, and produced a partial closing of the water gate; when, on the other hand, their motion was slow, the balls approached each other and affected a greater opening of the gate by which an increased motion was obtained. This conversation was held in Boston, at Mr. Lowell's house. The gentlemen separated with an understanding that a “governor” should be forthwith ordered from England. Mr. Moody, on his ride to Waltham, could not get those balls out of his mind. They were flying round in his brain the whole of that day and night. The next morning he went to the shop and chalked out the plan of some wheels, which he ordered to be made. Not long after this Mr. Lowell was at Waltham, and Mr. Moody inquired if the “governor” had been ordered from England. On learning that it had not, Mr. Moody produced the “governor” which he had made. It was set up in the mill, and that identical one was in successful use until 1832.”[\[54\]](#)

There is nothing more flattering to a man then when a young woman takes great interest in his life's work. Paul knew that if he was younger and not already married, he would have made Hannah his wife. Hannah was his good friend and it would stay that way.

AT THE MACHINE shop the following day, Paul worked on a new drive system for the looms. He needed to develop a new mode of power transmission that would be more economical and require less maintenance than the shaft-and-gear system that had been borrowed from the British mills. He was working on a system of leather belts and pulleys to power the machinery. Unaware the final work bell had rung or how long Hannah had been standing there watching him, when he finally noticed her presence he remembered, "Well Hannah, such a surprise and what brings you here today?"

"Mr. Moody, stop teasing me, you know very well why I am here today! You invited me and promised to share some exciting news of your travels."

Paul put down his tools, wiped his dirty hands on a cloth and looked directly into Hannah's eyes. "Why Hannah, no small talk for me today? Right to the point you are, but I like that in you Hannah. Would you care for a cup of tea? I have hot water."

Paul was the man that made her the most uncomfortable, yet she was always drawn to him. Hannah was unsure with men she liked, but tried not to let it show. She knew most men found her too bold and direct, asking them too many question. Hannah learned it worked best when she tried not to talk and just listen to

men. She did not often do what was best. But Hannah loved to listen to Paul even as her head raced with new and exciting thoughts. Hannah made her mind slow down, to halt the race of her thoughts. She calmed herself. “Yes I would like a warm cup of tea and a story.”

Paul slid two wooden pressed backed chairs to his drawing table and fixed the tea. Hannah sat, picked up the hot cup of tea waiting for it to cool and the story to begin. Paul stood, tested his hot tea, put the cup on the table to cool and began to pace as he formed his thoughts. Paul was not one to sit, but Hannah patted the empty chair beside her and he sat down. “The day we met outside my home, you most certainly recall how I was dressed? I did not want to be known when we arrived in East Chelmsford. Ezra Worthen and I traveled there to inspect Pawtucket Falls and the old canal built around it.”

Hannah’s eyes flashed open wide. “You were looking for a site to build a new mill!”

“Yes, the site is perfect for a new mill. With so much land needing to be purchased, we can’t let people know our intentions. Now you understand why I had to dress in such old clothes. Hannah we measured the drop of the falls, and it is just over thirty feet. The water power available would be enormous. The old Pawtucket Canal around the falls is not used any more after the Middlesex Canal replaced it and the old canal with its thirty foot drop would become our power source. We must first buy up all the land along the old canal and below the falls, then widen the old canal and we’ll have water power to run a dozen mills.”

“Paul, this excites me! I want a change. The new mills would locate me closer to my sister in New Chester.”



[54] Lowell, *As It Was, And As It Is*, published 1845, 226

Chapter Nineteen

George Washington Lovrien

Lowell, Massachusetts, October 1839,

George: **“A boy raised without a father won’t know how to be a man!”** I heard that statement too often during my childhood. Aunt Hannah was my only guardian. She raised me, without a father or mother. Two things happened to cause this: Mother died and Father gave me away. These events both hurt and angered me as I grew up without parents.

Being a motherless child made me ache in ways I still can’t shake. Hurting is my secret I keep hidden from others, it dwells deep inside me.

Anger! I had a problem with it. Of course I was angry; my Father did not want me. He gave me away! There’d be something wrong with me if I hadn’t been angry! Me need him? No, and I don’t give a lick what he did; heck, I’m just fine without a father. What more could he have taught me anyway? I had Aunt Hannah and she’d raise no sissy. Oh, I got in fights; all boys do, but not any more. I no longer need to prove my worth by fighting. Sure, I’m still able to go man-to-man against all comers, but not this morning; I came to the falls to be alone.

The early morning sun is awake, peeking above the far

horizon, shooting its rays of light, touching the city below and casting long shadows on the red brick buildings of Lowell. From my vantage seated upon a flat rock by Pawtucket Falls, the factory town beneath me appears asleep. Only on a Sunday morning does this city sleep past first light. Even now in October, with shorter days and a later hour of sunrise, the workers of Lowell still slumber because Sunday's our only day of rest. We'll not toil today, unlike the sun who's never given a day off. As winter approaches the sun sleeps later. Yet on this late October morning the sun is now up, struggling to climb above the trees on the far horizon, casting a clear white glow, cutting sharp long shadows on the brick factory buildings of Lowell. Lowell is my town, my life, my loneliness.

I visit the falls on Sunday mornings to sit on my rock, listen to the water, and sketch the red brick buildings of Lowell; cotton mills and boarding houses line the river bank in neat rows. I set my drawing pad, pen and ink bottle on the flat rock beside me and wait for an early morning light worthy of capture. Sunday is the only dawn I've ever sketched with my pen; the other days of the week are taken working the mill, as I have done since the age of five.

On Sundays I'm here for solitude, allowing my hard heart to open. All week I work tough, appear happy, strong, but I'm not; pain's inside me, hidden in my chest. Listening to the sounds of water falling helps me release this, which I hold secret, giving myself this time for hurting. I visit this emptiness to experience fully the pain I wish to rid myself of and yearn for this heart of mine to stop aching! Does this wallowing end my pain? No, I'll be back next week with another heart full of dark power.

Something is truly wrong with me! Why is it difficult for me to gaze upon a young mother holding her sleeping child? Part of me is lost; I long for a mother's touch I'll never again feel. I can't remember her face.....my heart is broken! I need tenderness to heal. Love! A piece of me is missing and by God I will be made whole.

This that affects me is not uncommon among workers in our factories. I daily see emptiness in their eyes, their actions; the difference among us comes in how we choose to deal with our injured hearts. The acts of drinking, gambling, fighting, eating, womanizing, writing, book reading, finding religion, are a few of the ways I see us, the walking wounded, trying to deal with our emptiness. For me, I work hard and flirt with pretty girls to cope with mine. I'm hopeful success and the love of a good woman will fill my void. I come to the falls weekly to visit this dark power holding me back, and remind myself why I work so hard in the mill.

Living in Lowell and working the mill is all I've ever known. I don't recall my life before Lowell. I was too young to remember arriving in town the month the first mill opened, or Father giving me away to Aunt Hannah. In 1823, I was age two; my Mother died, the factory opened, and I came here with Aunt Hannah to live in Lowell. The small village we moved to was at that time called East Chelmsford, not yet named Lowell.

The story is told that Kirk Booth, an agent for the Waltham Company, was sent to East Chelmsford, by the corporation, to shrewdly purchase all the land around Pawtucket Falls on both

river banks for as cheap as possible. The corporation wanted total control of all the land and water power, so they could build a new mill. So Booth, not wanting the farmers to know of the corporation's plans, only told them he was going to raise fruit and wool. When the farmers learned they sold Kirk Booth the greatest water-power in New England for dirt, Booth became a hated man. Booth remains in Lowell to this day, living in his fine mansion by the river, riding in his fancy carriage and striking young boys with his riding-whip; he's still most hated. But not all the stories he told the farmers were untrue; you see Booth did plant fruit trees outside his mansion and the wool he raised it, pulling it over the eyes of the former land owners he swindled.[\[55\]](#)

Kirk Booth, the man in town people love to hate, was not actually the one who made the first purchases of farm land for the corporation. Aunt Hannah tells how Thomas Clark, a merchant of Newbury, was taken into the confidence of the Waltham Company owners and employed by them to buy up the locks and canal rights around Pawtucket Falls. Thomas Clark, one of the Directors of the defunct Locks and Canals Corporation, with its canal around Pawtucket Falls, was able to buy up all five hundred shares to the company for about one hundred dollars a piece for the corporation. With control of the water rights secured, the owners sent Thomas Clark to East Chelmsford in the autumn of 1821 to purchase the farms on which the city of Lowell is built. The first tract of land purchased was the farm of Nathan Tyler: forty acres in town and sixty acres out in Tewksbury for the sum of eight thousand dollars. By 1824 when the last of the land was purchased, the newly formed Merrimack Manufacturing Company bought nearly four hundred acres at prices averaging not far from

one hundred dollars per acre. They had purchased enough land and water power in East Chelmsford to start ten large mills.

Aunt Hannah worked the mill in East Chelmsford when it first opened in the autumn of 1823. A few years later, at age five, I started in the mill as a bobbin boy, called a “doffer” by the other workers. We “doffed” or took off the full bobbins from the spinning frames, and replaced them with empty ones. My tasks as a doffer were easy compared to what is expected of me now. To earning my keep as a bobbin boy, I only worked fifteen minutes out of every hour, just when the bobbin spool was full. The remainder of the hour was my time to play. As a “doffer” I was paid two dollars a week. Not bad for a five year old, but what made the job difficult were the long days. We all started work at five o’clock in the morning, with one half hour off for breakfast and dinner, finishing the work day at seven in the evening. The ringing of the bell in the tower called us to and from work each day. It still does; we march to the sound of that damn bell. The long fourteen hour days were most difficult for me as a child of five, yet it was all I knew.

During my first years in the mill, older girls watched out for me, mothered me. At a young age I wanted older girls’ attention, their mothering; yet as I grew older and tired of their fussing ways I insisted they stop acting like my Mother. Acting like my Mother! How would I understand what that meant? I have no memories of my Mother or how she acted; she’s been gone most of my life. I know the older mill girls that enjoyed mothering me were only playing the role much like a big sister in a large family does when “Mother’s away.” Like the older mill girls, Aunt Hannah

tried to be my Mother, caring for me in mothering ways. I love Aunt Hannah, she is all I have, but she's not my Mother. Mother died that October when I was a child of two. I'm age seventeen, almost eighteen, and I no longer have need of a mother. I'm my own man, having been so these last three years. Adulthood began for me during this week of October, at age fourteen, when a Father whom I've never known declared me, George Washington Lovrien, a man.

The sun is right, with light and shadows at their best. I pick up the pad, uncork the ink, dip the pen and rapidly sketch the scene before me as I've done many times before. I'll never get this scene right, yet I continue trying to capture the magic of a sunrise. My pen flies wildly across the page until the sun is too high and the moment lost. Setting the pen and pad down on my rock, I move to the grass for a place to nap. Having awakened early all the years of my childhood makes me long for the sleep I've lost. Church will be missed again this Sunday; I'll deal with that matter later. Pulling my great coat around me, I settle to sleep on the brown grass and dried fall leaves.

A loud shout awakens me from my sound sleep; a friend, Chapman Ward is calling to me, "George! Help me!"

I rub my eyes the sun is bright, nearly noon, and my friend Chapman is running for his life up the hill towards me with an angry, scruffy looking Irish lad hot on his tail. If Chapman does two things well, they are to make trouble and run fast. What has he done this time? I stand, pull off my great coat, and square my shoulders, ready to step in front of the dirty Irish kid after

Chapman passes. The Irish kid is dressed poorly like most of their kind that come to Lowell seeking employment, with hardly a pot to piss in. This Irish dreg stops and stands before me bent over, breathing hard trying to catch his breath. He is older than I first thought, about my age, stands about a head shorter than myself, yet he is built stocky with broad shoulders and powerful arms. This young Irishman, with his handsome face, chestnut brown hair, only lacks a good bath and clean clothes to turn the head of any pretty girl.

“He cheated me!” the Irishman yells as I feel the spit from his words spray my face. His eyes flash with anger, and cheeks turn beet red.

“I’m sure this matter can be settled if....” but before I can finish the young Irishman swings a powerful fist, tagging me square in the eye.

“You’ll not be telling me what to do!” the young Irishman screams.

The power from his blow rocks my head back, waking the rage I keep hidden inside. My body lunges forward and unleashes upon the Irish youth like a wounded wild beast; with arms and legs flailing the two of us roll wrestling Indian style down the hill towards town. When we reach the bottom of the hill, the young Irishman is struggling with all his might, but can not shake free of my total control. I hold him pinned to the ground.

“Let me up!! Let meee up!!” the Irishman yells as I hold

fast.

Minutes pass as the lad yells and thrashes wildly, unable to shake the strength of my hold. When I feel the lad's power spent, I let go, stand up and call out, "Chapman, give Irish back his money!"

Chapman throws a few coins down into the dirt beside the lad as he staggers to his feet. Refusing to pick up the money, the Irishman turns and walks several steps away before looking back to yell, "You best watch your back! I'll be looking for you!"

"Irish, you best be more careful with your money. There are many in that city who will take it from you. Learn to be smarter Irish, you're looking a bit green."

CHAPMAN WARD will not have a black eye tomorrow, but I will; it has begun to swell shut and is puffy and red. I study my battered reflection in the steam before I bathe it in the cool water. Chapman, having not a mark on him, slips away before I can pull on my great coat that waited for me at the top of the hill. My silver watch remained safe in the pocket of my coat and I check the time. With less than an hour to clean up for Sunday dinner at Aunt Hannah's boarding house, I start the walk to town. My long legs carry me quickly; I don't want to be late.

I no longer live with Aunt Hannah at her company boarding-house; at age thirteen it was deemed improper for me to sleep under the same roof as her girls, whose virtue she is paid to protect. In Lowell, if a mill girl's virtue is even questioned she will

be dismissed by the company. Her name is placed on the black list and no other mills in town will hire her; so to preserve their virtue, the pretty girls of my town are kept safe, away from us single men. At the age of nearly eighteen, the best part of my week is the hour spent sharing a Sunday afternoon meal with a room full of lonely mill girls kept secure from the attentions of other men. Sunday dinner at Aunt Hannah's is my only opportunity to socialize with her pretty girls that work the mill and live in her boarding house. My Aunt Hannah is guard and gatekeeper to the lives of these sweet young women and by having her trust I'm allowed in. Some Sundays there are as many as twenty-six wonderful women to share a meal with. The only way this meal could be finer would be if one of them was mine. Although I've not yet met the right girl for me, I'm sure having fun trying to find her. Living in Lowell is a single man's dream, if you have an Aunt Hannah to let you in the door.

WITH A CLEAN change of clothes and a puffy red eye, I am met at the door by Aunt Hannah.

"George, been fighting again? The way your face looks you'll scare my new girls from Vermont. They're sisters, arrived yesterday, so be sweet to them."

I follow Aunt Hannah past the front door and down the hall to where the girls of the house are seating themselves at four large dining room tables.

"Sophia! Marie! Please come here and meet my boy!" Hannah's voice is often strong and demanding when she is dealing

with one of her girls. “Girls this is my boy, George Lovrien. George I would like to introduce you to the Bixby sisters, Sophia and Marie.”

With my one good eye I look the sisters over. Sophia, the taller of the two has pretty bright blue eyes and a long slender neck and body; her shiny dark brown hair is pulled back in a bun. When she breathes in, it is difficult for me not to notice her firm breasts lift the front of her dress.

Marie, the younger sister is a spitfire, with black hair and wild sparkling blue eyes. As bold as brass she says, “George, I hope you didn’t get that shiner trying to steal a kiss from one of these girl. If you did, you should have tried me first. I’d never hit a boy as handsome as you. Yes, I’m sure you’ve guessed it, I have a weakness for the charms of a man with one eye swollen shut.”

“Marie! We need to talk!” Aunt Hannah grabs Marie by the arm and escorts her out of the room.

“Sophia, your sister is full of the dickens. Unless she mends her ways, she won’t last long here.”

“What will Aunt Hannah do to her?”

“Just talk. Aunt Hannah is here to help keep her employed. If anyone outside of this house heard her talk like that, Marie would be sent packing.”

“But I’ve heard the other girls talk of the Sunday meal and

flirting with George. You are George, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am that George! The girls will flirt with me, but they understand it is done in fun and only here in this house where it is safe to do so, young lady. Is your sister a hussy?"

As quick as a flash Sophia slaps my face, striking me hard enough beneath my swollen eye to burn her hand print on my cheek, "How dare you insult my sister! You're a fool George to think Marie is interested in the likes of you! She was only speaking in jest!"

I look at this woman with my one good eye and a smile comes to my face, "If I knew you'd be beating me today, I'd have skipped the first."

"George Lovrien, are you always this impossible?"

I grab hold of her arm and feel it tremble as I move my lips close to her ear and whisper, "Sophia, what I find interesting since we met just a few moments ago, is my Christan name passing through your lips five times. Sophia, I've been counting. So Sophia, I use your name again in hopes of catching up. Now Sophia Bixby, that makes five times for me and we're even, I also know something more about you. You see, I'm older and remember meeting you as a child; we took baths together."

With her free hand she slaps me hard on my other cheek, leaving yet another hand print smacked red upon my face. Marie and Aunt Hannah reenter the room as Sophia's hand strikes my

cheek. Marie smiles and gives me a wink. Aunt Hannah appears stern, yet I know she's amused; I can read her eyes like a book.

"George! Sophia! You two will sit together until you're both able to get along. Is that clear?"

Aunt Hannah sits us down, across from one another, at a table to ourselves. Sophia is struggling to hold back tears and will not look at me. The girls at the other tables carry on, laughing and talking, taking no notice of Sophia or me. They view Aunt Hannah like a mother, me as their brother, and most of the girls at one time or another has earned this punishment of eating alone.

"Sophia, you're not in any trouble with Aunt Hannah."

"Why then was I forced to sit alone at this table with you? If that is not punishment, please tell me what it is."

"You're right. Being forced to share a meal with a brash young man with two red cheeks and a swollen eye is more punishment than most girls can bear."

A small smile breaks across her face that she tries to hide, "You know I didn't mean it like that!" Sophia looks up at my beaten face and starts to laugh, "George, you are really impossible and what will Aunt Hannah think of me after this? I'm off to such a bad start."

"Sophia, look at me!" Looking up her eyes catch mine, her lower lip quivers as she gives away a smile. Her beauty causes me

to pause as I stare deep into bright blue eyes. Her eyes reach back, deep into mine.

“George,” she whispers and our eyes drop their embrace.

“Sophia, work hard, follow the rules and Aunt Hannah will treat you fair. I am certain she likes you and your sister.” I capture her hand in mine and she looks down, “Sophia take this to heart, there is no better woman than Aunt Hannah; she is hard on her girls, but they love her. All the boarding girls call her Aunt Hannah; she’ll treat you like family. Trust her; she has a reason for everything she does. You’re not the first girl to eat alone at this table, just the first to eat alone with me.”

WHEN I SETTLE in bed to sleep, the thoughts of Sophia slapping both my cheeks makes me smile. I see her face as I try to sleep.

I must have said something wrong, or given Sophia too much to think about, because for the remainder of that meal she kept her head down, and would not look up or speak to me. I tried to engage her in conversation, but she would not give me the time of day.

When we were excused from the meal, Sophia thanked me politely for my company and left the table. Sophia keeps her feelings well hidden. That’s not uncommon among mill girls, but she is somehow different from the others. I like her.

Unable to fall asleep, I swing my legs from the bed, light the

lamp and with my ink pen begin sketching Sophia's face on the paper that is kept on my bedside stand. My pen flies about the paper as her image takes form. I remember every detail of her hair, lips and eyes; her looks are burned into my head.

Tired now, I stretch back in my bed, close my eyes and again see her face. Feeling warm inside, I drift to sleep.



[55] Robinson, LOOM AND SPINDLE or Life Among The Early Mill Girls With A Sketch Of "THE LOWELL OFFERING" published 1898, page 10

Chapter Twenty

Sophia Maria Bixby

Lowell, Massachusetts, October 1839

Sophie: I watch as Aunt Hannah slowly finishes the last bite of her pie, takes a sip of tea, and smiles. “If everyone is finished, you may be excused from the table.”

Being forced to sit across from George Lovrien, with his one swollen eye and smart talk, unnerved me during my first Sunday meal in Lowell. Aunt Hannah directed George and me to eat together at a table by ourselves, away from the others. Punishment! Humiliating for a grown woman! I would not speak to him the whole while we ate. He is so rude! He makes me angry! I was determined to ignore him completely; yet at the end of the meal, standing up from the table, I hear myself speak, “George, it was nice meeting you and thank you for your company.” Why am I so polite?

As the girls scatter from the dining room tables Aunt Hannah calls me out, “Sophia! You and your sister will stay after to clear the tables. This is not punishment! All the girls take their turn. If you hurry, you’ll finish cleaning up before the others leave for Sunday stroll.”

Marie gives me that look, I frustrate her. “Sophia, shake your

self out of that mood and help me clear these tables! I don't want to be left behind!"

"Marie, I'm not going out. I'll finish here. Go ready yourself with the others."

"No Sophia, help me clear these tables, we're going out!"

I climb the stairs to my room after the meal clean-up is completed. There are two beds in my room, with three girls to a bed. I share with Plumy and Samantha. I have plenty of room because Plumy is small next to me and Samantha hugs the far edge on her side of the bed. Yet, sleeping with strangers is different than having shared a bed with my sisters at home. I know the sounds and feel of my sisters beside me. With these strange girls next to me, their unfamiliar touch and breathing makes me uncomfortable. Triphena, Kezia and Aseneth fill the other bed in the room. What odd names my roommates have.

THE SOUNDS OF horse's hooves clattering on the brick street and the noise of children at play fills the air; I'm far from the quiet of the farm. The sidewalk is bustling with teams of young women outfitted in their Sunday best dresses and hats. It's a show, with the well clad men passing by, greeting, smiling and tipping their hats. Marie and I stroll side by side. Our Sunday dresses from home are plain; mill girls of Lowell parading the walk spend their money in the town's finest hat and dress shops. In church this morning I was amazed, unable to distinguish any difference in dress between mill girls and wealthy families' daughters.

Mill girls have money to spend but Aunt Hannah says times are getting harder. The bank panic and collapse of the last few years has us in what they now call a depression, with many immigrants in New England out of work. In October '36, with lines of hungry people arriving in Lowell seeking employment, mill girls became less valued; the company announced factory wages were to be cut down. The "girls" turned out en masse, refusing to work for less pay, shutting the mills down. The procession of indignant mill girls followed one another out of the factory and marched to the grove on Chapel Hill. It was there that a girl stood on a pump and spoke to the fifteen hundred coworkers that gathered. Yes, a young woman stood on a pump and spoke in public: an event unheard of, causing surprise and consternation among the upper classes in Lowell. The "girls" turned out and made their demands known, but the strike did no good. The supposed ringleaders were sought out, and swiftly discharged; the mill "girls" soon gave in, returning to work for lower wages and no corporate pay for their board, a loss of a dollar a week.

Mill girls are most certainly not in the upper class in this town, but I don't care about social station. I would rather be alone in the woods than well dressed on this crowded street. Marie wants crowds, fine clothes, the excitement of the city and men. I did not come here to be put on display; I came for schooling, books and to save some money. In my small village of Chelsea, Vermont opportunities for women wanting an education or income are poor at best. In Lowell it appears a young woman can do both; so I'm here to better myself. Tomorrow I begin working the mill and I'll enroll in night classes at the start of the next term. I want my life planned with no surprises; thus in two or three years I'll return

home to the farm where I belong, with an education and money in hand.

Men are not in my plans, not now! However for my younger sister, men are her plans; as long as they walk, talk, wear pants and smile.

“Marie! What did Aunt Hannah say to you in the hall? You know mill girls have been discharged for less than what you did!”

“Sophia, as I recall, you were the one being punished, having to sit alone with that man. What happened to his face, other than you hitting him?”

“I didn’t ask him.”

“You sat alone with him for an entire meal and did not ask him why his eye was swollen shut! What did you talk about?”

“I refused to talk with him.”

“And why?”

“George whispered in my ear that he remembers bathing with me. The image of us both sitting naked in a tub together unnerved me.”

“You were naked with him?”

“We were small children!”

“Oh Sophia, you need that man! You’re too serious and he’ll make you laugh! It’d be great if you laughed more! You’d be a fool not to chase after him. He might even prove handsome if people stopped hitting his face.”

“Marie, enough of your endless talks of men; tell me what she said to you in the hall!”

“Aunt Hannah went off like the fourth of July. It was Marie this! Marie that! However, as her fireworks blasted me, she could not hide what I saw in her eyes; they sparkled with understanding. I’ll wager when Hannah was young, she was a pistol like me. I like Aunt Hannah. This is going to be a great place to live.”

“Marie, learn to control your mouth around men or the company will send you packing! I’m certain Aunt Hannah informed you of the consequences of such behavior in public.”

“I love you too, Sophia.”

“Marie I’m serious!”

“So am I. Sophia, look at all these girls in their beautiful dresses, men tipping their hats as they pass by. This is a dream.”

I watch Marie’s face as she smiles and greets each passerby. My sister truly loves the excitement of the city. I pray she will remain free from trouble. She has much to learn about city life. Aunt Hannah explained to us, but I don’t think Marie was listening, that society in Lowell is divided into four classes and one

must know their place.

The company owners and their agents of the corporation are the aristocrats, not because of their wealth, but on account of their power. There is no appeal from an agent's decision in matters of business or of those employed in his mill. The agents live in large homes, surrounded by beautiful gardens: a paradise for many a home-sick girl working the noisy dusty mill. Often found holding tight to an agent's iron fence is the lonely mill girl looking longingly at his garden flowers, dreaming of country life and home.

The next class is the overseers, ambitious mill hands who worked their way up from lower grades of factory labor. The girls of the house informed me, George is an overseer and hitting him twice before the meal was not very bright. "George has the power to have you discharged, if he felt like it." I've always been the good girl, yet I may be in more trouble than Marie. Aunt Hannah said the overseers live in the end tenements of each block and are afforded rooms to themselves. I wonder if George lives at the end of our block.

We make up the third class, mill girls, the factory operatives and we are spoken of as the "girls." We make up the largest class of workers in Lowell.

The fourth class of workers is jokingly known as "Lords of the spade and the shovel", who labor constantly to repair and expand the great factories. Lords of the shovel live in hundreds of little shanties clustered around a small stone Catholic Church in an area just outside town known as the "Acre." Life at the "Acre" is

often fraught with riot and disorder due to the feuds and quarrels between the “Bloody Fardowner” and the “Corkonians,” factions brought with them from the old country. However, boys from both gangs are glad to fight together when taking on the damned “Yankee boys.”[\[56\]](#)

“Marie.”

“Yes Sophia.”

“Did I make a fool of myself with George?”

“No Sis, but there is a great deal you don’t understand about men. Look deeper into George’s eyes; learn to understand his thoughts through them. It’s so romantic to read a man’s eyes. By the way I took a deep look into George’s one good eye and I think he’s half interested in you, my Sophia. Study eyes more and books less; you’ve a lot to learn about men my dear older sister. George was just trying to have fun with you.”

WE SIT ON the front stoop and watch the sun set on our first Sunday in Lowell. As the light fades, the air chills, a small red haired freckled girl named Plumy Clay can be heard quietly sobbing between the houses until Aunt Hannah comes out to hold her. For so many of the girls, Aunt Hannah is all they have to cling to. I pray I’ll make it here in Lowell. My home in the Green Mountains is far away; I may be next to cry and need holding. I’m all alone in this crowded city. Marie does not understand how I feel. I am afraid. I want to cry, but I’ll wait for bed, when the lamp is out; no one will see my eyes water.



[\[56\]](#) Robinson, LOOM AND SPINDLE or Life Among The Early Mill Girls With A Sketch Of“THE LOWELL OFFERING” published 1898, page 15

Chapter Twenty-one

OVERSEER

Lowell, Massachusetts, October 1839

George: I'm slow to start on this Monday morning. The area around my eye is swollen and turning dark. My dirt digging boys will give me the business; there will be no end to the comments about my black eye.

Training new workers while sporting a shiner will make today difficult. I'm struggling to wake, clear my head. The early morning coffee is hot; the smell of fresh baked bread fills the kitchen. I pour a cup of brew, sip it alone, and breathe in the warm heavenly smells in Molly's kitchen. Molly, our cook, is the only one up before me; she's in the dining room setting tables for breakfast. Her serving girl did not arrive this morning to set up and Molly is not the least bit happy.

"Molly do you need an extra hand in there?"

"Just eat your breakfast, George! I told that girl I'd warm her back side if she ever showed up late again!"

Molly is not a sweet woman, outspoken, tough, but she sure can cook. She goes through kitchen help faster than any cook in Lowell. Young girls are afraid of her; I get along fine with Molly.

Her warm fresh baked goods are the best I've ever ate. At my age and always hungry, good food is almost as important as a pretty woman. Molly's not pretty; I can't find any trace of it. Too many loveless years drained the bloom from her face. Pain has a way of stealing one's beauty. She has no family, few friends. I sit alone; eat the eggs. Aunt Hannah is my only family. I have no close friends.

"Molly, the eggs are good this morning. Your bread with the sweet butter is the best!" I holler at her from the kitchen.

"My eggs are always good! George, more bacon's on the stove; help yourself! How'd you get that black eye? You been fighting again? I hope the other pretty bastard looks worse," she bellows back from the dining room.

There will be no end to the talk of my eye. I quietly sip my hot coffee and ready myself for what this day may bring. I will not respond to any questions about my face.

THE MORNING AIR is crisp, frost covers the ground. Yesterday may have been our last warm day; our earthwork, setting footings, must be completed before the ground freezes. It's still dark; my men won't show up until just before first light. Our workday starts when we can see and stops when we can't. Mill girls work inside with lamps and begin their day at five; we'll not have enough light until after six. On the dark street I watch streams of sleepwalking young girls empty the boarding houses, trudging to the mills as the ringing bell calls them to duty. The sound of that bell is a dammed cold way to start a day.

I unlock the toolshed; light the lamp. Pulling out the wheelbarrows from the front of the shed, I begin piling the shovels on the ground as my body starts to warm. While holding a bundle of marking sticks and string in my arms, I notice a new boy has arrived, afraid to be late. That's a good sign.

"I'm glad you're here early wanting to work; we'll have plenty of it until the snow flies. I'm George, your overseer." I drop my bundle on the ground, extend my arm to shake the lad's hand, but he keeps his head down, won't look me in the eye and offers nothing back. In the dim light of the lamp the man's actions are difficult to discern, but it's clear something is wrong. I'm quick to size a man up.

"Look at me lad! If you've got a problem, the boys on the crew will find it; they'll run you off before noon!"

"My problem is not with the boys, it's with you," the Irish lad's voice smacks with anger. He lifts his face into the light and looks me straight on with eyes flashing rage, as he studies what his fist did to blacken my eye. The harsh stare softens as his thoughts turn to employment. "I take it I'm fired!"

"Irish, what's your name?"

"Joseph Patten."

"Joseph, I'll make this real clear. I don't hire, but it's up to me to decide when to fire. If you're a hothead, you won't last long on my crew; your temper will get the best of you. I will not

tolerate any fighting between members of my crew, at work or on your own time. I don't care if you're a Bloody Fardowner or a Corkonians, you will not be fighting and remain employed. Is that clear?"

"What about striking an overseer?"

"Joseph, you're in luck that was yesterday. You start today. Do you still want the job?"

"I need the money."

"We all need the money! The question is, will you work for me?"

"Yes."

"Good, then you'll start by taking back your coins." I hold out the silver Chapman Ward threw on the ground. "You're not the first to look foolish by Chapman's tricks. I was age seven when Chapman talked me into trading my best pair of boots for his gold toothpick; of course, it wasn't made of gold. Chapman is not a bad fellow as long as you never trust him. He thinks it's funny to pull one off."

"I can't stand a cheat!"

"Chapman has too many friends in the company. Let it go Joseph. You'll get the better of him in the long run."

"I'm not just some dirty immigrant to be kicked around!"

“Prove it by hard work; it’s the only thing that counts in this town if you’ve no money.”

“I know how to work.”

“Good, then we’ll get along fine.”

Joseph steps away from me as other members of the crew begin to arrive. He does not want others to think he’s brown-nosing on his first day.

My earthmovers are mostly Irish, hungry enough to earn their daily bread with a shovel. Three new Irish laborers, “Newbie’s,” are to join my crew of twenty. I don’t feel up to the effort it will take to train them in. As overseer, I choose to lead by example. My rule: give no man a task I’m not willing to do myself. I show “Newbie’s” what I expect by picking up a shovel and working beside them. I challenge a new man by setting an outrageous pace, faster than I know he’ll handle just to test his mettle. I outwork “Newbie’s”; it confirms why I’m in charge.

“Newbie’s” will often walk off before the first day’s end, not from the backbreaking pace I set, but because of taunting, from seasoned workers making fools of them. A new worker’s first day is hell. Many won’t make it, yet the few foolish enough to return will have employment. My “Lords of the shovel” are a tough bunch.

Today we’re digging footings for an addition to the mill. This task must be completed before the ground freezes. I’m

assigned this difficult bunch of misfits because this Irish crew fought more than they worked; Irish gangs are the problem in Lowell. This Irish crew was unmanageable and behind schedule before I took over; a problem to be fixed. A strong hand was needed to keep these men on task. I'm that strong hand. Having mastered all the jobs in the mill, I'm often sent to fix problems. So, I'm stuck here babysitting these childish men while I fall farther behind each day in my routine mill duties; I maintain the factory machinery. These men-children are mine until a permanent solution to this dilemma is found: an overseer willing and able to manage this rowdy crew.

JOSEPH PATTEN works hard, making the start of his first day appear easy. In the forenoon I'm called away to complete a repair in the mill. Returning to my crew late in the day, Joseph is setting a hurried pace; the other men are striving to keep up. I stand at the edge of the site, unnoticed, and watch this lad; he has a way with men. They follow his lead. I've never known a man to come out on top their first day; not with this crew, the pecking order is fierce.

By day's end, Joseph Patten is the best worker I've got. Dirt works is not new to him, nor are the roughhewed men that swing the shovels. Patten is drawn to rough men; he likes to best them. He understands these callous men's coarse ways; their raw bantering only makes him smile. Patten is so comfortable in their presences; he most likely is a rogue himself. Patten, a cocky sort, struts like a bandy rooster in front of the crew. He could be trouble. I don't want to trust him.

BY THE WEEK'S end my shiner begins to fade and so have comments about the eye. Night classes start next week and I do not want the new school master to think ill of me. Sporting a shiner would make a poor first impression. Master Briarcliff of Boston will teach mathematics and the classics in the new term; I'll study both. I want high marks.

Aunt Hannah is expecting me for Sunday dinner so I've washed my face, combed my hair and put on my best clean shirt. Sophia will be there. Unlike most Sundays, I woke in high spirits with no need for time alone at the falls. Sophia's been on my mind all week; I stir with excitement in anticipation of seeing her again. The picture I sketched of her is pinned to the wall by my mirror. I've had feelings like this before; it never works out.

At Sunday meal Sophia does her best to avoid me. She waits until nearly everyone is seated before entering the dining hall to locate a place, sitting with her back to me at a table as far away as possible. My heart sinks; I'll not be a fool by giving her any more of my unwanted attention. After the meal she hurries off; we make no eye contact or speak a word. Sophia's sister Marie is not here; maybe something is wrong?

Chapter Twenty-two

SISTER

Lowell, Massachusetts, November 1839

George: Pawtucket Falls still has a friend in me. With my back to the city, I sketch the water falling on its rocks. Its spray chills in the November air and clings to the rocks as ice. My fingers are cold, my breath visible like the mist from Pawtucket Falls as I capture its beauty on my drawing pad. My heart again feels cold. I have no plans to ever return for a Sunday meal with Aunt Hannah. I don't care to visit with her girls. They seem young and foolish; they don't understand me. I'm told Sophia enrolled in both of Master Briarcliff's night courses this term. I will avoid her; not give her a chance to converse with me.

"George?"

Sophia's voice startles me! I turn to find her standing behind me, alone, silhouetted against the cold gray November sky. Dressed in a heavy winter coat, gloves and a wool hat, only her face shows; yes, this is her. She found me; spoke my name. Why? Frozen like a startled animal, no words find their way to my mouth. She speaks again.

"I was told you come here on Sundays. You were not at Sunday meal. I need to speak with you."

I note worry in Sophia's eyes. My words come slow and quiet, "Who knows I come here on Sundays?"

"Aunt Hannah said I'd likely find you here. George please let me talk with you; I don't know who to trust."

"Talk to Aunt Hannah. You can trust her."

"This is about my sister Marie. I'd rather trust you."

"Trust me? You don't know me! You've not talked with me since the first day we met. Why now?"

"Marie would trust you if I was in trouble."

"Fine, sit down; tell me what you want!" My tone is harsh and uncaring. I see a flash of anger, and then hurt sweeps across her face; I'd pushed her too far. Standing up, I hold her shoulders as they begin to tremble; softly I speak her name, "Sophia, I'm sorry. I'll help you." Her tears begin to flow and I pull her into my chest as she begins to cry.

"I need your help." Sophia sputters out the words, unable to restrain her sobs. "I'm afraid Marie will be blacklisted and sent home in shame."

I wipe the tears from under her eyes and move my face close to hers. Longing to press my lips to hers, I control the urge to taste her kisses. "What has Marie done wrong?"

"The Sunday last, she slipped out after church, not returning

until just before bed-check. Marie left the house again today after church. I think she is with a man. I need to help Marie before Aunt Hannah finds out what going on.”

“I’m sure Aunt Hannah already knows. If it’s true, we’ll need to confront Marie before Aunt Hannah is forced to act. How do you know she is with a man?”

“This morning after service, Plumy and Samantha saw Marie talking to an Irish boy outside church. George, help me find her.”

“There’s a young Irishman on my crew that owes me a favor, let’s see what he knows. Sophia, head back to the house and wait for me. Go home! You don’t want to be seen out with me, or you’ll be in the same trouble as your sister.”

THE OUTER WALLS of Joseph Patten’s shanty are of cast-off wood from shipping crates, crude but cleverly built. The shelter has no windows to let in light or the winter’s cold. White smoke is visible rising above the shack from a dented tin chimney; a cook stove may serve as its only source of heat. For as poor as Patten’s home looks, it’s of the best in the “Acre.” Patten does not answer my knocks, but I attract plenty of looks from the Irish now filling the street. I withdraw quietly as their angry stares threaten my life. The “Acre” is no place for a Yankee boy to venture alone.

SOPHIA RUNS OUT the front door of the boarding house as I approach and whispers to me, “She’s back!”

“And?”

“Marie won’t talk!”

“Tell her to put on a coat; we’re taking a walk. Marie will talk to me or I’ll have a chat with Aunt Hannah!”

Within minutes Sophia is out front with her sister in tow; both girls are dressed warm for our November stroll. Little Plumy Clay, her red hair in pigtails, watches from the front window as I grab Marie by the arm and drag her down the walk. Gossip of this confrontation will spread through the house like fire. Aunt Hannah will know! Marie’s stepping out, her virtue is in question, and Aunt Hannah will be forced to confront her. God help Marie when she returns to the house.

At the post office I park Marie down on a bench; Sophia and I stand. The street is empty. I can see my breath in the cold air as I ask, “Well....?”

Marie is ready to bite as she growls out, “You have no right...”

“Quiet!” flies from my mouth as my words cut her off. “Do you understand why you’re here?”

“No!”

“If you’ve been stepping out, alone with a man, Aunt Hannah will find out; if she doesn’t already know! She’ll do her job and you’ll be gone. Is that what you want?”

Marie’s face is dark red and hot as she glares silently up at

me; her bottom lip quivers.

“Your silence speaks volumes! We all know what’s going on.” I stare back into Marie’s angry face. Her eyes are on fire.

Marie defiantly asks, “Are we done now?”

Sophia sits and circles her arm around Marie, but her sister is stiff, not wanting touch. “Marie, I love you. We want to help.”

“I don’t need your help and I’ve nothing to say!” With that said, Marie is on her feet storming back towards the house.

Sophia turns to follow. “Let her go,” my hand holds Sophia’s arm, “she needs time to think.”

“George,” she looks up, our eyes meet, and Sophia’s stare is stark with fear. “I need to help my sister. I won’t let her throw this all away.”

“It’s cold. I’ll walk you home.” The soft sounds of our stiff leather soles scuffing the brick walk is all we hear on our return.

“George.”

“Yes.”

“Will you talk with Aunt Hannah to see if Marie’s in any trouble?”

“I think she’s in trouble.”

“I don’t understand my sister. Why is she so man-crazy? What’s wrong with her head? How could she allow a man to do this?”

“Sophia, wanting to be loved is a powerful force.”

“No man is worth being blacklisted, run out of town for. I’d never give up my dreams for a man! Marie’s foolish! She’ll throw her life away wanting to hear sweet words from a man’s mouth. We both know what men are after! George, you’re no different. I’ve watched the way you look at women. I know what’s on your mind!”

“Sophia, stop it! Fighting with me won’t help your sister.”

Joseph Patten calls out, “George!” as he approaches us by cutting across the road; he’s running his mouth. “George did you come to my home? A Yankee boy has no place in the “Acre”. You could have been hurt!” Patten stops in front of Sophia, looks her over before turning to me. “What did you want from me George?” Patten’s eyes lock back on Sophia’s face. “Have we met?”

“I have not met you sir!”

“Sophia Bixby, I would like to introduce you to Joseph Patten.”

“Are you Marie’s sister?” Patten’s face quickly reddens. Immediately realizing his slip, he casts his eyes down and scuffs the toe of his boot on the ground.

“You know Marie! You’re the one she’s seeing! My sister is about to be blacklisted and I think you know why! What have you got to say for yourself?” Sophia trembles with each word spoken, fighting back tears of rage.

Stunned, I remain calm asking Joe, “Is this true? Are you and Marie stepping out?” Stone faced, Patten glares back at me refusing to speak, yet concern for Marie slips passed the anger in his eyes. “Joe, you care about her. She needs your help. Come with us; explain to Aunt Hannah what’s going on..... Will you help her?”

Patten nods his head “yes”. Sophia takes my arm and the three of us make the walk to the house in silence.

She clings to my arm. Layers of cotton and wool separate Sophia’s warmth from mine. In my mind I feel her touch. Her hands caressing me, making me feel loved. The thought of her bare chest pressed to mine is intoxicating; yet her warm winter clothes shield her from the cold November air and my touch. Sophia hangs from the arm of my jacket, seeking my support. I feel the weight of her pain. She fears for her sister. Marie has crossed a line, broken a rule; she wants to be held, loved. Marie and I are much alike: we both want the healing of human touch. Daring to touch is a sin. In this working town, with all its laws of conduct, a mill girl accused of such a sin is shamed and destroyed. Wanting to be loved may lead to the greatest crime and humiliation a mill girl may face in the factory world of Lowell.

At the house, the girls are abuzz with drama. “Aunt

Hannah's in the kitchen with Marie!" We escort Joseph Patten down the hall and march him boldly past the girls; Triphena, Plumy and Kezia stand just outside the kitchen door. Their voices fall silent at his sight. My knock on the kitchen door is in passing as Joe, Sophia and I make an entrance. The kitchen is warm with the smell of fresh bread but the air is thick with tension. We shed our winter coats and hang them on the back-door hook, as Marie, who is seated in a chair, has Aunt Hannah standing over her giving the old what-for!

I grab Joe by the back of the neck and whisper, "Don't speak unless asked to!" as Aunt Hannah turns to give Joe one of her looks. Marie bolts to her feet at the sight of Joe Patten, her eyes flash passion before the mask of fear takes back control. Joe stands silent.

"Marie, sit back down." Aunt Hannah's voice is soft yet commanding. "If you remain uncooperative, I'll send you back to the farm. Your parent will receive a letter with a detailed account of the reasons for my actions. Is this what you want?"

"No! I don't want to go back!" Marie flings out her words in anger, "I've done nothing wrong!"

Aunt Hannah slowly kneels down in front of Marie, taking hold of the young woman's hands. She looks up into softly watering eyes and asks, "Do you care for this man?"

Marie looks to Joe, then back to Aunt Hannah and nods her head "Yes" as the tears leak down her face.

“Joseph Patten! If that’s your name, pull up a chair. We’re going to talk!” Aunt Hannah barks out orders while still kneeling before Marie.

Joe slides a kitchen chair beside Marie, sits and his hand finds hers. With his touch Marie’s control is strengthened as she clears the tears with her hand and waits bravely for the next question. Aunt Hannah notes the sudden change in Marie’s demeanor.

Aunt Hannah looks long into Patten’s eyes before she stands and softly asks, “What are your intentions with this woman? Is she just one of many mill girls you trifle with?”

“No, I wish to marry Marie if I’m able to win her heart.”

Marie is awash with smiles, tears and squealing sounds of joy as she holds tight the hand of her man. Turning in her chair, facing him, Marie breathes out, “Joseph Patten, my heart is already yours; I love you and will marry you today....”

“Quiet!” Hannah’s face shows no joy as she interrupts Marie. “This is not a storybook; we have problems to solve. Marie, wait in the hall while I talk with Joseph... not one word about this to any of the girls. Is that understood?”

I pull the stunned girl from her chair before she has a chance to answer. I hurry Marie through the kitchen door to the crowd of waiting young women filling the hall. With Marie gone and the kitchen door closed behind her, I slowly return to the three; Sophia,

Aunt Hannah and Joe in a chair. Aunt Hannah is busy rearranging the kitchen shelves; I know she is thinking.

Time drags on before Aunt Hannah ends her busy work and speaks. “George, I understand you worked with Joseph Patten at the mill, so tell me straight up, what kind of man do I have sitting in my kitchen? I want the truth!” Aunt Hannah moves her face nose to nose with Patten and asks him, “You’re man enough to hear the truth, aren’t you?”

Patten stares firmly into Aunt Hannah’s eyes and with a calm flat affect states, “Yes ma’am.”

“Good, I’m starting to like you already Master Patten.....George, give me the hard truth!”

I straddle a chair in front of Joe and collect my thoughts before I speak..... “Joe and I slung dirt together. He’s my best worker, but the crew is finished for the season. Joe’s out of work till spring.”

“And?”

“Joe was always on time, never came drunk or hung-over, no fighting he’s respected by the other men.”

Again Aunt Hannah pressed close to Patten’s face, “You sound like any number of men in this town! Why should I help you? I’m here to protect my girls from men like you. What makes you so different?”

“Marie and I love each other. She needs me.”

“Patten! I know all about my girl’s needs; that’s how they get in a family way.”

“Ma’am, I’m talking about love, not lust!”

“So at your age you know the difference?”

Joseph Patten rises to his feet, squares his shoulders and lets his anger fly, “Ma’am I’ve had enough of your condescending attitude. Marie and I love each other! I understand what you’re trying to say. I know meeting her alone was wrong, but my heart’s so taken with her I couldn’t help myself.....its my fault. Marie’s a good woman. Are you going to help us or not?”

A slow smile forms on Aunt Hannah’s face and her eyes sparkle, “Sit down Master Patten; I like you. You’ll have my help as long as you don’t cross me. Is that clear?”

“Yes ma’am.” Patten remains standing, not sure if he can trust Aunt Hannah.

“You sound like an educated man;” and in quick fire, Hannah shoots her next question, “can you read and write?”

“Yes, I’ve had some schooling.”

“Good. Sophia, bring your sister back in here. Boys, pull up a chair; would you like some coffee? We’ve got plans to make when the girls are here.”

Sophia and Marie join us at the kitchen table; Aunt Hannah pours coffee before she leaves the kitchen to check on her other girls. Marie's eyes are puffy, red from crying. Joe reaches for Marie's hand; again his touch calms her. No words are spoken as we wait for Aunt Hannah's return.

Aunt Hannah rushes into the kitchen, shuts the door, slides her chair up to the table and takes a sip of coffee before she speaks, "I have one more issue to clear up before I commit my support. I must ask the question. If I give you my help and her belly swells, I'd look like a fool, costing me my job ...well ...Joe Have you been planting any seeds; playing farmer with Marie?"

Marie's face blushes deep red. Joe squeezes her hand trying to reassure her, "Marie, it's a fair question. We need her help....." Joe watches a tears roll down Marie's face before turning to Aunt Hannah. Withholding his anger he responds, "The answer to your rude question is, NO! Ma'am, don't ever again speak disrespectful about my Marie! Is that clear?"

Aunt Hannah leans back in her chair and smiles, "Thank you Master Patten; I think you've made your point quite clear. Lets get to work; we have problems to solve."

Chapter Twenty-three

CHAPERONE

Lowell, Massachusetts, December 1839

Sophia: Outside, the cold snow falls heavy as the tables indoors are cleaned after another Sunday meal. The brick boarding house sheltering us from this winter storm feels warm and lazy as Marie follows the other girls upstairs to nap. George and I settled in across a dining room table to keep watch over Marie. We are her chaperones.

The girls of the house know what has transpired; many eyes now follow Marie's every move. Young mill girls believe in love, think of their own tender hearts, long for Marie's dream to survive.

Aunt Hannah has a magical way about her; transcending her tough exterior, warmth shines bright to those she cares for. She takes care of her own. We are her children. Joseph Patten is now one of hers. It is amazing to witness the transformation of that rough cut young man as she pulls the best out of him. Aunt Hannah often causes Joe to anger with her demands. Joe is strong-willed and hardheaded, but when the dust settles after each bout, he follows Aunt Hannah's lead because he believes she truly cares.

Joseph and Marie are not courting. To all outside the house they are not even a couple, just classmates at night school. School

gives them the excuse to spend time together, at study table and returning from class. On these icy walks home from school, Joseph often holds her arm; George holds mine. We are never alone; it's the four of us together to keep things proper. We chaperone Marie and Joe, they us; so I'm forced to be with George to help my sister. Spending time with George is not of my interest; writing, school and books, the literary advantages, is why I came to Lowell, not a man. I am different from my sister; I'll not settle for life in a city, a man and raising his babies. Oh, it's not any hardship spending time with George. He's easy with conversation, a gentleman to me, candy to my eyes, accommodating with his chaperone duties, and good to Marie. But I have no need of a man in my life. He cares for me, but I've built my walls to keep him at bay. I will not lead him on. I will follow my plans; after a few years in Lowell, I'll return to my Green Mountains to write, teach school and publish my poetry. No man with his good looks and smart talk will change my mind. I have better things to do with my life than to become some man's maid, cook and baby factory. I have a dream to live.

“Sophia?”

My eyes focus on George. The book I hold has gone unread.

“Sophia, what are you thinking about? You look worried.”

“I'm fine George, just thinking about Marie.”

“Don't worry Sophia, everything is working out. Joe will start tomorrow in the machine shop at the mill. I talked to John Holland

last week and Superintendent Clark told him to hire who he wants next spring to oversee the work crew. I think Joe is a shoe in as the new Overseer for that bunch of misfits. Once he has a good position, courtship and marriage will be no problem.”

“Thanks George for everything you’ve done for my sister.”

“Hey Soph, if you’re still having trouble with your arithmetic, I’ll go over it with you.”

George is up and seated beside before I am able to respond. That man causes my mind to run like molasses in January. I open my mouth but nothing comes out. I hate looking so addled.

APRIL BRINGS WARMER weather. Joseph Patten secures the overseer position and yesterday we observed a baggage-wagon loaded with country girls waiting outside our mill. Aunt Hannah said a headhunter brought them in hoping to be paid so much a head by the factory for delivery. I pray they find a safe position. The better days for headhunters has long ago passed in Lowell and this wagonload of sorrowful looking country girls will struggle to be placed with so many immigrants also wanting work. In the early days of Lowell, men were employed by the factory to collect and deliver girls from other states because the need for workers was so great. Arriving often in those days, were large wagons loaded with country girls, their homes left behind, to seek earnings in the great manufacturing town of Lowell. These pitiful looking girls, dressed in various outlandish fashions, presented a curious sight when they arrived in town with all their worldly goods packed in bandboxes.[\[57\]](#) Not all girls arriving in Lowell would

own their time; many were sent to increase family incomes. The law gives no protection to a woman if a father or a husband wished to claim all their wages. Women can't be trusted with money! Without the say of a good man we women are nothing more than slaves. My father has given me my wages, so why would I marry to have a husband take them away? In this mill there are married women employed under assumed names to prevent their husbands from trusteeing their wages. Samantha, who sleeps on the opposite side of my bed, is married. She is young, timid and afraid because her husband beat her until she ran away. If Samantha's husband finds her, he will claim the wife and the wages. They are both his by law. I do not understand why Marie wants to marry Joseph Patten and give away her life.



[57] Robinson, LOOM AND SPINDLE or Life Among The Early Mill Girls With A Sketch Of "THE LOWELL OFFERING" published 1898, page 63-64

Chapter Twenty-four

LETTERS

Lowell, Massachusetts, May, 1840

Sophia: In May's cool evening air, warmth radiates from the red bricks of the city as we make the short walk home. George is my escort back to my crowded boarding house existence. Sleeping with five others in one small room is no place I'd care to call home, but it is my life for now. For me, the most difficult part of city living is my loss of privacy and freedom. I'll only stay in this town until I achieve my goals.

George is quiet tonight; he has not spoken a word during the stroll home. At my front door I ask, "George, why so quiet? What are you thinking about?"

"Us." George exhaled the word slowly with such intimacy it makes my neck tingle. He reaches out, holds my hands, and looks longingly into my eyes.

"Our friendship?" I ask. His hands feel warm and comforting embracing mine. "We are friends George, nothing more." I'm trying to be kind but I see the hurt flicker in his eyes.

"Sophia, everyone knows we are more than friends!"

"It looks as though somebody forgot to tell me..... George,

I'm not like my sister! I did not come to Lowell to fall in love, marry and have babies! You know my plans. They have not changed!"

"You've fallen in Love?" George flashes a teasing smile.

I pull my hand from his finding no humor in his games, "You are twisting my words. I did not say I love you. I told you I'm not like Marie! I came to Lowell to better myself; to learn, read, save my nest egg. Not to seek love! I came here for poetry! I want to write, be published in the *Lowell Offering*. You know my plans! They have not changed! I will not make serving a man's dreams my life. I have my own dreams. George, I will return to my Green Mountains, teach school and write; I hate this city!"

"You want to write poetry?"

"George you're not listening to me! If you're looking for more than friendship, then I have no other choice! I will not lead you on. George! I no longer care to see you." I turn away; he's left standing on the front steps as I fling myself through the doorway and into the house. I kick the door shut behind me. My heart is pounding, and tears flood from my eyes as I gasp for air, quick and shallow. Blood pulses through my throbbing ears; they burn. My face is hot. I'm struck down, paralyzed by what I've just done. I sink to the floor crying, having no control of my tears. I've made a choice; I will not spend my life in this city! I will return home! I've turned George away. It is over!

As the week passes, George and I evade each other at class;

he no longer walks me home. I had to end it. All I want is sleep, but I find no rest. I can't clear my mind, I'm unable to study, and all I think about is George. I did not believe or realize I cared for him until I pushed him away.

At Friday's evening meal, Marie sits beside me; she knows my heart is troubled. Giving my hand a squeeze she sets a letter addressed to me beside my plate. The penmanship used to perform its address is flawless. **Sophia Bixby**, written on the front of the envelope holds my eyes transfixed. My gaze lingers on the handwriting to take in its grace. During dessert, I open the letter and remove the single page from its envelope. The mail begins, **Dearest Sophia**. Each letter of every word is beautifully drawn to perfection, as if a work of art. The correspondence is only a single page, short and unsigned. I know what this is! I feel my face redden and I pull the letter to my chest.

"Sophia, is there something wrong," Marie asks?

"I can't read this."

"Is it from George?"

"I'm not sure, I think so. Here you read it."

Marie plucks the paper from my hands. My head spins and the girls hush as Marie begins to read my letter out loud at the dining room table. In a clear full voice she reads:

“Dearest Sophia

My hands fall empty without your touch and my heart no longer sings”

As the poetry of love’s loss flows from Marie’s lips, the girls remain spellbound; wide eyes stare in amazement as romance teases ears and enter their hearts. The beautiful sounds are powerful. Girls gasp at what they hear; some cover their faces with napkins as they blush. Marie’s voice rises as she reads the last line:

“My heart will never again soar high without your loving wings.”

His words linger in the air as Marie slowly folds the letter placing it back into its envelope. The twenty-six women in the room are silent; some wipe back quiet tears.

I grab my letter from Marie and storm from the room. My sister has pushed me too far! She does not understand my struggle with George. I don’t need him; my life is fine without him. He’s trying to use poetry to manipulate me. Why poetry, my weakness; the path to my heart I keep hidden? How does he know me well enough to use poetry? I slip the letter from its cover and reread his words. He writes with such depth and feeling. These can’t be his words. George is shallow, always teasing trying to make me laugh; he’s not the man who could pen these words. I don’t believe George wrote this.

MASTER BRIARCLIFF ASSIGNS our reading pages on the chalkboard. I study George as he writes them down; he's ignoring me again tonight. For a man thought to have written me poetry, he pays me no mind. I don't think it was him. He has not looked at me once. Not spoken a word to me. It's almost rude of him to carry on like this.

"Miss Bixby, have you written down the assignment? I would like to erase the board." Master Briarcliff is speaking to me, catching me day-dreaming.

"Yes. Thank you, I'm writing it down." Marie smiles at me as Joe takes her arm to walk her home. I'll follow behind them. I miss George's conversation, but he is out of the classroom and gone before I have the assignment written down.

At the door, Marie and Joe wait for me to tag along. The stars above are cast bright over the night sky as if done so just for us by God's hand. What a night for anyone in love! The two lovers in front of me hold hands and whisper to each other; it's difficult for me to watch them carry on so. I again feel alone in this city. Why couldn't George just be my friend?

My days through the week drag on, and all I want is more sleep. I'm never hungry at meals. I struggle mornings to wake up. My head feels thick. I can't think straight and I'm tired all the time. There is something wrong with me. Again tonight George did not look at me in class; he won't speak to me. It's as if he never wrote that letter. My feet feel heavy as I trudge home alone behind my escorts, the love birds; again they hold hands. At the

front of the house Marie lingers with Joe as I pass them and climb the front steps. At the stoop the door swings open and little Plumy Clay pops out, red hair in pigtails. She is waving a letter in her hand. Behind her follows the girls of the house, all talking at once about another letter.

“Please read it to us,” Plumy whispers as she places the letter in my hand.

I feel the tears start to well up in my eyes. Marie is at my side wrapping her arm around me. “I can’t,” and gives the letter to my sister. “You read it Marie. I don’t care!” I push past the girls to find my bed, cry and sleep.

Marie wakes me with her touch; I’ve just found sleep. “Sophia, I have your letter. I think you should read it. It’s different from the first; it’s about you.”

“I don’t care.”

“Sophia, he writes about the Green Mountains, the path and a woman who walks it. He’s writing about you. The girls downstairs were in a pool of tears when he described you: your beauty in early morning light, hair swept by wind, sitting alone by the pond. I didn’t know you went there in the mornings. How did he know?”

“He asks too many questions,” my words choke out between sobs. “I must have told him. I don’t care. Leave me alone, I need to sleep.” Why am I in so much pain?

Marie places the letter beside me on my pillow and takes her leave. I clutch the letter to my chest, pulling the covers over my head. What is wrong with me? I've never cried this much. I'm a wreck. As sleep comes to me I see my path, my pond, my mountain and find peace.

I wake holding the letter stained with tears. He loves me. I can't help that. I did not encourage him. I open the letter and read his words. How could anyone love me this much? I'm not as good as the words he writes. I won't let him make me be his.

"Sophia." Marie is in my doorway watching me, asking, "Did you read it Sis?"

"Yes."

"Good. Meet me down in the kitchen; we need to talk before church."

The other girls are still asleep; the house is quiet. Marie is up early; so unlike her. I pull off my nightgown and slip on an old yellow cotton house dress. My hair is a mess and my eyes are red and puffy. I just don't care how I look. I tie a ribbon around my ratted hair to hold it back; I had forgotten to braid it before bed last night.

Aunt Hannah watches me from her room as I come down the stairs. She's reading and pretends not to see me. No breakfast is served on Sunday mornings, but for those who don't sleep in, there is bread to slice and hot coffee on the stove. It is yesterday's

bread, but with a good coating of butter it's fine; Marie has already fixed us each a piece. I pour the coffee and we head out to the back steps off the kitchen to sit.

Marie waits until I finish my bread and begin sipping my hot coffee before she speaks. "After reading his letter I realized something, well a few things. First his poetry makes you sound far prettier than me, which I know for a fact is not true."

"Fine, I'll go along with the fact you think you're pretty." My sister is trying hard to make me laugh.

"Sophia, he captures you in his words, how you are at home in the Green Mountains. You're not that person here in the city; you've changed. You don't laugh anymore, not like back home. On the farm you were more carefree; we talked more. You seemed more alive..... In this city, you're like a dark cloud. And with George out of your life, I'm worried about how you're acting. You have gotten worse."

"Yes Marie, I've grown up. I never realized there was so much despair in the world, so much sadness. On the farm we were poor but I never knew it. Our parents gave us a good life; it filled me with such hope. I never knew a child of five that works the mill so a father can drink more ale or a husband that beats his wife. Where is the good in this life?"

"George. George is good. He works hard everyday to find what's good."

“Oh Marie, it’s not that simple.”

Out the back door scampers little Plumy Clay and finds a place on my lap. “Sophia you were gone when I woke up.”

“I’m talking with Marie.” Plumy wiggles and scampers inside, “I’ll be in to fix your hair before church.”

“Sophia.” Marie holds my arm as I begin to stand, “Joe and I will picnic after church and he’s bringing George. You’re coming with me to talk with him. You need to do this Sophia!”

I exhale long and slow, “Fine, George and I will talk, but I won’t stay long.”

AFTER CHURCH, MARIE has arranged for us a basket of cold chicken for the picnic. I smell a rat; Aunt Hannah set up the food and is party to this matchmaking. Marie wants everyone to be in love; I only agreed to talk with George to tell him to stop writing those poems. George and I are over. He wants more than I’m willing to give.

Under a large shade tree on Chapel Hill, I spread the blanket on the grass as Marie unpacks the picnic basket.

“Marie, I’m not staying to eat; I’m only here to talk.” I turn my head and there stands George; our eyes meet. He is silent. His hair dark, eyes deep blue; he is just a touch away. My heart pounds as I wait for him to speak; his face calms as our eyes intertwine. He remains silent; this is not the man I thought I

knew. Gone is the smart talk and laughter, replaced by a depth I do not understand. This cannot be the same man! “George?”

“Yes, Sophia.”

“Walk with me; we need to talk.” I hold his hand and lead him away. I feel my heart stir; my hand is in his. We sit on the thick rough planks of the pump stand, still holding hands. I am comfortable with his touch; time passes as he waits for me to speak. I’m not sure how to start, searching for the right words..... “Letters.....ah... the poems, you did write them?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“You love poetry; I wanted you to read them.”

“George, I can’t be your friend.”

“Sophia, I’m not looking for a friend, I already have enough of them.”

“And what’s that mean?”

“Sophia, we need each other. You’re not happy.”

“George, I can’t.....”

“Soph, are you happier with me gone?”

I avoid his gaze by looking down; I won't answer that.

"I want you to try something; hear me out before you say 'No'. Will you do that?"

I look into his eyes and nod my head in agreement.

"Sophia, you need to find what you truly want, giving yourself enough time to make a decision. What I'm asking allow me to court you for a year.....please let me finish." He holds up his hand for me to wait. "If at the end of the year you want out, I'm gone; I'll disappear."

"George, I'm not ready for a courtship."

"Soph, this will be a courtship like none other. All I ask is your time so we may spend it talking of matters meaningful to you. I'll make no demands of commitment; no pressure to touch or embrace. What I ask is for you to share your thoughts and feelings with me. There is no expectation of an engagement from this courtship, only for us to learn of each other before you make a decision. I'll take what ever time you offer even if in the end, you turn me away."

"George, what if it is I that grows to love and you turn me away?"

"Soph, your heart is safe with me; I'll not be the one to break it."

"If we court, will you promise not to send anymore poems

to the house; it's too much attention for me."

"Yes, if we agree to court, I'll send no more poems to the house."

"And if I won't allow you to court me, you'll keep sending the poems?"

"Something like that." George flashes me a big smile.

I remained for the picnic of cold chicken, bread and strawberry jam. We sat together on the blanket, Marie, Joe, George and I, sharing food like couples in love. I did not answer 'yes' or 'no' to a courtship; George took my lack of commitment as an open door into my heart. I study this man from a new prospective, it is clear he loves me. It would be easy to love him in return if I was willing to sacrifice that which is dear to me. George may court me, but I will not give up my dreams.

Chapter Twenty-five

COURTSHIP

Lowell, Massachusetts, June, 1840

Sophia: My sister is happy: with a glow that comes with being in love. Marie and Joe are openly courting. Joe wrote Mother and Father as to his intentions; enclosed was a note written by Aunt Hannah of her support. With the blessing of our parents and Joe's income, they are saving money to be married.

My days working in the mill are spent deep in thought; my mind is no longer needed to operate my loom. I walk in dreams through my mind while the world lives around me; this is how I've spent my life. My greatest adventures have been in my mind. In my past the farm noise of chickens was too great a distraction for me to reach my quiet place; I needed solitude by the pond to have my best thoughts. In Lowell, my mind has learned to roam free while operating my loom amongst the noise and chaos caused by the multitudes of humanity and machines on the mill floor. Alone at my loom for hours, I ponder my relationship with George. I carry his letters in my pocket and reread them often during my days at the mill. The walls I've built to hold George back are beginning to weaken; this is why I worry. I'm no longer satisfied dwelling in a world of dreams. I want to live in the flesh. George is my dream. I want to love.

The rush of fresh evening air blasts my face as we press out and exit the stuffy walls of the mill. The girls around me giggle having spotted George waiting for me outside the factory door. He lifts his arm and I cling to his side. He leads me away from the crowds towards the river so we may be alone to talk. The town knows we're courting and this provides us with certain liberties in public. To keep in good standing, George is now a regular at church; he is my escort.

"George, did you miss me today?" I ask with mischief in my voice as I hug tight to his arm.

"Sophie, I've been missing you for as long as I can remember; it's been too long waiting for you."

"George, did missing me start after we stopped taking baths together?" I flash a teasing smile.

"You're snapping like a whip tonight."

"I feel good when I'm with you..... George?"

"Yes Sophie."

"What did you mean by saying you've been waiting for me?"

"Always something's been missing inside me. Sophie, you coming into my life has filled an empty place in my heart. I've waited forever for you to make me whole."

I don't understand what it is that George is telling me so I

press on with my questions, “Does the ‘something missing’ have anything to do with your parents?”

“In part.”

“You were raised by Aunt Hannah; what happened to your parents?”

“It’s not important. I have you to hold.”

I pull George’s face close to mine and look hard into his blue eyes, “Please share this with me. How will I ever understand you if you won’t explain your past? Is it too painful to talk about?”

“No; it just doesn’t matter any more; it’s over.”

“Are your parents no longer living?”

“Do you mean dead, Sophie?” His words come out flat, matter-of-fact, showing no feelings.

“George, I’m trying to be polite.”

“Sophie, dead is dead; there is nothing polite about it.... Sorry that was rude of me.....it no longer matters.....look my mother died when I was two.” George’s eyes betray a hint of his hidden anger.

“And your father?”

“He’s living well and fine without me.”

George pulls his silver watch from his pocket, and then digs deeper, fishing out a small wooden locket. Returning the watch to his pocket, he is left holding a hand-carved dark walnut locket. Cut into the locket's sliding top cover is his initials, G. W. L. George slips off the cover and reveals a miniature portrait of me.



NOTICE
I S hereby given, that I have given his time to
my son, George Washington Lovrien, and
have authorized him to trade and transact busi-
ness for him-self, and to take all the benefit of his
labor and earnings; and I will pay no debts here-
after of his contracting.
PETER LOVRIEN.
New Chester, N. H., Oct. 22, 1836. 5-125

“Is that me? You sketched me?”

“Yes.”

George hands me a newspaper clipping, folded and stashed behind my portrait in the locket. I read the scrape of newsprint.

“George, what does it mean?”

“It means four years ago I went to see my Father. I’m not sure why.....we didn’t have much to say. I don’t know what I was expecting.....it was a waste of time.....a few months later he sent me this clipping.”

“I don’t understand the point of this newspaper clipping.”

“Think of it like Plumy Clay whose father takes her earnings; at thirteen my father had the right to find me and take my money if he had a mind to. His notice in the paper declared he was done with me, but it works two ways: first it states I now benefit and keep whatever I earn; second he lets everyone know that, at age thirteen, I’m on my own. He will not be held responsible for any of my debts.”

“George, put that away. I don’t want to talk about this any more; it’s too sad.” I look up and George is smiling, “Why is this bothering me more than it does you George?”

With a mischievous smile he asks, “Is my sad story softening your heart?”

“Oh it’ll take more than one sad story before I’ll tumble in bed and make a dozen children with you.”

“I pulled out my big gun, and it’s not working?”

“Not for the tumble.....but....” I run my finger through his hair and press my lips to his.....we linger.....my heart is pounding.....he wraps his long arms around me.....oh what a first kiss! “George,” I step back from his embrace, “a few kisses like that and I’d be ready for that tumble.

“Sophie, I felt your knees getting a little weak.” George gives me that teasing look of his.

“George, I’ve never kissed a man before. Did I do it right?”

“Sophie, let’s try it again. I can’t seem to remember.”

“Stop it George, be serious. That was my first kiss and it was way different then I’d thought it would be.”

“How so?”

“I felt... swept away in your arms...like my body was not in my control...if I kept kissing you I’d want them all over me. George please don’t think badly of me.”

“Now you understand why Aunt Hannah worries about her girls.”

“Are all kisses like that between a man and a woman?”

“No, not all kisses are the same. I’m told the best ones happen for those in love.”

“George, was my kiss any good. Did I do it right?”

“I’ll never pass up a chance to get another.” He again gives me that teasing smile of his.

“George!”

George rests his hands on my shoulders, his face close to mine and whispers to me, “You know I’m in love with you.....and yes I felt your love when you kissed me.”

“You could tell I love you?”

“The way you kissed me.....I knew.”

“George, oh I do love you.”

“Sophie, I’ll love you forever. Choose me to be yours and, I’ll cherish you everyday we share together. I promise we will find a way to make the Green Mountains of Vermont our home. It may take us some time, but we will make it happen. Your dream will be my dream.”

Chapter Twenty-Six

HIS PROMISE

Rutland, Iowa, March 15, 1877

Back in the present moment, which is the day after Sophia's funeral and the shabby foreground of our story, Aunt Hannah awoke among the late afternoon shadows filling the front parlor; the house was quiet until the sound of chicken hitting hot grease in a cast iron skillet broke the silence. Frances was in the kitchen frying chicken; Aunt Hannah knew, by its sound and smell. Today, recounting stories ate up most of the daylight as the family drank coffee around the kitchen table. Work waited. Meal times were a mess as the noon dinner had been skipped; the men were getting hungry. The afternoon was late: Aunt Hannah slept while the men were doing chores, Cella sat grading school papers, and Frances filled the house with the aroma of chicken frying.

Frank will stay the night; his wife Agnes sent along his bedroll. Wild-eyed Frank loves his woman; she's the only one who may tell him what to do. Frank's spunky, strongheaded wife ordered him to take time to mourn the death of his mother and to spend it with his family. He'll ride home in the morning. This will be the last evening they'll all be together, gathered to morn Sophia's passing. Aunt Hannah is expected to continue her stories; tell of the years when George and Sophia were first married.

Frances, in her everyday apron, stepped from the kitchen to look in on Hannah. “Aunt Hannah, I’m feedin’ the children first and puttin’ them to bed early so the adults ‘ill have time to talk. ‘Ill be ‘bout an hour ‘fore we eat.”

This overdue meal was served to the glow of oil lamps as the hungry family ate without much talking, except for a, “Pass the gravy” or a, “More chicken” and a, “Pass-a-peas!” It took serious eatin’ to complete this hungry task.

After wiping his plate clean with the last piece of bread, George Henry pushed himself back from the table and let out a moan of pleasure. “Frances, that’s the best chicken gravy I’ve ever ate. You got any pie to top me off?”

As the table cleared and pie set out, the family discussion took hold with James asking Aunt Hannah, “What year was it Ma and Pa got married?”

While waiting for her pie and coffee, Aunt Hannah started in telling, “George and Sophia were married May 1, 1842 in Lowell... stayed there until 1846...the year after George Henry was born. Before ’46, your parents remained in Lowell saving for land they wanted in Vermont, until a business opportunity in South America was offered to your Father. George and his brother-in-law, Joseph Patten were hired to oversee the construction of a cotton mill in Brazil. With this South American prospect promising a large income, George secured a banknote to buy their Green Mountain dream: a farm home and seventy acres of land outside West Topsham, Vermont, not far from Sophia’s childhood place in

Chelsea.

I gave up my boarding house position in Lowell to stay with Sophia in Vermont while George was away; he anticipated his time in South America could be as long as two years. Sophia was expecting their second child. George did not want his wife alone on the farm with a small child and another on the way so I came with her to the Green Mountains. My move to Vermont was of no great loss to me; the factories were selling off their boarding houses and I soon would have been out of work.

In May of '46, George took passage on a ship to Brazil. In late summer after Sophia, Little George and I were settled on the farm, we received our first mail from George. His letter dated July 1, 1846 came from a place in Brazil called Valencia, Bahia. George expressed his wonder of a strange new beautiful land; fruit was plentiful and wine cheap but the fleas vicious: *"Forty miles up the river, Rio de Valencia is the site of the factory we are building. Joe and I were both offered a plantation of first-rate land if we will put up a house and send for our families but I would not for all they are worth. The home I want is with you Sophie, in your Green Mountains."*

A few letters and months later, when loneliness set in, he wrote of missing his wife and son. George wanted to return home. Upon learning of his first daughter's birth, Hannah Emma Jane born September 18, 1846, George longed to be home to hold her. Missing Sophie he wrote, "I will not stay more than a year because money is no object when away from you." Wanting the love of his family, George returned home in time for Christmas 1847. Oh,

what a wonderful Christmas it was, together in Sophie's Green Mountains.

In each of the next two years following George's return, a child was born: Frank in '48 and Cella in '49. Then in October of 1853, James was born; thus, completing George and Sophia's family of five children. Of course there was still me, old Aunt Hannah helping them along.

In life, what we ask for and what we receive are often quite different. We seek to find happiness, yet the road we want is not always the path we're given to follow. It's often the unanswered prayers that give us the direction we follow, not the life we understand. For me, old and looking back, I'm often thankful for prayers unanswered."

BABY JAMES STIRRED in his crib waking Sophie from her shallow sleep. With a four month old, Sophie checked on his every change; yet often she awoke to find him asleep. Sophie slipped from the warmth of their four-poster bed and found Baby James with covers kicked off. February nights are cold. At this late hour the home fires burned low and the chilled night air caused Sophie to shiver in her worn cotton gown. Shaking, barefoot on the cold floor, she covered the baby and slipped back into bed seeking the warmth of her man. Under the quilt George lay bare chested and warm. Sophie wrapped an arm around her man and pressed her face to his cheek. Lying next to him Sophie knew she was loved. Sophie thanked God.

George turned and kissed her face and whispered asking,

“Baby’s asleep?”

“He’s fine. I wake you?”

“No, can’t sleep, been thinking.”

“Oh George, my big thinking man can’t sleep worrying about one of your little pigs?” Teasingly Sophie continued on, “I swear you worry about them more than me.” Sophie ran her hand softly across his chest in a seductive manner.

Teasing back, George kissed Sophie on her neck in the way that always made her scream. Between kisses George whispered, “I was thinking of you my love.”

Playfully laughing, and struggling to stop his tickling, Sophie lightheartedly warned, “George, stop it! I just had a baby.”

George kissed Sophie’s lips and she settled upon his chest. “I love you Sophie.”

“George? What were you thinking about?”

“We have five children...five children! Can you believe it?”

“The years have gone by so fast....no time to take it all in. George Henry will be ten next year.”

“Soph, did you ever think you’d have five children?”

“You know all I wanted was to be an old maid school teacher

who wrote poetry and died alone; fat chance that will happen now,” Sophie bantered in her teasing way.

George bantered back with mock drama, “I’m a dream killer, with five children. There’s not a snowball’s chance in hell you’ll ever find a quiet place to die alone.”

Sophie, no longer joking, whispered, “George you kept your promise; I love my Green Mountains.”

“Soph, are you happy?”

“Oh George, you know I am. We have a good life. I love you George Lovrien.” Sophie kissed his lips and snuggled with her good man... *The dream killer*; she laughed to herself. They fell asleep in the warmth of each other’s love.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

GREEN MOUNTAINS

West Topsham, Vermont, February 28, 1854

George lay awake worrying in the early hours of the morn. Sophie slept warm beside him, while he recounted the various chores which awaited him; February was at its end..... and with only two tons of hay left for winter feeding, the cattle will require spring grass in perhaps forty days. If the snow lingers, the herd will suffer...enough time wasted in worthless thought. George flung back the covers, and stood leaving the warmth of his wife and bed. The house was cold; George dressed in the dark, quietly so as not to wake his woman and child. As he left, George gently pulled the bedroom door closed behind him. Sophie needed her sleep; Aunt Hannah will soon wake to make breakfast.

In the cold morning kitchen George struck a wooden sulfur match to liven his old oil lamp that hung on a peg by the back porch door. The lantern's glow brought life to Sophie's kitchen, George's favorite room in the house. He stuffed two thinly split logs into the cook stove; the embers near out. Lifting the lamp handle from its peg, George held the lantern high, casting light throughout the big kitchen. Opposite the cook stove and at the other end of the kitchen was a large common table with six chairs; all but Sunday dinners were eaten here. In George's mind, this common table and cook stove formed the heart of his home. If you

wanted to feel the love of his family all one needed was to share a meal at this table and eat Sophie's cooking; the best of times happened in George's favorite room.

The kitchen had been an add-on to the north side of the main house before they bought the place in '46. Originally the house consisted of one large room; unchanged was the stone fireplace on the east wall, the sleeping loft to the west, and the room's ceiling that opened to the rafters, slanting up to meet at a high peak making the room feel spacious. George placed two logs on the hearth and jabbed at them with the cast iron poker until they caught, lighting the great room. The fire illuminated the wedding portraits of Sophie and George that hung on either side of the fireplace. He and Sophie sat for the oil paintings in Lowell shortly after they were married. Mounted on the wall below George's portrait was his violin which he had handcrafted and learned to play. Turning from the stone fireplace, George looked up to the open loft where the children slept and felt pride in his home and family. Below the loft on the west wall were two doors leading to add-on bedrooms that George had built; Sophie and Baby James were asleep in one and Aunt Hannah the other. The home's front door stood in the middle of the south wall and led out to Sophie's sittin' porch. Along the room's north wall and to that side of the fireplace sat Sophie's formal dinning table and six best chairs. The rocker rested on the opposite side of the stone fireplace, where Sophie liked to rock the baby. The open stairway leading to the loft started up along the north wall by the kitchen door. George climbed to the loft holding the lantern high; its rays cast light upon a tuck bed with its trundle pulled out. Little Fast Frank slept on the bed's pull out. Frank was more than a handful when awake.

He had only one speed: fast. Five year old Frank loved to chase chicken and pull the dog's tail, daring the mutt to bite him; he was wild and fearless. Asleep Frank looked like an angel. On the upper mattress slept his two daughters: sweet gentle Hannah Jane, age seven, and Marcella, age four. When awake, Cella talked a lot, most of it questions. Next to the trundle, asleep in a straw bed built for him by his Pa, was George Henry. Almost a man at nine, George Henry wanted a bed to himself because his wild brother Frank often kicked him at night when they shared the same bed. George Henry was proud to have his own bed even with its mattress of straw. With the children checked, George pulled out his silver watch; five o'clock, time for morning milking and feedin' livestock.

With the warmth of George gone from her bed, Sophie woke. Before first light, she sat rocking by the fireplace feeding Baby James. The other children were still asleep. George was out doing chores. Aunt Hannah, rattling in the kitchen, stoking the cook stove to fix pancakes and coffee. Another day had begun.

Baby James took her milk as Sophie rocked and drifted back into a half-sleep, carried in her mind to the hill behind the house where she once escaped to write. Sophie found her hideaway on the hill above the farm that first summer George was away in South America. Oh the freedom of that first summer.....Aunt Hannah often watched the baby giving Sophie time to sit alone on her hill, write poetry and pine for her man George; with a blanket spread on the ground, her back to a fallen log, she spent hours writing. The view from her hilltop inspired her; the farmyard below and the surrounding Green Mountains fueled Sophie's best

works of poetry. Even on days when she did not want to write, Sophie sat on her hill, smelled the evergreens, missed her husband and thanked God for all she was given. In the years after George's returned home, time passed, and more children were born. Sophie's place on the hill became a refuge visited often only in her mind, always waiting for her return. Sophie imagines herself having time when she and George are old, and the children grown, to again sit on her hill, feel its magic and write. With a husband, five children and a hard luck life of farming, having selfish time alone will have to wait.

“Sophie, coffee's hot, want a cup?”

The glow from the stone fireplace greeted Sophie's eyes as she opened them. Baby James had fallen asleep nursing in her arms. Placing the sleeping boy back in his cradle, Sophie turned towards the kitchen for coffee.

Aunt Hannah had only a cheap candle burning for light as she drank her coffee seated at the kitchen table. Aunt Hannah, that hardheaded woman has been told repeatedly to burn the lamp. “We can afford the cost of the oil.” Seven years she's lived in my house and I'm still not in charge. I've birthed five children and she still looks at me as one of her young mill girls. We've locked horns over the years but nothing like the first weeks George was away in South America; I was determined to have the kitchen my way. I know Aunt Hannah has a good heart.... only wants to take care of me.... but she believes doing things her way is the best way to make my life easier.

“Aunt Hannah, you know we burn the oil lamp at breakfast.”

Aunt Hannah looks up from her coffee and matter-of-factly states, “I’ll light it before George comes in. I’m trying to save you some pennies.” Aunt Hannah notes the look on Sophie’s face and commands, “Sophie, sit down we need to talk.”

Sophie’s face flashed hot as years of frustration lash out from her mouth with no forethought, “I’m no longer one of your mill girls to order about. I am a grown woman and you live in my house!”

Steady as rock, Aunt Hannah calmly asks, “Would you like a cup of coffee? I’ll pour you one.”

With eyes cast away, a tear rolls down Sophie’s cheek as she quietly responds, “I’m up. I’ll get my own coffee.”

In a loving voice Aunt Hannah asks, “Will you please sit with me dear? I’ve you on my mind this morning.”

“I’m tired Aunt Hannah.” Sophie sits down with her hot coffee and wipes back the tears.

“Of course you are Sophie and that’s part of what I wanted to talk to you about. I’ve been sitting here thinking about you; how hard you’ve worked and how tired you must be with the newborn. I am proud of you Sophia. You’re a remarkable woman and a good mother to these children.”

“Thank you Aunt Hannah for your complement,” Sophie sips her coffee, waits to respond, yet again she is not careful with her words. “I’ve always got the impression you still think of me as a young girl unprepared for motherhood.”

“Sophie, it’s not easy having me in your house trying to do everything my way. I know I’m strongheaded.....you stand up to me when I push too hard; few women could do that and remain kind. Sophie, take this to heart, I love you...I’m so proud of you. George could not have found a better wife.” Aunt Hannah steps around the table, wraps Sophie’s face in her hands and kisses her forehead. “Sophie, it’s alright to cry; you’re tired. I understand.”

Winter morning’s awakenings in the Green Mountains is amazing to witness as dull dark shapes transform, becoming snow covered trees, rocks and hills, sparkling in the days first rays of sun. George stood alone in the dark just able to discern his single trail of footprints from the house to the barn, disturbing the fresh white snow that fell during the night. The three inch snowfall covers the evidence of sled runners and log dragging that only yesterday scarred the dirty white of the farm yard. Today we start anew; fresh powder to toil away. George loaded his log chains onto the snow-covered sled before returning to the barn for his lantern. Morning chores are done, and time for breakfast. The lantern George fisted in his one hand illuminates the mist off the fresh warm milk in the pail held in his other. In the dark the lamp lights his way through the soft falling snow, to the house, family and his morning meal.

The smell of bacon, cakes and coffee greets George at the

door as he passes the pail of warm milk to Aunt Hannah's waiting hands. As part of a daily routine, Hannah pours the bucket's contents through a scrap of cloth into a glass pitcher filtering out cow's hair and debris before serving it fresh to the waiting children. They love their warm milk on cold mornings.

Sophie looks up from her place at the table, greets her man with a smile and thinks how tall, strong and handsome George is. George kisses his wife as she rocks Baby James. He finds it difficult to believe his pretty young wife has given him five children.

Eyes are on George, last at the breakfast table, as the children look to him for their cue to bow heads. George leans to his right, kisses Sophie's cheek and asks her, "Mother will lead the prayer?"

Sophie presses her hands together and bows her head; all heads go down. "Lord, these gifts you have given us are truly blessings we are thankful for: our loving family, warm house and this good food on the table. Lord, please look after Little George today; keep him safe as he helps his father move logs down the hill. Thank you. In your name we pray. Amen."

George Henry's head pops right up after the "Amen" and flashes his father a smile, "Pa, do I really get to help you today?"

"It's about time you learned to drag logs...with the fresh snow we got last night I plan to use the sled so we won't have to move one log at a time. I'll need you to help me load up the sled and lead the oxen; the team may be able to pull half-dozen logs at a

time.” George pulled three cakes from the stack with his fork and passed the serving platter to Sophie. The food starts out in front of George; when he has taken his share the platters are passed to Sophie, Aunt Hannah and then the children. Everyone is respectful of the helping they take so no one goes hungry.

After a sip of hot coffee, Sophie starts in mothering her oldest son. “George Henry, I want you to think about how dangerous moving logs can be. If a log rolled over you...it would be your death...you listen to your father. Is that clear?”

“Yes Ma.” With a full smile pinned to his face, Little George answered his mother. Today at age nine he’d have his first chance to drag timber with his Pa. Become a man. The money earned logging sustains the family during the slow winter months; George Henry wants to be important like his Pa.

George Henry’s moment of attention did not last in a large family when mealtime chaos ensued; Fast Frank pinched Little Hannah, and she pinched him back causing milk to spill. The flood of white invaded the table; nothing was safe. Little Hannah watched wide eyed as the flow crept back toward the table’s edge and her lap. Hannah jumped back to escape milk on her dress only to spill another glass, adding more to the mix. While the women raced to stem the flow with rags, the boys laughed and the baby cried. Little Hannah stood stunned with her chair knocked back; she looked down at the wet soiled front of her dress and wailed. Steady as a ship returning to port, George poured maple syrup on his pancakes, sipped coffee, forced a smile and began to eat his breakfast. Lord help him, he did not know what he had

asked for; George has his family, they are his own, his heart is full. Sophie's love has made him whole, yet his life with children is forever changed.

Sophie smiled when her eyes met George's and he knew her telling look; it was he who wanted all these children and she found humor in this pay back. While it was George who worked to practice his patience at times like these, Sophie had learned to laugh. As if reading his mind, she quickly kissed his lips, smiled and whispered in his ear, "George thanks for your patience." The kiss tasted of syrup and cakes so Sophie went back for seconds and lingered while milk dripped from the rag she held in her hand; after all she still loved her man.

SOPHIE GAVE A WAVE from the door as her husband and son rode away behind oxen in a sled to move logs for the day. Sophie could not hide the fear she felt for her young son. The work was dangerous.

Aunt Hannah touched Sophie's shoulder, "He's a good boy; he'll listen to his father."

"I know George will keep him safe. I can't help but worry." Sophie turned away and a lone tear rolled slowly down her cheek. "We best clean up that kitchen."

The morning passed slowly as the tasks Sophie completed would not use up her time. She cleaned the kitchen, fed the baby, changed the baby, settled the children at quiet play, put the baby to sleep; yet Sophie found herself still waiting and worrying. Sophie

stood watching at the window. The sun was bright on the fresh snow.

Aunt Hannah spoke from the door of the kitchen, "I've made up the dinner pails and I've fed the chickens. Sophie, feed the baby and walk these pails out to your men. Go check on little George, and stop your worrying!"

Sophie smiled, "Thank you, I will," she said and rushed to feed the baby.

THE SNOW WAS slippery in her high button shoes as Sophie tread up the last rise; here she'll have a first view of her men. The sun was blinding on the fresh white snow, Sophie shaded her eyes with her hand and looked towards the next hill. She exhaled in relief when her eyes focused on a sled loaded with logs drawn by two oxen and her son spurring them on with a stick. All was well as George followed behind the sled to monitor its load. Little George caught sight of his mother and waved his long stick above his head. As Sophie waved back the sled's right runner sunk into a soft spot in the snow, the logs shifted and the left runner began to slowly lift off the ground. The sled was tipping over. Without thought George threw his left shoulder into the right side of the sled, braced his feet against a near by tree stump and with all his might, locked into a struggle to level the load. Sophie held her breath and watched. If he failed the sled would overturn and crush him. The picture froze in Sophie's mind; seconds became an eternity. A sense of desperation gripped her as the sled

balanced precariously on one runner, then gradually her husband's effort guided it safely onto two runners once more. Appearing unharmed, George stepped back from the sled. Sophie watched as George looked up towards her, smiled, and collapsed crashing to the cold white snow. In her heart, Sophie already knew something was terribly wrong.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Lost

West Topsham, Vermont, March, 1854

Though seemingly in perfect health, George's death came as a result of a burst blood vessel in his head; no visible signs of injury were to be found on his head or body. The stroke George suffered was both mysterious and unforeseen. Nothing at all could have prevented it, or given us warning, said the local doctor.

For Sophie, the loss had a way of playing tricks on her mind. Watching George's death first hand, the vision replayed endlessly in her head. Nothing stopped her mind from reliving that moment; not restless sleep, not crying, nor even Aunt Hannah's arms of comfort. The redundant visions seemed not to ebb at all, unless it was a teasing retreat before yet another return.

George's death was not the only loss to jolt her life. When the bankers came knocking the gates of hell opened up, wanting to pull Sophie down into its depths of despair. A businessman in a starched white shirt called the loan note due, to be paid in full. The farm would be lost.

Sophie ran from the house. Aunt Hannah found her on the hill above the farm. Sophie sought out her place of comfort, her refuge on the hill. She could no longer breathe in a house full of

sympathy as they delivered their fresh baked pies and cakes. Sophie made her escape after hearing the same worn statement just one too many times: "I'll be there for you in your time of need."

Sophie sat alone at her hideaway on the hill above the farm; her refuge found that first summer where she wrote, dreamed and waited for George's return from South America. Alone on this same hill she again waits, but this time he'll never return.

Aunt Hannah's climb to the hill top through the dense growth of Pines and Maples was snow-packed and difficult for a woman of her age. The top of the hill was bathed in full sun having lost its winter snow; there sitting alone on a log, Sophie hid herself, wrapped in her husband's great coat, face buried under its wide collar to breathe in his smell still clinging to the cloth. Aunt Hannah fought back a tear at the pitiful sight of a young widow, alone on a hill, her man lost; George dead at age thirty-two. Aunt Hannah sat herself down on the log beside Sophie. No words were spoken. They both shared loss.

From this hilltop the women gazed at the farmyard below, its empty fields stretched out before them, the pastures stitched with a patchwork of brown grass and dirty snow that kissed the feet of the distant hills. The Green Mountains that surrounded them were not daunting so as to make them seem small, but rather seemed to include them in its embrace. The March sun cast warmth on Sophie's face; the unsteady winds felt cold.

At long last the silence was broken when in a soft wispy voice Sophie spoke, "*It was one of those March days...*"

Aunt Hannah leaned in to catch the meaning of her soft words.

Sophie looked to Aunt Hannah; their eyes met, the young widow forced a smile and found the strength to continue speaking, “I was thinking of something Charles Dickens wrote:

“It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light and winter in the shade...”

Sophie paused and Aunt Hannah wrapped her comforting arms around her; they held each other tight.

“Aunt Hannah, I have lost the light in my life; left with five children...winter in my heart...I dwell in this dark, dark shadow.”

“Sophie please, you’re using fifty cent phrases and sounding like a bad poem. Tell me straight out what’s in your heart.”

“How will I care for my children? I can’t go on.”

Aunt Hannah watched as Sophie held back the welling tears from her face, “Oh Sophie, why did your first loss have to be George?”

“My children need me and I can’t even take care of myself... we have no home...how will I feed them with no income?” Sophie looked away from Aunt Hannah, her eyes downcast when she softly spoke, “The school board will not hire me to teach; I asked, they said no. I was told my place is in the home taking care of my

five children. I said I can't afford a home with no income; they suggested I find a man."

"Oh Sophie you knew the answer before asking. A man may have children and teach, but a woman is to be single; I know it seems downright unfair..."

Sophie pulled from the pocket of George's great coat his silver pocket watch and held it out for Aunt Hannah to see; neglected, unwound the watch had run down, stopped. "Aunt Hannah...George smiled at me...he tried to tell me something...I got there too late...I should have left the house sooner. I wasn't able to reach him...he wanted to tell me something."

Aunt Hannah hesitated; silence hung between them.

"Aunt Hannah, explain it to me. What did George want to tell me?"

"Sophie, he told you. He said it with his face. That smile was words unspoken. Just as a baby can speak to you with the slightest look, George looked up and spoke to you one last time. His smile told you how much he loved you Sophie."

"Thanks for saying...it's a right good thought, God bless him...oh, Aunt Hannah...will this pain ever go away? I feel so lost...how will I care for my children like this?"

Aunt Hannah placed her hand under Sophie's chin and guided her to look up. Eyes meeting, she spoke lovingly, "Sophie, you are

going to hurt like this for a long while; this is how it's meant to be. Grieving is hard; you'll be tired all the time...cry a lot. The children are hurting too; you'll just do the best you can. There is no one right way; you'll make mistakes. You just have to move ahead and believe."

"What do I have to believe in?"

"It's the little things at first that you can count on...believe, that you'll awake tomorrow and have another day to cry."

Sophie flashed Aunt Hannah a weak frown, "Be serious, *I am strong.*"

Aunt Hannah kissed Sophie on the forehead and smiled, "I'll try to be serious...believe, that I will be here each day; you'll not struggle alone. Believe that life will go on; your children will again play and laugh like they should. Children are blessed with fast mending hearts, as long as they know they are loved. Together we will give them love...one day you will again laugh and your heart will heal."

"I don't want my heart to mend if it means forgetting George...I don't want to believe this is real...what do I have to believe in without George?"

"If you believe and trust that this pain will not last forever, you'll still have hope. Trust in hope."

EPILOGUE

“Life comes with no guarantees;” words of advice, often given by parents to their children, have little meaning until lived. Until we experience the sudden bite of loss how can we understand the tenuousness of life? Even those we love most cannot be kept safe from tragedy at all times. They can be taken at any time.

Sophie woke one fine day in February of 1854, fed her newborn baby, feeling thankful for having more in life than she ever dreamed possible; with a loving husband, five children, a pretty farm home in her beloved Green Mountains, she wanted for nothing, except more time each day to live the life she loved. She had it all; yet there are no guarantees to keep it. With George's death the bank called the note due because the loan was in his name. Banks at this time did not loan money to women, so they profited from Sophie's loss. In the struggling years following George's death, Sophie gave a child away and one died. Frank ran away and George Henry went off to war. Through it all, Sophie held fast to Aunt Hannah's enduring love. Aunt Hannah was her rock; together they faced the worst of life. Their strength was their bond and with it Sophia gradually learned to laugh and love again.

Rutland, Iowa, March 15, 1877

The kitchen chilled. The hour was late. Aunt Hannah's account concluded, summing up George's death, Sophie's loss and the pain they endured together. Her words had the men restless in their chairs at the oak table. The women let the tears flow. Frank blew his nose with a large red handkerchief, stood, turned to hide his misty eyes and stepped to the wood stove to check the fire that had gone cold. George Henry was out of his chair going through papers in his desk. James, always hungry, was cutting himself a piece of pie. Cella, Frances and Aunt Hannah remained, seated at the kitchen table.

THESE FARM MEN! When given the choice between "talk" or "fix" most would rather not talk. If they aren't able to just fix it, they don't want to waste time talking; these rough men want the discomfort eliminated just now. "Fix it!" "I'll take care of it!" Why do so many men act this way? They're just not adept to rolling in a hurt; it makes them uncomfortable. They would rather not talk about it.

Aunt Hannah placed her hand on her forehead, exhaled and rubbed her eyes, "I don't want to tell any more tonight...I'm too tired."

James returned to the table with a plate-load of pie and a cup of cold coffee. George Henry pulled up a chair with a handful of papers. Frank remained by the stove, his back to the family, tending the fire.

Aunt Hannah, old and frail, looked at the family she loved, a lifetime of giving. The past held her life; it's all she'll ever have. "*I was needed by so many!*" The rush swept over her like a wave on the sand and in that moment her heart held all the lives she had cared for, all the lives she had loved. Aunt Hannah Hoyt spent her life giving; yes she was often needed more than loved, but she had been loved. In life, love is what matters.

Afterword

The amount of George Lovrien's estate assigned to his widow Sophia was \$212.00 plus an additional \$29.96 to be selected from the inventory at appraised prices. Household goods were about all that was left to Sophia.

In the final accounting, town, state and school taxes to Topsham were 60 cents and Orange County taxes for 1853 were \$3.74. George's coffin cost \$4.50. The household furnishings were: 1 cookstove, 1 clock, 1 vinegar barrel, 6 dining room chairs, 1 kitchen chair, 6 common dining room chairs, 1 rocking chair, crockery, glass and silverware, ironware, 2 wash tubs, 1 brass kettle, 1 looking glass, 1 best bed and bedding, 1 2nd-best bed and bedding, 1 tuck bed and bedding, 1 straw bed and bedding, 2 tacks and blanket, 1 bureau, 1 best table, 1 common table, 1 chest, 1 trunk, 1 lamp stand. The total estate was appraised at \$1,316.14 while notes and other debts amounted to \$1,131.53. The young widow was left with five young children, the oldest being George Henry, nine years, and the youngest, James Monroe, four months.

SOPHIA MOVED TO Iowa in 1870, settling on a farm in Rutland Township where she died March 10, 1877. She is buried in Union Cemetery at Humboldt, Iowa where stories were once told of how each Memorial Day a granddaughter placed a flower upon her grave. Aunt Hannah Hoyt died the same year as Sophia, in August 1877, and is buried beside her. Sophia's tombstone is

inscribed:

Over the threshold only

Out of the mist and rain

Into the sun of heaven

Unto eternal gain

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