

Chapter 3

Mercy's Visit

Mercy arrives—She is floored to find out Josiah plans to marry Violet—Josiah pays a visit to the shipyard—Learns of Bishop's drinking and not doing his job—Mercy returns home and announces her engagement to Roger—

The moment Josiah had been dreading came the fifth day he was home.

He knew it would have to happen sooner or later, but he had hoped to put it off for a while yet. But since yesterday, when that blabbermouthing fool Johnny Bishop had told him that while he was in Concord picking up that load of cedarwood he had encountered Mercy Willingham and babbled to her that Josiah was back in Boston he had been on pins and needles, knowing that it was only a matter of time until she showed up here. So when in the late afternoon there came a loud knock on the front door Josiah had a premonition as to who it would be, and when he heard Mercy's voice calling out, "Elias! Where is Josiah?" as Elias opened the door he knew that moment had arrived.

It was his own fault in a way, coming as it did as part of his first day back in the shipyard. He had meant it to be brief, and it was, but when he arrived unannounced he found his new brother-in-law in a furious argument with Ruben Torres, the master shipwright (a title he had assumed with the retirement of old Gordon the Grouch.) They were arguing about who should take the big wagon to Concord to pick up a load of cedar for the cabin of a new ship, and it was going hot and heavy when Josiah appeared.

"I'm the Yardmaster, Torres," Bishop said loudly, "and if I say you go to Concord to get this wood, then you go to Concord and be happy about it!"

"I've got a ton of work to do, while you just walk around the yard playing the bigshot and giving orders nobody listens to," Torres roared back. "It was always your job before, remember?"

"That was when I was a carpenter. Now I'm the Yardmaster, and you will do what I say!"

"You forget, Johnny Bishop, that I knew you when you were just an apprentice!" Torres exploded. The man had some Spanish blood, and he was known for his fiery

temper. Josiah could see that he was only moments away from seeing either Torres or Bishop knocked to the ground if he didn't step in.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, getting between the two men.

"Why Mr. Hartford! You're back!" Ruben exclaimed.

Josiah listened patiently while both men explained their side of the story, and it quickly became obvious that Bishop wanted Ruben to go to Concord and get the wood because he thought getting a wagonload of wood was beneath his new status as the "Yardmaster."

"Johnny, you go," Josiah said, having heard enough. "Ruben has work to do here."

"The Yardmaster shouldn't have to do such a lowly task as that," Bishop protested. "An' I have plenty of work to do myself. Send someone else."

"You want to keep working here?" Josiah said sharply. "Then do as I say." It was becoming painfully obvious that Bishop had been getting used to being the top dog, both here and at home, and he was going to have to be reminded of his place. He had gotten way too big for his britches while Josiah was gone. "Ruben, you can get back to work. Johnny, you get going."

Ruben gave Bishop a triumphant smile. Bishop climbed sullenly onto the wagon and took hold of the reins. "I'll need some money," he said petulantly. "How do you expect me to pay for this if you won't give me any money?"

"You'll be getting the wood from Jacob Benowitz?" Josiah asked.

"That Jew!" Bishop said. "He charges way too much!"

"He's a friend of ours. Tell him I said, 'Shalom,' and do not refer to him that way. Tell him I want to reopen our line of credit. We've done business with his firm for years, and you will be respectful toward him. Now get going."

"He knows we have credit with Benowitz's company," Ruben Torres said as the wagon rolled through the shipyard gates and onto Boston's waterfront road. "He only wanted some cash so he could stop off at Buchman's Tavern in Lexington and have a few drinks. So glad you're back, Mr. Hartford."

So when Bishop returned with the load of wood as he'd been directed, he announced that he had seen Mercy Willingham and given her the big news that Josiah

Hartford had come back, Josiah felt a sense of foreboding. But when he heard Mercy's voice and saw her rush past Elias and make a beeline for the drawing room, he thought the moment is here and I might as well get it over with.

He stood up when he saw her. He had been sitting with Violet, Jessica, Johnny Bishop, as well as Charles and Anne who had come to welcome him home. The moment had arrived and Mercy did just what he hoped she would not do. She cried out, "Josiah!" joyously and fling herself on him. He was careful to keep his response formal and distant. This could get sticky.

The twenty-two miles from Concord to Boston were for Mercy as long as a journey around the world and back. She feared the Willingham family carriage, with its ornate and huge "W" and the family crest on both doors would never get to Hartford Manor in spite of her instructions to Zachary Hastings, the carriage driver, to drive the horses as fast as he dared without wearing them out. As they peregrinated over the sometimes rough roads through Lexington where the war had started two and one half years ago and then onto the Lexington Highway toward the Neck and into Boston itself she could hardly stand to wait any longer. When old Elias opened the front door to admit her she fairly flew past him, and when she saw Josiah getting to his feet in the drawing room she felt a wonderful rush of pure joy. He was even more handsome than she remembered, just as tall and graceful as he had been the last time she saw him. He rose from the small sofa he had been sitting on with an arresting red headed woman she had never seen before but who appeared to know who she was without being told. Josiah did not return her embrace but simply patted her on the shoulder and gently pushed her away. This was a far cry from the greeting she expected, and she immediately wondered if it had anything to do with this redhead who looked at her as if they were old acquaintances and smiled, showing a double row of perfectly white teeth. She had been sitting awfully close to Josiah and now she stood up and extended her hand.

"You must be Mercy," she said charmingly. "You are just as beautiful as Josiah described you."

"Who are you?" Mercy asked.

"Mercy Willingham, meet Violet Dos Santos. Violet, this is Mercy."

"I've heard so much about you, Mercy," Violet said. "I'm so happy to meet you at last."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, I'm sure," Mercy said in a flat tone. She was more than a little nonplussed. Who was this woman who sat next to her Josiah as if she owned him?

This was followed by an awkward silence, finally broken by Jessica, who said, "It's a long trip from Concord to Boston. I image Mercy would like to come upstairs and freshen up a little."

"Yes, yes, I would, definitely," Mercy said, still not knowing what to make of this.

"Come with me, then," Jessica told her, taking her in tow. "Toby!" she called to the new stableboy. "Help Elias bring in Mercy's luggage and take it upstairs. Brandi, you can help too."

Brandi had been dusting and cleaning in Josiah's office on the first floor. It was amazing, Josiah thought, how dusty a room could get after being closed off for well over a year. It was a good job that this Brandi was a hard enough worker. He'd had his doubts after meeting her for the first time and discovering how flirtatious she was, but he had to admit her efforts on the job were satisfactory, but as she left his office to do as Jessica directed her saw Johnny Bishop following her with beady carnivorous eyes. I'll have to keep a watch on this, he thought, and his unease at Bishop being part of the family got even larger.

He had spent the morning and early afternoon in his Hartford Manor office going through all the papers and books he had left behind when he went to rejoin the army last year. It appeared that Charles and Jessica had done a fair job looking after the business in his absence. But some things had been put off, set aside for him to deal with when he returned, and at the top of the list were the problems caused by the man who had promoted himself from carpenter to something called the "Yardmaster," whose duties were vague and undefined, which was apparently the way Johnny Bishop wanted it.

"Yardmaster," he said, "why aren't you at the yard?"

The new Yardmaster was enjoying a glass of expensive red wine and talking on a superficial level manner with Charles and Anne, whom, he sensed, were not too keen on Johnny Bishop's presence either.

"I was there," he said defensively. "I came home early, that's all. A body is allowed to come home early sometimes, ain't he?" He took another long sip of wine and got bolder. "You ain't been to the yard but once since you come home, I notice."

The look on Bishop's face plainly said that he considered this a daring riposte to Josiah's reprimand, but Josiah wasn't having it.

"That's my business," he flared, "not yours." Bishop was going to have to get the message one way or another—he was, Jessica's husband notwithstanding, still a worker in the Hartford's employ. He had been hired, and he could be fired too.

Josiah's sharp tone had the desired effect. Bishop's face took on a subservient look.

"I'll go in early tomorrow, Josiah, I promise," he said.

"See that you do," Josiah warned.



As they were ascending the broad staircase Mercy asked in a low voice, "Jessica, who is she?"

"Mercy, I'm not sure. Truly, I'm not. All I know is they showed up four days ago, Josiah, Adam Bigelow, and these two women," Jessica said in a confidential tone that meant they were more than just friends, they were practically sisters.

"Who is this *other* woman?" Mercy asked.

"Violet's older sister. Her name is Caroline. She's lying down again. She isn't well."

"What's the matter with her?"

"Apparently some bad things happened to her. No one will say what they were. Whenever I try to find out what went on after they left Mary Louise's house in February they just say, 'It's a long story,' and won't say anything else. I'm as much in the dark as you are."

"All right," she said as they entered the spare bedroom that Mercy always used when she came to visit, "enough about me. Change of subject. How is your married life?"

Jessica tossed her head in an unhappy motion. "Not what I thought it would be. Marital bliss! Hah!"

"Is it your husband, Johnny?" Mercy asked.

"What else would it be? He's rough, he's crude, he drinks, he's unintelligent..."

Jessica's voice trailed off.

"What about—you know, the other part."

"You mean, in bed? What a joke that is."

"Why? What's it like?"

"It isn't like anything. It's just bing-boom and it's over, all done, before it really starts."

"Is it that way with all of them, do you think?"

Jessica shrugged. "Who knows?"

"Are you sorry you got married?"

"I married the first man that came along. I should have waited. Don't make the same mistake I made, Mercy. Make sure you have the right man before you say 'I do.'"

Mercy was about to say she was certain Josiah was the right man for her, but as she hurriedly changed from the rumpled dress she had worn since leaving Concord she kept thinking of that Violet woman sitting so close beside him, and how no one knew what their relationship was. Once she had finished changing and taken a look at herself in the mirror and given her hair a few slashes with a long comb, she hurried back downstairs, determined to find out what was what with this Violet and Josiah.

She is pretty, Mercy said to herself. That dark red hair is striking, and so were those green eyes—they made her think of a cat, they were so bright they looked as if they would shine in the dark. Eyes like that could stop a man in his tracks. But there was something of innocence lost about her, as if she had once held a high position and then been brought down. She was still sitting as close to Josiah as she possibly could, causing Mercy to wish she had a wedge or a lever to pry her away from him.

"Where are you from, Violet?" she asked, noticing that Walter, in his blue and white uniform, had joined them. "I detect an accent."

"Yes, I'm from New Orleans," Violet said pleasantly. "My mother and father came from France, before I was born."

"*Vous devez savoir parler francais?*" (So you must speak French?) Mercy asked, wondering if she could catch this woman in a lie.

“Oui, je parle francais,” (Yes, I speak French), Violet replied.

“Est-ce que le francais est le langue que vous parliez a la maison?” (Was French the language you spoke at home?)

“Oui, le francais etait la premiere langue que j’ai parlee. Votre Francais est bon. Qui vous a appri?” (Yes, French was the language I spoke. Your French is good. Who taught you?)

“We had a French governess,” Mercy said, switching back to English.

“Was she from Paris?”

“No, Marseilles.”

“I grew up speaking French, Spanish, and English,” Violet said.

“Now there you have me,” Mercy admitted. “I don’t speak any Spanish at all.”

“Violet’s Spanish is perfect,” Josiah put in. “That came in handy when we left Philadelphia.”

“How come?” Johnny Bishop asked in his rough way. He felt he was being left out of the conversation, with all this talk about speaking French and the rest of that rubbish.

“When we left Philadelphia we took passage on a Spanish ship,” Josiah explained reluctantly. “It was called the San Martin. Only the Captain and the First Mate spoke English, and the Captain’s English wasn’t very good.”

“No, I meant how come she speaks Spanish,” Bishop said. “Ain’t New Orleans French?”

“France ceded New Orleans and all the surrounding territory to Spain fourteen years ago, in 1763,” Violet explained. “So we had to learn Spanish to deal with the new Spanish administration, and the Spaniards too.”

“Why in the hell—’scuse my language, folks—why in the world would they do a thing like that? Give up a whole city an’ all that land? Sounds downright crazy, you ask me.”

Best to ignore this fool, Josiah thought, but he was growing near the end of his patience with the man.

He could tell by the looks on the faces of everyone gathered around that they were all dying to know what had happened between the time they left New Jersey to when they showed up at Hartford Manor.

"Are you ever going to tell us what happened after you left Mary Louise's place?" Anne asked, sounding exasperated. "Is it a secret or something?"

"Walter must have told you some of it," Josiah said.

"I told them how Father and I, after those cursed Brits arrested us, ended up in that equally cursed Sugar House in New York," Walter said. "And how, by a miracle, Josiah showed up there, just before Father died."

"Yes, I got there just in time to see Father die," Josiah said bitterly.

"What did Father die of?" asked Anne.

"Who knows?" Walter said. "The filth, the food, the rats, a fever. Men died there every day."

"Sometimes by their own hand," Josiah added.

"I only got a glimpse of it," Violet said, "and even that gave me an idea of how awful that place must have been."

"You were there?" asked Mercy, surprised. "I thought you said you were from New Orleans?"

"Violet helped us escape," said Josiah.

"You escaped from that horrible place?" asked Jessica. "How did you do it?"

"And what role did you play?" Mercy asked Violet.

"All I did was find them a boat so they could get across the East River," Violet explained.

"What a story this must be," said Charles.

"Yes, yes, details, please!" Anne asked enthusiastically.

"It would take a long time, and it's not a happy tale to tell," Josiah said. "In order to escape we had to kill one of the guards. Then we had to make our way across New Jersey, freezing and starving part of the time, hiding when British soldiers came near. Dermont and Little Tommy got killed—"

"Who were they?" Anne asked.

"Two fellas who escaped with us."

"And we stole, too," Walter added. "We stole food, we stole clothes—"

"None of us enjoyed it, Walter," Josiah said. "We did what we had to do to stay alive."

"Is that how you met Josiah, in New York?" Mercy asked Violet.

"That's another long story, Mercy," Josiah said.

"Adam told me some of what you all did after you left New Jersey," Walter said. "Since we don't want to tell about what happened in New Jersey, why don't you tell us about that?"

"What did he tell you?" Adam had left this morning to go to his farm in Bedford.

"Oh, nothing too exciting or worth talking about. Just that you were captured by Indians and a slave trader who was going to sell you to the Iroquois."

Walter smiled mischievously, reminding Josiah, for the first time in years, of the boy he had been before the war started, the boy who helped dump the tea overboard on that fateful night in 1773, and who delighted in tormenting British soldiers by throwing rocks at them and harassing Boston's Tories by painting big red "Ts" on their doors.

Walter's comments, especially the part about being captured by Indians, had the effect he had been hoping for. There were looks of consternation and dismay, all the more so because everyone could see by the expressions on the faces of Josiah and Violet that it was true.

"How in the world did this happen?" Charles asked. "And where?"

Violet looked at Josiah, who nodded. "We were in Kentucky," she began, and then faltered. It was not easy to talk about.

"He also told me that you killed an Indian called Dragging Canoe, and another called The Hanged Man," Walter continued.

Once again there was dismay on every face. Josiah shook his head.

"Adam got the Hanged Man. I took care of the other one, Dragging Canoe." In spite of all the killing he had seen and done, he didn't like to use the word itself.

Of all those present only Charles Waite understood what this tale of the frontier meant. He was a slight, reedy, somewhat frail man, and he was honest enough with himself to know that he would not stand up well against the hardships of military life. For that reason he had never joined the Continental Army, despite his enthusiasm for

the American cause. He was an attorney, and he knew that the best way for him to fight for liberty was to help the Hartfords build ships by handling all the legal matters for the firm and assisting in whatever other ways he could in making the shipyard run.

In spite of his physical weakness, or perhaps because of it, Charles loved adventure stories. He had a special affinity for the tales of the American frontier. As the Americans pushed further West, past the Alleghanies and the Appalachians, they were coming into more and more conflict with what everyone referred to as "the Indian savages," although Charles had his doubts as to whether they really deserved to be spoken of that way. From the Mohawk Valley in New York to Ohio and Kentucky in the south, stories of the Indians' wild and cruel ways were making their way to the cities of Boston and Philadelphia in the form of books, pamphlets, and newspaper accounts. And some of the names heard more and more were the Hanged Man and his main henchman, Dragging Canoe, two of the most feared Indian raiders. Armed with long knives, sharp tomahawks and muskets supplied by unscrupulous white men like Simon Girty, they terrorized frontier farms and settlements, burning and killing, kidnapping white women and children and making slaves of them.

"The Hanged Man and Dragging Canoe are two of the most fearsome Indians out there," he said with a touch of awe in his voice. "And you're saying they're both dead?"

"Them and some others," Josiah told them. "There was a lot of killing, a lot of death."

"How did you kill him, boss?" Johnny Bishop asked. Perhaps he could worm his way back into Josiah's good graces this way. "Did you shoot him?"

"No," Josiah said reluctantly.

"Did you stab him?"

"No."

"Well, then how did you—if you didn't shoot him or stab him, then you must have—you mean you killed him with your bare hands!"

Josiah didn't answer. But Violet nodded her head.

"I saw him do it," she said.

"It was the death hold, wasn't it?" asked Walter.

"The death hold? What's that?" asked Bishop.

"It's a trick Adam taught me," Josiah explained. "He learned it from some Italian sailors in New York years ago. You catch a man's head with both hands and twist. It isn't hard once you learn it."

"What else happened?" Jessica asked. "How did you get away from them?"

"A man named Daniel Boone came. He was searching for his daughter Jemima and two other girls who had been taken by the Indians."

"Daniel Boone?" asked Charles.

"Yes, you know him?"

"I know of him. He's quite famous in his own way."

"Who is he?"

"An explorer, frontiersman, Indian fighter. He explored the Cumberland Gap, and opened up the Wilderness Trail."

"He almost killed us," said Violet.

"How? Why?"

"He thought Adam and I were renegades, like Simon Girty, who were working with the Indians."

"There's white men who help the savages?" Bishop spoke up. "What kind of no account low life scallywag does that?"

"What tribe were they?" Charles asked. "Shawnee?"

"Hell—oops, there I go again, sorry, you all—heck, what difference could that make?" Bishop asked. "They're all the same, dirty sneaking savages, aren't they?"

"Not necessarily," said Charles. "Some tribes are quite different from the others."

Bishop digested this with a "Hmpf!" sound, and drank more wine. Jessica looked at him with a kind of revulsion. She isn't happy with him, Josiah thought. Since coming home four days ago he had observed a number of things going on in his house that he wasn't happy with, and many of them centered around his new brother-in-law. The carpenter turned "Yardmaster"—and Josiah still wasn't sure what that was supposed to mean—drank a great deal, slept late, and only went to the shipyard for a few hours at a time, when he bothered to go at all. He relished ordering the servants about and behaved as if Hartford Manor was his personal playhouse.

Then there were all these new servants. The Hartfords had never needed two maids before, and had never employed a stableboy either. He had found out from Walter that the extra servants was Bishop's idea, and that he had come up with the idea that the shipyard needed a "Yardmaster." It had all come about after he married Jessica.

What would someone like Bishop know about how to treat servants? And he couldn't figure out what Jessica saw in him. He had once been handsome in a rugged sort of way, and perhaps that was what had attracted her at first, but all these months of soft living and hard drinking had taken a toll on the man. He was overweight, and his face starting to take on the sodden look of an aging drunk. When Bishop said something especially stupid or obnoxious—and Josiah had already discerned that the man was an insufferable drunk—a look of disgust crossed her face, and when he reached for her to put an arm around her waist or upon her shoulders there was no mistaking her sense of loathing for it. And Bishop was not entirely blind to this. Once Josiah had seen a look of rage cross the man's face when Jessica pushed him away from her, the kind of look that precedes a slap or a punch. If he ever hits her it will be the last time he raises his hand to anyone, Josiah thought.

There were other things he wasn't happy with either, and they had nothing to do with the new Yardmaster and brother-in-law. He had at first planned on occupying the main bedroom on the second floor, the one his parents had slept in. It seemed fitting. With his father's death everything passed on to him—the house, the shipyard, all were his now—but Jessica had moved their mother in there and Josiah, after seeing her, agreed that the shock of moving her out and into another room might be too hard on her. He had put Caroline into one of the rooms on the second floor as well, and Violet in the room next to that one. But it immediately became clear that Caroline couldn't bear to be alone at night. She screamed and cried and carried on to the point where Violet had to spend the night in there with her.

This led to something else that troubled Josiah. It had been a long time since he and Violet had been together. Their long journey had given them little opportunity for intimacy. Seeing that his parents' bedroom wasn't available, he had decided to sleep in his old room on the fourth floor, at least for now, and wanted Violet to join him up

there. Nice and private, he thought, so that might work out for the best. But with Caroline behaving this way, it just hadn't been possible, and Josiah was not happy about it. He said as much to Violet.

"I know it's been a long time, Josiah," she said, patting him affectionately on the cheek. "I'm wanting you too. But things will change soon, I promise."

"What am I supposed to do until then?" he said, not pleased with this answer. But there was little to be done, except grin and bear it.

He saw that Mercy kept stealing glances at him. What could she be thinking? Sooner or later she would have to find out. He didn't know that Mercy had hardly slept the night before, that the idea of seeing Josiah after such a long time had possessed her like a raging fever. That he had never acknowledged, in his letters to her, that she had changed her mind and wanted to marry him after all, troubled her only a little. Men were prideful. He didn't want to appear over eager after what happened. She could understand that. Now he had returned, and everything would be set right.

So she had hoped. It never occurred to her that he would bring a woman back with him, let alone one as arresting as Violet. As the afternoon wore on she realized she would have to get Josiah alone and make him explain what this was all about.

Mercy's chance to see Josiah alone came later that night. The mysterious Caroline appeared at dinner. She sat beside her sister and smiled vacantly at everyone, but said very little and barely touched her food. She kept looking at Violet as if to reassure herself that her sister hadn't gone anywhere. Mercy tried several times to engage her in conversation, out of a desire to be friendly with this pitiful creature but also because she might have some of the answers that were blazing about in her mind on what was going on between Josiah and Violet, but the conversation went nowhere.

Bedtime came. As Mercy made her way up the stairs toward the room on the second floor that she always stayed in when she came to Hartford Manor, she looked up when she heard Josiah's voice on the floor above. He was on the landing there, near the big window that provided such a wonderful view of Boston, talking to Violet.

"Can't you come up for a little while at least?" he was saying. "I mean, just long enough for us—"

"I'm sorry, Josiah," Violet said. "She's really bad tonight. I've got to stay with her. I know it's been a long time. It will get better soon, I promise."

Josiah made a disappointed sound, turned and went up the stairs toward the fourth floor. Violet came down and went right into the bedroom she shared with her sister, not noticing Mercy.

Mercy couldn't sleep. Her room was next the one Violet and Caroline were in, and while she couldn't make out all the words being said in there she could hear Caroline crying and Violet speaking softly and trying to soothe her.

After what seemed a long time Mercy decided to get up. She went out into the darkness of Hartford Manor and saw some light coming from the floor above. When she got there and looked out, she heard a voice from the floor above.

"Can't you sleep either, Mercy?"

"Josiah!" she cried, and she hurried up the stairs to the next floor and grasped him with both arms, then kissed him on the mouth.

"I've waited for this for too long, Josiah," she said softly. "Every day, every night, I've wondered when you would come back."

"It's been such a long journey," he said, "and so much has happened."

"Now you're here, and you're going to stay," she declared. "You aren't going to pull some damn fool stunt and go back to the war, are you?"

"I'm done with the war," he promised.

"There are so many things I want to ask you," she said. "But I can't tell them to you here. Let's go into your room, we can better talk there."

Josiah started to protest, but Mercy grabbed his hand in a strong grip and began towing him toward the door of his bedroom. "Come with me," she said determinedly.

This has disaster written all over it, Josiah thought, but he let himself be pulled along as Mercy opened the door and once they were inside close it with an extra push. She threw her arms around Josiah again.

"Kiss me, Josiah, kiss me," she said.

"Mercy, no," he said, pushing her back.

"Why not? Because of *her*?" Mercy demanded. "Josiah, what is going on? Why did you bring her here?"

"She's my fiancé, Mercy." Josiah decided it was best to say this plainly.

Mercy, normally so loquacious, was struck dumb. She stared, wordlessly, at Josiah, then sat down on the side of the bed, as if unable to stand.

"Your fiancé" she asked.

"Yes. I'm going to marry her."

"It isn't possible," Mercy said. "Do you love her?"

"I told you a long time ago, Mercy, that I couldn't marry someone I didn't love."

"Is it because I turned you down when you asked me before? I didn't mean it, I told you in the letters I wrote."

"I guess it was too late by then," Josiah stated.

Mercy looked like someone who just had the ground pulled out from under her.

"I can't believe this," she said. She stood up and came toward Josiah. "Kiss me, please."

Mercy, I just can't."

"Make love to me, Josiah, I want you to."

"Mercy..."

She was already removing her nightgown. In spite of Josiah's pleas, she took hold of his hand again and began tugging it toward her.

"Touch me," she said. "It feels good, doesn't it. I've dreamed of this." She was trying to pull him to the bed.

Josiah knew if he didn't stop this now there would be no stopping it. He could feel Mercy's yearning and his own feelings had begun to assert themselves. Even in the dim light he could see the outlines of her body through her nightgown. He pulled away.

"No, Mercy, I can't do this."

Mercy was dumbfounded. She stared intensely at Josiah, and when she realized he meant what he said, she gave a bitter laugh.

"What a fool I am," she said. "Is there something wrong with me, that you don't want me anymore?" She began buttoning her nightgown back up. "You were willing to cheat on me with Alice but now you won't cheat Violet with me. I've waited all this time for you to come back and now I see it's been for nothing." Josiah reached for her shoulder, want to show sympathy, but she slapped his hand away. "I don't want your pity," she snapped. "Keep away."

“Mercy, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” she said as she finished dressing. “Goodbye Josiah.” She opened the door and left the room.

The next day Mercy announced that she was suddenly taken ill, and returned to Concord. A week later her parents announced their daughter’s engagement to Roger Macefield.