



“Pappa! Pappa!”

The voice of young Zadok tore at Jonas’s heart. No ordinary lament, these sobs of a child in deep distress gripped him. Jonas ceased pumping the bellows, dropped his hammer, and raced toward his younger son, certain the lad was injured in some way. But when he stumbled across the road to meet Zadok, the child flung himself against his father’s legs with no blood in sight.

“Pappa, he’s taking her away!” The boy wept great tears.

Jonas lifted him into his arms. “Who is taking who away?” He’d nearly forgotten about the return of Aurinda’s father when the realization struck him like a physical blow. The veteran had truly taken his child, and no one could do anything about it.

What could Jonas say to comfort his son? He gripped him tightly as Zadok convulsed in his arms, tearing away at the fibers of emotions he usually withheld. Turning toward the house, Jonas carried his son indoors, where Esther met him.

“I was just going out to see what the trouble was. Zadok, what has happened?”

“Aurinda. He’s taken her away. All the way to Fairfield.”

Zadok resumed the outpour of tears on Jonas's shoulder, soaking his grief clear through his father's shirt and waistcoat.

"Oh, Zadok." Esther's voice held back a sob.

Zadok and Aurinda were such close friends, playing together nearly every day for the last couple of years. Esther's grief seemed as deep as the lad's.

She waddled toward her favorite chair and beckoned Zadok to come sit on her lap. Jonas set him on the wooden floor, and Zadok ran to his Mamma. With little room left on her lap with the coming child, Esther did her best to accommodate her whimpering son. She cuddled him and stroked his head while whispering soothing sounds.

Jonas turned toward the door and walked with heavy steps back outside. This event would cause a great stir in their town. 'Twas not every day a widowed man claimed such a wee one from the only home she'd ever known, not to mention the only mother she'd ever known. Veteran or no, most men would see the practical side of allowing the aunt to take care of the lass.

Why Abijah Whitney made this choice mystified him. Could the veteran not have moved to New Haven or at least arranged to visit the aunt from time to time? What sort of man would do this?

After he inhaled deeply, Jonas started to pump the bellows when he heard screams in the distance. "What now?" He lay his work aside once again and walked toward the disturbance.

The closer he came to the Allan home, the louder the screams tore at his heart. 'Twas bad enough to see his son's grief. But when he saw Primrose Allan beg her brother-in-law to leave the child and then saw the lass laid across Abijah Whitney's saddle, a chill needled up his spine.

He grabbed at the horse's reins before Abijah cantered away and glared at the stern-faced man who gripped the girl. "Is there no other way you can settle this?" Jonas spoke with measured

anger. "The child is beside herself with fear. Is this how you want it to be?"

"'Tis none of your affair, Wooding. Release my reins at once." He hissed his words like a snake.

Jonas let go of the leather straps.

But the child grabbed his fingers and would not let go. "Please, Mr. Wooding. Help me."

The terror on her face, akin to the sorrow he'd seen on his son's, brought deep anguish to him. "Aurinda ..."

Before he could speak further, Whitney pried the girl's hands from his and kicked the mount to a run. Jonas would never forget the pitiful sounds coming from the girl while her curls bobbed with the gelding's stride. Her voice soon faded, but the memory of that moment would likely never cease.

The only wails he heard now belonged to Primrose Allan. He forced himself to turn toward the grief-stricken woman.

"My wee babe!" she repeatedly cried.

The man who rode into town with Mr. Whitney attempted to comfort Primrose. Jonas, his feet heavy as lead, clomped toward the two.

"Miss Allan, I am so sorry."

The sobs ensued while the veteran twisted his tricorne hat in his fingers and stared at the ground. Noticing Jonas's presence, the stranger tipped his head. "Isaac Northrup, at your service." The audible strain in the man's voice testified to his concern.

"Jonas Wooding. You are mates with Abijah Whitney, I presume?"

"Aye. Though I wish today he'd been more friend than foe." Isaac tugged at the collar of his uniform and exhaled a breath with force.

"Indeed." He stared in the direction Abijah had gone. "'Twas ... a poor decision he made."

Isaac nodded and stared at his hat. "Aye."

Silence followed except for the wails of Primrose Allan. A

neighbor appeared and put her arms around Primrose then guided her into the house.

“I don’t know what to do. I know Abijah’s within his rights to take the girl. But the cruelty of it all.” Isaac shook his head. “There is no reasoning with the man. The war has hardened him to the point I barely recognize the schoolmate I once knew.”

Jonas put his hand on the man’s shoulder. “Come down the road to our house. Have some cider, and you can rest. It looks like you’ve traveled a fair bit and could use some victuals.”

“Aye, that I could.” Isaac’s legs turned stiffly toward his mount, and he untied the reins that secured the mare to a tree. “I’ll come back later and bid farewell to Miss Allan. I believe she is none too pleased with my presence at the moment.” The weight of a thousand worries seemed to rest on his shoulders while the two men walked side-by-side, Isaac leading the horse.

“So tell me, Northrup, what did you do in the militia?”

“I am a physician by training, so I worked as camp surgeon. I had two assistants, but one of them was killed while helping a mate.” Isaac’s face waned pale.

Jonas asked no further questions about the war. “There’s my house and smithy. My wife has a fresh hogshead of cider you may find refreshing. Step inside.”

He held his hand out toward the door in welcome, and Isaac removed his hat before entering. Jonas looked for Zadok, but he and Esther were no longer on the chair. Soon, Esther bustled back toward the main room, steadying herself on the wall every few steps.

“Zadok is asleep, poor lad.” She looked up at Isaac.

“Esther, this is Isaac Northrup, recently returned from the war. He is a physician. He is also friends with Abijah Whitney.” Jonas cleared his throat.

She tilted her chin upward. “I see.” She waddled toward the hogshead and took a pewter tankard down from a shelf, then

filled it halfway full. "Here, Mr. Northrup. Some refreshment." Her voice sounded less than friendly.

"It's Dr. Northrup, Esther. Although he is a friend of Mr. Whitney, he is concerned for Aurinda. And for Miss Allan."

Isaac wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "Aye, that I am, Mrs. Wooding. 'Twas no reasoning with my friend. He refused to listen to my concerns. All I can do is watch out for the little lass to be sure all goes well for the child. But my hands are tied by the law. He has every right to take her, despite the obvious pain to so many."

"Aye." A tear rolled down Esther's cheek. She wiped it off and sniffed. "Would ye stay for supper with us, Dr. Northrup? You must be starved after your long journey."

The man smiled for the first time. "Aye. 'Twould be most pleasant, and I'm grateful."

"Mamma, I feel sick." All three adults turned toward the lass whose cheeks were bright red and who rubbed her eyes.

"Alice!" Esther hurried toward Alice, who stood in her shift and shivered. "Let me take you back to bed. I thought you'd been napping quite a long time. My poor babe."

"Let me carry her for you, Esther." Jonas picked up the three-year-old, who seemed feather-light after carrying her big brother, Zadok. The heat that emanated from her small frame vied with the sweltering warmth in the forge. "You burn with fever, lass. To bed with you."

Would this day get any worse? He prayed not, but this latest distress filled him with uncommon foreboding. He'd ne'er seen their youngest child this ill. And with his wife about to deliver their fourth child, Jonas grew overwhelmed with worry.

"May I help?" Dr. Northrup stood in the doorway. "I have some medicinals that might relieve the fever."

"Aye, of course." Jonas combed his hand through his hair, which had come undone from his queue. "I thank you."

Isaac exited the house then came back carrying a leather haversack. "Show me where your daughter lies."

The two men's boots clomped down the hallway. A raucous cough erupted from the lass as both men entered her room.

Esther sat on the edge of the bed, stroked her hands through her daughter's damp hair, then pulled the quilt up to the girl's chin.

"Best to cool her off a bit, ma'am. I know we like to comfort our young ones with quilts, but her fever seems quite high."

"Esther, let Dr. Northrup examine her." He helped his wife stand from the bed.

The two of them watched as the doctor felt her forehead and placed his ear against her chest. Jonas's heart raced when the doctor's eyes narrowed.

The physician patted the girl's shoulder then stood. He inhaled a deep breath before he spoke. "I regret to tell you this, but I believe she suffers from the grippe." Isaac wiped his hand across his face and thinned his lips when he turned toward the parents. "I shall do all I can to help her recover. 'Tis important, Mrs. Wooding, you keep your distance from your daughter, since you will soon be in your confinement."

Redness emerged on Esther's cheeks, and she glared. *There's that look.* The fierce stubbornness of the protective mother—unknown to the doctor and on the verge of an eruption. Jonas often likened it to a mother bear robbed of her cubs.

"I will not remove myself from my daughter's bedside, Dr. Northrup, no matter the danger. My lass needs me." Her anger suddenly morphed into tears, and she returned bedside to comfort Alice.

Isaac's face paled. "I must caution you, Jonas, this grippe is a fierce one." His voice was barely above a whisper. "Many in other communities have succumbed to this illness already. You and the rest of your family must take care."

"Aye." Jonas's throat dried, and he tried to speak but coughed

a bit instead. He swallowed quickly, then responded with a weak voice. "I understand. But ye'll not convince my Esther to stay away from the lass. She is our precious wee one." The tears that had remained restrained now gushed.

The doctor took his arm and led him down the hall. Jonas's thoughts ricocheted from the small hands of Aurinda that clung to him as she begged for help to the convulsive sobs of his younger son to the scarlet cheeks of his desperately ill daughter. So much sadness in one day—he could not fathom the thought of any more.

What would he do if he lost his family to this dreaded grippe? Would he have the strength to bear it? He prayed to God the doctor's presence would be the providence he longed for. He clung to the man's arm as he hoped the doctor's medicinals could save them all.