



The raw, skin-splitting cold of December extended into a constant, frigid squall of snow in January. The unrelenting gales brought towering snow drifts, along with slivers of ice pummeling the windowpanes and thundering crackles. Howling winds disrupted the flames in the hearth.

Aurinda had never been happier that the art of weaving kept her moving both arms and legs. The motion helped keep the numbness at bay. At least for a time. When it took over, she forced herself to stand up and dance in front of the fire. Neither Mercy nor Mother Wooding thought the behavior strange. Indeed, they often danced alongside her as they pretended to attend a dress ball. They must have looked a sight!

Once their blood flowed steadily, they, one by one, resumed the occupations that would help keep them all warm. At this point, it was a matter of survival.

Since the wool was now carded and ready to use, Mother Wooding and Mercy knit scarves, hats, and gloves.

The women worked so efficiently, Aurinda thought surely they would have extra for neighbors. Mrs. Caldwell, who had lost her husband to the elements, most certainly could use extra.

Aurinda heard Zadok's boots squeaking on the fresh snow

outside. He thrust the door open. The women, in turn, shivered, despite their woolen shawls. Zadok quickly shut the weather out.

Despite two pairs of woolen gloves, he blew warm breath on his chilled fingers. He leaned down to kiss Aurinda's cheek, and she gasped. "Even your lips are frozen."

"Sorry, my love."

"Never say you're sorry for kissing me." She stood and hugged him. "Besides, you've worked so hard in this weather. Who am I to complain, sitting here by a warm fire?"

Zadok reached inside his jacket and withdrew a couple of letters. "I stopped at the store where the post rider has been leaving mail. With this cold, it only arrives once a week now." He handed one to Mercy and one to his mother.

They inhaled sharply, and Mercy cried. "I never even knew if Levi had made it to Morristown. Thank the Lord. He is safely there!" Wiping away her tears, she hurried back to her bedroom and closed the door to spend time alone with her missive.

"How is Father?" Aurinda stared at her mother-in-law, whose gaze was riveted on the letter.

"Mother Wooding?"

She glanced up abruptly, and Aurinda noticed her eyes were moist. "Sorry, my dear. I wanted to catch up on news. I needed to know if Jonas was all right."

"Of course you did. I should have waited to ask you."

Mother Wooding refolded the missive and tucked it inside her apron pocket. "I'll visit it later." She swallowed, a look of serenity spreading across her countenance. "Can I get you anything, Aurinda?"

"Nay, I'm just so blessed to have Zadok here at home with me. I fear I'd not make a good soldier's wife."

"Truth be told, I ne'er thought after last war that I'd ever be one." She wiped away the moisture from under her eyes. "Jonas decided he needed to be here for the family during the French War. The boys were so little ..." Tears emerged again. "But then, this war broke out. My Peter. He never had a chance to

have a family of his own.” Her last words were submerged in sobs.

Aurinda placed her arms about her shoulders and held her close. She regretted not ever knowing Zadok’s older brother—such a loss for their family.

Occasionally Aurinda still discovered Zadok reading letters from Peter that he’d received before the Battle of Stony Point. Before Peter suffered bayonet wounds that took his life, they rarely spoke of the loss, but Aurinda would hold him closely until her husband ceased sobbing.

Her own tears dripped upon Mother Wooding’s apron until the sobbing lessened. They must be brave. They must ensure this next generation lives on to secure the survival of the family and of America.

The women wiped their noses and proceeded back to work. There were blankets to weave and scarves to knit. Time enough to weep in one’s bed in the darkness of night.

Mercy returned to the hearth from her room and held her hands close to the warmth of the fire. She was unusually quiet.

“Mercy?” Zadok walked toward her and held his own fingers near the flames. “Everything well with Levi?”

“If you can call starving and cold ‘well.’” Anger infused her speech. “What is wrong with General Washington not making provision for the troops? He calls Levi away from our warm home and hearth and sets him amidst thousands of soldiers without sufficient victuals and blankets! I hardly think ’tis fair or just.”

Zadok cleared his throat. “I fear the Continental Congress is responsible. I’ve been getting news from the men in town about this lack of provision. The general is begging for money for food and supplies, yet the Congress apparently does not believe him. Why I do not know.” He sighed deeply and scowled.

He looked back at his mother, who reflected worry in every wrinkle. “Do not fear for Father. He’s likely being treated with better care than the lower ranks.”

Mercy's nostrils flared as she jerked the yarn tighter around the knitting needle. "That may be true. But why is Levi not provided for sufficiently?" She bit her lower lip and continued knitting. "I'm certain the general has sufficient meat and wine for entertaining." Anger laced Mercy's words.

"Careful, Mercy." Mother Wooding stared at her daughter. "Bitterness can be a trap for your soul. 'Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.'"

Mercy became quiet, but her expression revealed she still fought her way out of the trap's teeth.

Aurinda tried to change the conversation. "Perhaps we might send some blankets to the troops, Zadok."

He sat on one of the chairs. "I'd like nothing better. But how to deliver them?"

"Let us pray for a solution. I think that's an excellent idea, Aurinda." Mother Wooding continued to work on the scarf she created.

"Aye, a wonderful idea that poses a difficult dilemma." Zadok rubbed his hands through his long hair.

"In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." Mother Wooding spoke the verse by heart. "Let us beseech Him for the answer."