

9. Micklewood makes his way

A nightmare, it was only a nightmare, Mr. Pelham told himself as he stood on the quay next to *Jonathan*. The sun had just set and a chill breeze had risen in its place. In the twilight, he could just make out the half-dozen burly dockwallopers he had hired. They lounged nearby with their long staffs at ready and made Pelham nervous even as he worried whether six would be enough. It was only yesterday that the Privy Council -- finally! -- authorized the Company to ship these beggars and idlers whether they

willed it or not, and to *'imprison, punish, and dispose'* of them as needed and *'so to ship them out for Virginia, with as much expedition as may stand with conveniencie'*.

Ever since it had been chaos.

Mr. Collingwood had allowed him to hire a half dozen stout men to make sure boarding went without further disruption – the fiasco with the City and the Privy Council had been disruption enough! Even so, two of the Bridewell rogues had escaped last night! While the Company had quickly found replacements they had scolded Mr. Pelham in the clearest language that no further runaways could be tolerated. Things were quiet for the moment, but Mr. Pelham could only hope it would remain so. He feared that six men wouldn't be enough if the locals took matters ill once they learned what was afoot!

As Pelham paced anxiously along the quay, he had the uncomfortable feeling that the hired men were talking about him, perhaps even mocking him -- rum coves they were! He could smell them from here. Their stench was worse than the Thames' manure-fouled mud. The City should ship *them* to Virginia, he said to himself, even as he repeated that this was all just a nightmare and that would be over as soon as the ships sailed.

It was all Bridewell's fault, anyway, he told himself. Everything had been going so well for him until those beggars, thieves, whores, rascals and outright rogues had come into his life. It had been non-stop chaos since his disastrous meeting with Naunton. Mr. Collingwood had gone white at the news that the request had been refused for now. Dragging Pelham with him, Collingwood made him repeat his report directly to Sir Edwin; and it had been Sir Edwin's turn to be furious. He had said the most

illiberal things about Secretary Naunton – words Pelham had never before heard on a gentleman's tongue.

What had followed was worse, infinitely worse: meeting after meeting between the City and the Company; then draft after draft of an agreement. The drafts grew longer, the tempers shorter, and Mr. Pelham's fingers increasingly numb before an agreement was finally reached. As best Mr. Pelham understood, the Bridewell prisoners had been utterly transformed and would be promised housing, food, tools, and even 50 acres of land when their term was over, all spelled out in Mr. Pelham's fine script.

At first, Mr. Pelham thought it meant a painful loss for the Company. After all, with fifty acres of land to be granted to each deportee, that meant five thousand acres to be given away, in all! And the Company was now obligated to provide tools and housing and all the rest. Pelham feared that it was all the result of his disastrous meeting with Secretary Naunton and he trembled for fear of losing his post. But that was before he heard Sir Edwin tell his Deputy that each new laborer would bring ten pounds sterling from the sale of tobacco each year.

Pelham had quickly – and silently -- done the calculations, thinking of that blackguard Evans who'd bought maidens for a shilling. With the City paying the five pounds for passage and the Company expecting to make ten pounds at each tobacco harvest, that meant a two-hundred-fold return on that shilling! Each year! Mr. Pelham reconfirmed his calculation: *two hundred-fold* return, give or take! Even with additional incidental costs, the Company could more-than-easily bear the cost of the new agreement.... And of course, the Company couldn't have

to grant the fifty acres to any who died before the end of their terms, would it?

Mr. Pelham had looked at Sir Edwin Sandys' fine house in Aldersgate with a different eye after that. He looked at the pittance he received for his copywork with a different eye after that. He looked at the honorable gentlemen of the Company with a different eye after that.

His solitary reflections were broken by the sound of heavy wagons rumbling over the cobblestones. A moment later, the first wagon from Bridewell rounded the corner and came onto the quay, followed quickly by another. The broad-shouldered men in the shadows picked up their staves and stepped into position at the head and the rear of the wagons, to block any runaways. The wagons came a halt and Pelham checked the numbers assigned to each wagon against his master list. Satisfied, he waved the wagons to advance to the far end of the quay, where *Duty* stood moored tightly to the bollards. Pelham sent two of his men to follow. Some moments later, a larger group of wagons rumbled around the corner, most of which were sent to the *London Merchant*, the largest of the three ships.

The last of the wagons stopped next to *Jonathan*, where the red-bearded mate had set a gangway in place and pulled two stout ropes across the deck to make a kind of corridor to the hatchway leading below.

The driver jumped down. He came around to the back, rattled out the chain, and let fall the gate. It swung open on a kaleidoscope of faces: some tired or fearful, others full of excitement; some alert and light-hearted; some shadowed by sullen defiance. As they piled out and gathered together on the quay, it was excitement that won

out. Their voices began as a trickle, but soon rose to a torrent as the lads looked up at the ship. The name 'Jonathan' was on all lips -- what a beauty! just look at 'er -- anyone seen Tom? -- Jonathan's ours? you sure? -- how can we all fit into *that*? -- Tom who? Tom *Cornish*! seen 'im? The clamor and confusion swept away fear and fatigue. Some of the lads shoved forward to get a better view while the rest gawked at the towering masts that were silhouetted now against the darkening sky.

When Maggie arrived and began to unload, she craned her neck to look over the crowd. No Will. Her heart sank, despite the gaiety around her. She understood now that Will had learned somehow which numbers would go on which ship and he'd given her the key for sailing in *Jonathan*. But was *Jonathan* not traveling with the others? being sent somewhere else? to Ireland perhaps, as some rumors said? And where was Will?

"Be silent, now, I beg you," Mr. Pelham was calling, trying to make himself heard. "I have a list here. The girls numbered from twelve to eighteen are to go on board the *Jonathan* while..." Only those closest to him could hear him, but not even they paid any attention. The crowd was milling about more wagons clattered around the corner.

"Here, sir," suggested one of the drivers to Mr. Pelham softly, as he saw the chaotic scene. "Let me give you a hand, what say?"

"Do it, then," he replied. "I must check on the others." He shoved his paper into the driver's hand and head off toward the *London Merchant*.

The driver cracked his horse whip overhead; and in the sudden silence he bawled out directions. "Quiet there! Maids twelve t'eighteen go on board *Jonathan* here. Lads

fifteen to sixty-two on *Jonathan* as well. You others stand back for now. We'll you to your ship in a moment. Twelve to eighteen and fifteen to sixty-two are for *Jonathan*! Jump to it, now, or we'll be standin' here staring at tomorrow's tide!"

Some semblance of order began to emerge. The less numerous Brides were soon formed in a line, with Maggie at the end, her sack over her shoulder. It was more complicated for the lads. The Company's plan had been to separate the felons from the vagrants and the others from Bridewell. Most of the first were for the *Duty*, while the rest were to be split between two other ships. It was quickly found, however, that too many *Duty* boys had been mixed with among the *Jonathans* and some that should have been *Jonathans* were boarding *Duty*. Another of Company's plans coming undone before it even began, and Mr. Pelham was left to deal with it. Again.

With a curse Pelham halted boarding on all the ships and hurried forward to put matters right. There was a hurried, confused huddle; a muddle: notes compared; blame cast and rejected; voices raised and hushed. The result was that a dozen felons were culled from those wrongly assigned to *Jonathan* or the *Merchant*. They were to be sent forward to *Duty* and exchanged with dozen in the opposite direction. Meanwhile the bulk of the group stayed in their serpentine lines. Many were shivering now, for night had come, and the fog was chill.

There was still no sign of Will. All during the debate over who should sail on which ship, Maggie had looked for him among the jostling crowd. As she looked all around, she suddenly became aware that the *Jonathan's* red-bearded mate lounging on the ship's rail was looking straight at her.

Suddenly, he grinned and winked. Maggie reddened – and looked away. It was a good-hearted grin and a meaningless wink, she told herself: just a happy-go-lucky sailor who winked at every girl along the quay. Still, he was a handsome man, she thought, despite his unkempt beard and rather threadbare Monmouth cap.

When she risked another glance a few moments later, she saw he had jumped onto the quay and was peering forward to where an lamp could be seen approaching through the fog. Behind the lamp could be seen a couple of men, followed by what looked like a line of dim figures that came up and clustered around the lantern.

The *Jonathan's* mate joined them. The fog muffled the sounds and Maggie heard nothing distinct until an order was given, and a unusual noise rose through the fog. It was a very distinctive sound: a squeak, creak and shuffle. Maggie suddenly realized it was made by dozens of new leather-soled shoes scuffing the stone as they advanced, the same sound Will's new shoes had made that very afternoon.

A line of lads then emerged clearly from the fog, each toting his sack and approaching the plank to board *Jonathan*. Maggie risked a cry -- what could they do to her for breaking their rules? Ship her to Virginia?

“*Will! Will!*” she shouted.

“What’s that?” demanded Pelham. “Silence, all of you!”

Even so, came an answering cry: “*Maggie!*”

She smiled to herself and shook her head. Not only had Will discovered how they would be divided among the ships, he'd succeeded in rejoining her, even when he'd been wrongly sent to another ship! Whatever fate Virginia

held for her and all the others, Will Micklewood would find a way, would *make* his way, despite everything, despite *anything* they might do!