



Isaac pulled the many-bladed fleam from his haversack. He chose the smallest blade and poured rum over it to cleanse away remnants of the last blood-letting. His normally steady hand shook when he lifted the small arm of the child.

Mrs. Wooding wept in her husband's arms while Isaac prepared to make a small incision on Alice's arm. *Steady, man. 'Tis just an arm, simply much smaller than you're used to.*

"Must you do this? Alice is so very small."

"I am sorry, Jonas. The high fever necessitates balancing out the humours in her body. Bloodletting is the recommended practice. It's been done for centuries." Isaac could feel the droplets of sweat forming on his forehead.

The child, barely alert due to the intense fever, lay still. She jerked slightly when he inserted the sharp fleam. He held the basin below her arm, which hung at the side of her small bed. Her lack of response to the incision concerned him. His throat dry, he allowed the blood to escape for several seconds before he applied a clean bandage to the drowsy lass. Isaac looked at the parents. "Do you have cold water fresh from the well?"

“Aye, I’ll fetch some forthwith.” Jonas seemed relieved to leave the room.

His wife ran to Alice’s bedside and knelt on the floor beside her, an image of grief that had Isaac fighting back tears.

Moments later, Jonas returned with the bucket of fresh well water and a linen cloth. Mrs. Wooding grabbed the material, swished it in the frigid water, and carefully stroked the girl’s forehead.

Isaac motioned for Jonas to follow him to the other room. “I fear the grippe has filled her lungs with infection.” He kept his voice to a whisper. “We must hope for the best and pray all will be well.” He clenched his jaw and grasped his hands behind his back. Although a trained physician, the doctor’s arsenal of weapons against disease was painfully lacking. Often prayer became the last—or only—resort.

Jonas shuddered. “Aye.” He spun back toward the child’s bedroom and stood by the bedside.

The boy he’d seen at the Allan home emerged from another bedchamber, rubbing his eyes. He stared at the doctor and rubbed them again. “Who are you?”

“I am Dr. Northrup. You saw me at Miss Allan’s home.”

“You came with that bad man who took Aurinda.” Tears formed again in his already swollen eyes.

“Aye, I did. Although I wish he had not.” Isaac stared at his feet.

“Why are you here?” The boy blinked several times.

“I am a doctor, and your sister is quite ill.” He cleared his throat to get rid of the huskiness in his voice.

“My sister?” He ran into the bedroom until his father yelled, “Halt!”

The father emerged, carrying the struggling boy.

“Why is she sick?” The boy yelled. “What’s wrong?”

“Listen to me, Zadok.” Jonas set the boy down and gripped his arms while he held the child’s gaze. “You mustn’t go near

Alice. She has the grippe and you could get it from her, the doctor says.”

“But I want to see her.” By now, Zadok wept uncontrollably.

“I know, son.” Jonas’s voice remained strong but laced with fear. “But ’twould break my heart if you were to get sick too. Please, do as you’re told.”

“Come, lad.” Isaac put his arm across his shoulder. “Come sit by the hearth and talk with me. It’s been quite some time since I’ve played a game. What would you suggest?”

Zadok shrugged his shoulders but didn’t speak.

A knock at the door drew their attention. Isaac answered it, since the parents were with the ill child. When he opened the wooden portal, amazement rippled through him. Primrose Allan’s hand remained raised to knock again, and her expression seemed to mirror his surprise.

“So ye’ve not left New Haven yet.”

Her slightly swollen eyes and reddened cheeks did not hide the fine features of her face, nor lessen the overall impression of beauty. Her dark curls, for the most part, hidden beneath a mobcap, persisted in escaping the linen headpiece. Although her stare seared with rage, he discerned the grief her anger attempted to smother.

“Nay, Miss Allan. Mr. Wooding invited me for cider before I follow Whitney back to Fairfield. Whilst here not more than a few moments, his daughter took ill, and I’ve attended her.” He shifted his feet.

“Alice?” Her face paled, and she licked her lips. “Nay! Not their wee one!” She turned toward the boy. “Zadok, I came to see how ye fare since ... since Aurinda is gone ...” Her lips trembled.

“Please, Miss Allan, there is much sadness here as well.” Isaac gently gripped her arm. “Try to focus on bringing comfort to this family. Perhaps you can help Mrs. Wooding so she does not exert herself in her condition.”

“Aye, Dr. Northrup.” She bit her lip in an attempt to stop it from trembling. “Where is Esther?”

“Come with me.” He led her down the hall but noticed Miss Allan give a gentle squeeze to Zadok’s shoulder when she passed him.

Throwing her shoulders back in a brave maneuver, Miss Allan slipped quietly into the child’s room. Isaac heard the two women weeping. He wiped his nose and went back to the hearth to visit with Zadok, but the lad was gone. He sighed and sat for a moment while he rubbed his head.

A moment later, a hand touched his shoulder. “Thank you for seeing our daughter. What do I owe you?”

“Not a shilling.” Isaac shook his head. “My presence in this town has brought enough grief. ’Tis the least I can do to try to make amends.”

Jonas’s eyes pierced through the dimming light of dusk. “Yer not responsible for your mate. We all make choices, and Whitney made this one on his own.”

A ruckus outside drew both men to their feet. They hurried outdoors to find Zadok and another boy in a scuffle. Blood flowed from the other boy’s nose.

“What’s this about? Peter? Zadok?” Redness crept up Jonas’s face.

The boy swiped the blood away with his sleeve. “He started it!”

“He said I’m in love with a lass, and I’ll never see her again.” Zadok burst into tears.

As he lifted both boys off the ground, Jonas pulled with force on Peter’s collar. “Did I not tell you to be kind to yer brother? ’Tis not *you* that misses your friend. And now yer sister is ill and yer mother is fretting about.” He sighed and released the boy. The energy seemed to escape the blacksmith like the steam from a slack tub. Shoulders slumped, Jonas walked back to the house.

Isaac stared at the boys, then pointed at Peter. "Go wash up, lad." He took Zadok's arm. "Come sit on the tree stump with me."

Head downward, Zadok trudged behind Isaac.

Isaac lowered himself to sit on the stump, then groaned. "Spent too much time in the saddle the last few days." Looking up at the child, he softened his voice. "Lad, I know you miss yer friend. But I'll make you a promise."

"What?" The child stood with his arms folded.

"I promise you I shall look after your friend, Aurinda, and make sure no harm comes to her."

The child squinted. "How?"

"Well, I will be the doctor in Fairfield, and I'll be sure to check up on her and be sure she fares well. I promise." He placed his hand on Zadok's arm and gave a gentle squeeze.

"But can you bring her back to me so we can play?"

Isaac looked at the ground. "I wish I could, lad. But the law will not allow me to do that. Even though I wish I could."

"Dr. Northrup. Her fever worsens!" Primrose Allan called for his help from the open doorway.

He stood with weary legs and hurried toward the house, Zadok at his heels. He didn't stop at the hearth but headed straight to Alice's bedside, followed by Primrose and Zadok. Jonas picked up his son and removed him from the sick room as he scolded him for his disobedience once again.

"Do you have any hyssop or sage tea, Mrs. Wooding?" Isaac felt the girl's forehead with the back of his hand.

She stood from the chair, which had been placed by the bedside.

"Sit, my friend. I shall make the tea." Primrose Allan scurried away.

Isaac watched her for a moment, then turned back to the patient. "We must get this fever down. Please remove most of

her clothes and put cool linen behind her neck and down her arms.”

Her parents followed his instructions, seemingly energized by the task. Alice moaned when the cold cloth touched her reddened skin.

“My poor babe.” Mrs. Wooding’s lips trembled, but she continued to minister to her fever-ridden daughter.

“Mrs. Wooding, you must take a rest, truly. Please allow your husband and Miss Allan to attend your daughter.”

“He’s right, Esther. We can watch Alice. I’ll call you if we need you.” Jonas kissed her cheek.

She gripped his hand before she stood with his assistance. With one more look at her child, Mrs. Wooding waddled toward the doorway where Zadok had been standing, looking at his sister.

“Go with your mother, lad.” Jonas pointed toward Zadok, and the child obeyed.

Primrose returned with the tea and brought a spoon to administer the healing brew. “I could na’ find the sage, so I made hyssop with a bit of cone sugar.”

“That will do.” Isaac shifted his feet. He helped Jonas prop up the child with pillows. “Make sure ’tis not too hot and give her just a few drops from the spoon at a time.”

“I know, doctor.” She met his gaze. “I’ve tended my own wee lass when she was abed with fever.”

“Of course you have.” He winced and tugged at his collar. “I did not mean to imply you were not capable.”

Indeed, Miss Allan seemed the picture of motherly care as she fought back her own tears to tend to another in need. His admiration for her increased, along with his attraction for her. He remembered the kiss Jonas had placed on his wife’s cheek, even in the midst of their sorrow. What must it be like to have a wife to bring comfort to her husband? To be there in sickness and health? To be his helpmate and lover?

He shook the thoughts out of his head. He must have been away at war too long. Such a woman the likes of Miss Allan would ne'er want a man who helped steal her own niece out of her arms. Even if the choice was not his. She'd believe he shouldn't be on such friendly terms with a man like Abijah.

The child coughed, returning Isaac's thoughts to the present, a long and raucous sound. Miss Allan carefully laid the child back down on the lowered pillow, while Isaac laid his head on her chest to listen to her lungs. She sounded no better. The thick gurgle alarmed him when he rolled the girl on her side. Without the need to instruct her, Miss Allan patted the child's back firmly to help loosen the congestion.

She truly was a skilled and competent woman—and lovely to look at.

If only she did not despise him.