JONATHAN'S SEED

P. M. Marston

BOOK ONE OF A SEA OF SWANS

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Nobody but me remembers William Micklewood and Margaret Withering, not anymore. For me, it's different because they were never just names on a list: they were Papa Will and Mama Meg – my only family for twenty-five years. And no matter what the judges said later on, they're the reason I was born English and will die Virginian. That alone makes their tale worth the telling, since you can't know me *if you don't know them.*

Now, Papa Will always said it began on one of the most miserable January afternoons London had ever seen, so that's where I'll start. It was the winter of 1620; and this is their story -- and the beginning of mine….

-- Elizabeth G.

Part I: England, 1619-1620

By the Lord Mayor
to all aldermen
10 January

These are to …Charge & Command that…all Constables within your ward…forthwith…apprehend all such vagrant Children both Boyes and Girls as they shall finde in the streets and in the marketts or wandring in the night to bee apprehended by the watch and…to comitt them to Bridewell there to remaine untill further order…

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[Give charge to] the Deputy and Churchwardens of every parish to…inquire of them that are overcharged and burthened with poore children, if they will have any of their Children either boyes or girles of the age of twelve yeares and upwardes and how many sent to Virginia… And if such poore persons shall denie or refuse to send any of their Children…that then you take such order that they receive noe further releife from the parishe wherein they inhabite.

-- 31 Journal of the Common Council, folios 125v, 126r

1. Dolittle Lane

"*Griffin Beadle! George Piser! Mary Nicholls!*" The constable bellowed the names down the narrow London alley. He dangled the scroll to cover the laced seams of his doublet that opened a half-inch across his belly at each deep breath,

and paused between each name. He looked up to glare at the crowd before squinting again at his list.

Perched high above, at an open garret window, Will Micklewood was enjoying the scene. He was a wiry lad, fourteen or so; and he'd hoisted himself onto the sill like a young tomcat mounting a fence. While the constable ploughed on, Will looked at the faces that were appearing at the other windows alongside or below him, or across the lane. Some were hard; some curious; but all were tired at the end of this day. Will nodded at one or two and waved to sweet Maggie Withering, who was looking up at him from across the way. She smiled at him as she always did; but Maggie smiled at near everyone, he told himself. She tucked a stray blond wisp underneath a red headband and smiled again. Will grinned, then lowered his eyes: Maggie smiled at near everyone, he repeated.

Down in the alley, fat old Constable Tewman plunged doggedly through his list, and raised his voice to be heard over the murmurs beginning to rise from the crowd.

"*Tabitha Austyn*! *Thomas Riglee*!"

The names echoed down the alley and bounced from lintel to post beneath the overhanging gables that brought an early twilight to the mean, narrow cul-de-sac that opened off the mean, narrow lane that bore the unpromising name of Dolittle Lane. The inhabitants there did their best to live down to the name, doing as little as needed to survive from one day to the next -- at least most days. Even so small a thing took all they had, and when they prayed each morning for their daily bread, it was as heartfelt and earnest as prayer can be. Each of their days was much like the others, except perchance another waif wandered in from the countryside: another child without a

name from some town that no one knew. At this fag end of a cold January day, they eyed the officer with one part of exhaustion, two of contempt – but mostly with just hope for a show.

"*Tobias Destiny*! *James Feats*!"

A little gasp came from somewhere: surprise perhaps, or recognition. Constable Tewman officer looked up sharply and squinted around him but saw only a growing crowd of silent, hostile faces. He was no fool; he too knew how to survive, and could do his duty very nicely in the wider space, before the Lane plunged into the twisting alley; there was no call to go any further. Still, as he read through the names, more men and a not a few women were emerging from the unlit tenements and joining the back of the crowd. Abruptly -- whether a jokester had given a deliberate shove or an old crone had slipped on the stone -- the whole murmuring mass muddled forward like a troubled herd: one step; then two.

Tewman stood his ground, but his voice took a sharper edge. "*Margaret Withering*! *Lodowick Middleton*! *William Micklewood*!" he shouted.

"Will ain't here!" called a pox-faced woman in front -- and the murmuring vanished. She elbowed those behind to hold her place. "Nor Maggie, neither," she added. "We don't know none of the others."

"Where have they gone?" the constable commanded, lowering the scroll but raising his voice.

"How should I know," she spat. "They ain't mine."

"Tell me when they return," commanded Tewman. "The same goes for all of you!" The scroll flapped as he waved it wide. "It's an order, I say! A direct order from the Lord Mayor for all those to be sent to Virginia."

Scattered laughter rose from the crowd. "Well ain't that sweet!" cried a voice in back, "he's ordered us to rat on Will and Maggie!"

At the windows above, Will stared across the lane to where Maggie Withering stared back, her smile gone. Will pulled back into the shadows but still peered out just above the sill.

"And rat on this Griffin Beadle, too!" cackled another, "which I'd happily do, Constable, since I don't know no Griffin Beadle. No, no, no," he chuckled, "don't know no Griffin Beadle at all."

"It's the Beadle he wants?" croaked Old Pete, a bald fellow with a hunched-over back and a few tufts of white hair around his ears. Everyone knew that Old Pete was half-deaf, so it was possible – just possible –he had misunderstood; but a malicious glint in his eye told otherwise. "Why, he musts want the Beadle's boy, lads, our Baynards Castle Beadle!" he called. The crowd howled; Tewman scowled, and Old Pete carried on, staring the officer in the eye. "You've got to know where the Beadle is 'cause how can the Ward pay 'im every month elsewise? There you have it, Constable: go ask the Beadle where *his* boy is!"

"Send the Beadle's boy instead of ours!" called another.

"Send the bloody Beadle himself!"

The voices jumped left and right. Constable Tewman knew how a London crowd could become a mob. He'd seen it more than once -- could happen in the blink of an eye – and this rabble was turning ugly fast. He glanced behind him, where the lane wound back to the street. There were no shops: just tenements and more tenements

leaning out from either side with hard faces staring out of the windows above. It was thirty, no, forty yards or more to the tavern at the corner. The *Boar's Head* would be jammed with the regulars at this hour as they downed another pint. He could call for help if he got close enough; but would anyone hear him above the din inside? If they did, would they come face the mob? Or join it?

But a crowd is a fickle thing and already the mood had changed. Old Pete picked up the banter where he'd left it. "Maybe Constable wants a different sort of beetle, the kind with six legs!"

"Six legs, Old Pete? With six feets, the Beadle would run 'round the Ward so fast he'd deliver his messages before they's even sent." Laughter from the crowd.

"Fee-*te*, not fee-*tze*, young sprout! Six *feet*! Don't they teach you young'uns anything now? You only says one *feet* when you're talking about six of 'em. I mean…."

"You don't know what you mean no more, Old Pete!"

The round of guffaws and groans ceased as Thomas Dingfield stumbled forward and stood right before the constable. Dingfield was easy to recognize by the stench of day-old ale. "You want Withering, Constable?" he moaned. "I'm your man! Can't you see me withering, just withering away!" He rolled his eyes in mock distress and collapsed in slow motion onto the cobblestones, tongue panting, arms stretched wide: "A pint! a pint! give me a pint or I'll wither up whole!"

He stared at the Constable with a smiling, unfocused gaze. "But Maggie's not withering, and anyone what says so ain't seen 'er, 'cause she's a'blooming and a'blossoming like a rose in June!" He belched and Tewman pushed him

away. "Aye, a rose she is," persisted Dingfield, clinging to the officer's arm, "but with as many thorns!"

"She only pricked you, Thomas Dingfield," cried the pox-faced woman with a wicked laugh, "when you tried to prick her!"

Coarse laughter convulsed the crowd and Dingfield swung around to face them, fists raised to fight an unseen foe. "Come say it to me face! C'mon and say it here!" he shouted. He swayed a moment, staggered a few steps over to the wall where he turned, belched once more with remarkable force, then slid gently down the wall. There he sat comfortably on the wet cobbles with a beatific smile.

Tewman saw his moment. He took several determined steps towards the haven of the tavern and shouted with all the authority he could muster, "I'll be back tomorrow! And with a warrant," he cried. "They'll all be well cared for in Bridewell before they're shipped to Virginia; new clothes for each. And they'll be taught a trade there. Just like those sent last year."

The bantering vanished. "Last year? Where are they now, the ones from last year?" The pox-scars on the woman's face glared red and rough at the constable: "Where's Craupley? We ain't heard a word from him!"

"Nor little Shambrook nor Mary Hackett! Which nobody's heard nothing from them neither!"

"Not them, not from none of 'em! A hundred they were from all the Wards and nobody ain't heard nothing! Why'd you want a hundred more?"

Constable Tewman wiped his forehead with a large handkerchief and backed two more steps. He had a clean path now behind him to the tavern. A part of him marveled that he could sweat at all on such a cold day. "Well taken

care of, I say. The City has raised 500 pounds to ship them. It says so right here and --"

"Just hang 'em and save the sterling, you f---- butcher!" It was a low voice, unseen, but close at hand and ripe with menace.

"Who said that?" roared Tewman. "I'll be back with a warrant I tell you, and anyone hiding them will go straight to Newgate and *will* be hanged if I have any say in it! On behalf of the crown, I *order* you to help find them!" But he backed two more steps toward safety.

"Find 'em yourself, you fat-bellied bugger!" came a cry from the back, where someone shoved or pushed or stumbled -- and in an instant the whole mass surged forward again. Tewman fell back before the foaming tide. "A King's warrant!" he cried one last time before he turned and ran. A small stone shot past his ear and skipped down the glimmering cobblestones.

"Tell King Jimmy to come himself with his pretty warrant!" screamed Thomas Dingfield, rousing himself from his gutter-throne. "We ain't sending Will and Maggie to his Virginia hell!"

At the garret window, Will Micklewood watched the constable flee. When he looked up, Maggie had vanished, and the shutter was pulled tight. He lingered at the window and saw Dingfield collapse again in a drunken heap along the wall, ignored by the crowd as it slowly broke up. The drab twilight faded into evening; fog came rolling up from the Thames; someone threw a thin blanket over Dingfield and disappeared into the shadows. Before long the alley was deserted, except for an occasional workman hurrying home and candles began to light a few of the windows.

Will sighed, and pulled the shutter tight. He had no candle to light that night; but he was used to the dark and rarely did it damp his spirits. Tonight was different, though. He lay in a corner of the little room for a long moment, eyes open. Everyone in the lane knew where he was, where Maggie was, too. It wouldn't be long before somebody snitched, maybe right now, maybe tonight -- certainly before tomorrow night, once the word got all around. He could lie there and wait; or he could run. But with no place to run, why bother to hide?

He lay in the darkness and gazed at the beam overhead. What was this all about anyway, that's what he couldn't see! Mary Hacket, Craupley, Shambrook -- who were they? Transported to Virginia last year someone said? Just before he and his mum had arrived here from the farm, he guessed. A lifetime ago, yet no more than…he counted it out: eleven months since they had passed through the lively chaos of Southwarke to the smell of frying pan-cakes, crossed the great bridge, and threaded through crowded lanes into the Ward. Eleven months was time enough for her to die and for him to make a life scrounging on the streets, a world away from the quiet lanes and green fields of Kent he had known before. But Virginia was farther still, they said: unimaginably far.

He pulled the mite-infested blanket up to this chin and wondered what to do. Wait until they came back for him? Run away tonight? What about Maggie? Why were they coming for her? Would her uncle give her up?

The questions rose like waves on a troubled sea until, at last, he slept.

2. An evening on Philpot Lane

Sir Thomas Smythe was in his favorite after-dinner room: a comfortable London room in a comfortable house on Philpot Lane on a foggy winter night, with thick blue drapes twined with gold thread around the edge, a thicker rug, and a fire burning hard and bright on the broad stone hearth. Before the fire, a pair of fine Venetian crystal glasses stood on a small table.

Smythe sat to one side of the table, facing the fire: a dapper, white-haired man with a neatly trimmed beard. A younger man sat beside him. Sir Thomas lifted his glass and swirled the wine, watching the firelight play through the crystal as he shook his head softly in disapproval, disbelief or indeed both. Although the crystal, the claret, the room -- and a not inconsiderable part of London -- all belonged to him, he could take no pleasure in any of it tonight. Though he had tried to be companionable with his son-in-law in spite of his sour mood, he had failed. He knew it and regretted it. But he could hardly help it: he had not built the great trading companies for the East Indies, the Levant, the Baltic and Russia only to see his *magnum opus* fail -- and yet the Virginia Company *was* failing. A venture he had directed from the very beginning and nursed through hard years had begun to collapse from the very moment he had stepped aside as Treasurer last spring to let Sandys take that post – *Sir* Edwin Sandys! for the love of God Almighty – and just when the Company had finally begun to produce real returns! Smythe regretted *that* far more than his boorish demeanor at supper.

"Eighty thousand pounds of good sterling! Johnson," he muttered. "Eighty thousands! And hundreds of them mine -- along with a dozen years of my life! Yet Sandys will throw it all away like a fool, an idiot gone senile before his time. I cannot bear the thought of it, my friend…." Sir Thomas set his glass down with more force than was right and regretted that as well. He was a reasonable man, after all -- he had said so himself on many an occasion.

"Excuse me, Johnson, I have let my anger get the best of me and that will never do. Anger has not paid for this Médoc, my friend. Nor did I ever let anger get the best of me when we were launching the Levant Company…how many? Twenty-*eight* years ago? My God! I *am* getting old. And I can assure you that we had fools aplenty in those days, too!"

"Ordinary fools, perhaps," replied his companion, "but Sir Edwin Sandys is no ordinary fool."

"Eighty *thousands*! Johnson," repeated Sir Thomas. He leaned forward and stared at the fire, gritting his teeth before murmuring "You are in the right of it: it takes an extraordinary fool to throw away eighty thousand pounds…."

His companion was Robert Johnson -- now *Alderman* Robert Johnson. He was an altogether simpler man than his father-in-law. If his shirt lacked flair or finery, it was not because he affected the spartan simplicity of the Puritan brethren one saw ever more frequently on London's streets these days, but because he found it a more deliberate vanity than the conventional fluffs and ruffles that the Puritans, Precisians and other hypocrites condemned so loudly. No, his dress was unselfconsciously plain, the mere reflection of the direct, transparent simplicity of a man of business:

Johnson paid little attention to finery on others and none at all to lace on himself.

"The man is a fool, Sir Thomas," he repeated, "an ambitious, preening, cozening woodcock. But a brilliant and tireless fool! He throws himself into his follies one after the other with unstoppable zeal!" He stopped abruptly. "Excuse me, sir. He has been your colleague, after all. I fear I have spoken too bluntly."

"Bluntly, yes, but true. No, no. Johnson, we must be candid with each other after all." Sir Thomas set down the wine. "Robert, I have worked with the man, as you say, and closely too; but perhaps I have seen him too closely and too long to see him as he truly is. The Company's only realistic hope is the Crown's help with the tobacco contract, to keep the Spaniards' leaf out and root out plantings in England as well. We *must* have the Crown with us. You know that; I know that; and Sandys ought to know it, too. Yet all he has done since replacing me is to antagonize the King. It was a miracle that we got the Privy Council to ban planting here. But no sooner than we have that order but Sandys prepares to cross the Crown again! How many times does he think you may spit at any man and expect a favor in return?

"For all the years that he worked with me, never would I have thought he would run off like this! Headstrong he was, I knew; stubborn; and vigorous almost in the extreme. But he has become irresponsible, beyond measure." Sir Thomas shook his head again. "But perhaps I misjudge the man. The older I grow, the more irresponsible nearly everyone seems." He tried to chuckle, without much success. "Open your mind to me, Robert,

not as my daughter's husband, but as my counselor, do! How do you see this man?"

"In all candor, then?"

"In all candor. It stays between us only."

"Forgive me if I criticize out of turn, but you have asked me in all candor." Smythe nodded. "Then I submit that you underestimate both the man and his folly. Sir Edwin Sandys is what you say, a fool and a booby - but a *great* fool and a *great* booby. It goes beyond foolery and that is his special gift: he truly believes in his chimera, whichever he is chasing at any moment. *That* is why men follow him. They are not so much charmed by his silver tongue as by the dreams themselves. He is like a City man who is clear-sighted in business but so blinded by Cupid that he sees a Florentine countess in place of his honest Southwarke whore!"

"Yes, yes! That is it!"

"And because *he* sees a countess and not the whore, his friends soon see a countess too -- even as she wipes her nose on her filthy sleeve and empties the poor fool's purse!"

Smythe laughed in spite of his anger, and Johnson continued. "Most men are like that in some little thing or another, failing to see the gray in their beard 'til all is white as snow, perhaps, or forgetting a slight they have done to a friend. But with Sir Edwin, it is altogether more vast."

"By God, Johnson, you have it. He does believe his own tales; I have seen it. If Sir Edwin Sandys stood at the Globe and summoned the 'vasty fields of France', he would think *himself* in Picardy!"

Sir Thomas shook his head again and laughed at the thought; and his eyes sparkled with good humor. He was

not a man who liked to be angry; it went against his grain. That was why Edwin Sandys confounded him so deeply for Sandys sowed anger as the farmer sowed corn: it was what he did -- and was forever surprised when the seeds sprang up behind him in brambles full-bristling with thorns.

"In all seriousness, though, "replied Johnson," with Sandys everything must be vast. When you founded the Virginia Company -- how many years ago, twelve? Thirteen?"

"Thirteen years ago last month! I went aboard the *Susan Constant* with Newport the night before they sailed, you know. Every year, I mark the 20th of December as a great and important day."

"Did you? Just so. It was a great adventure."

"*Was*?" exclaimed Sir Thomas. "It still *is*, Robert, if only Sir Edwin does not destroy it!"

"Just so, again. But *revenons à nos moutons*, as they say on the continent. You planned the Virginia Company as a *trading* company like the others. The first voyage was to choose a port, build a post, make a base for trade.."

"Which we did! Oh, it was harder than we had hoped. These things always are. But we planned and prepared it. Not like poor Popham's plantation for the north. Those poor souls were left to fend for themselves without supplies until they gave up and abandoned it all."

"How long did they stay in the north? What was it…two years?"

"Two years?" Smythe exclaimed again. "Closer to two *months*!" He caught himself shaking two fingers right in front of Johnson's nose and quickly lowered his hand – and his voice. "Two months, three, a few more perhaps; but

they *planted* nothing, *built* nothing, *discovered* nothing and so *came* to nothing. Rocks, scrub grass, trees worthless for masts. Bah! They might as well have discovered *Wales*!"

Johnson laughed and took another sip. "Wales, yes," he replied, "but without the Welsh, which is not so bad a thing!"

The scowl on Smythe's face broke once again into a smile. "There is at least that, to be sure. But seriously, Robert, Popham himself told me that the north is much worse than they let generally known: like the coast of Cornwall with the winter of the Hebrides and hardly fit for civilized habitation at all. A worthless country altogether is Northern Virginia!"

"Yet there are those who would try again," said Johnson, after a pause.

"Yes, yes, yes," said Smythe with impatience. "Another of Sandys' wild schemes." His voice was rising again, in spite of himself. "But Robert, even that Southwarke whore you spoke of has more sense for business than Sandys! She knows what she sells, sir; and at least she gets paid in the bargain! But in all great seriousness, tell me what Sir Edwin Sandys looks to accomplish! As soon he succeeded me, he announced these plans to send a thousand men to Virginia this winter; a thousand more next year; and the next, and the next *and the next*! *Five thousand men in five years*! And to what end, I ask you? *To what end*? To build iron works better than Birmingham? glass works better than Venice? salt works to shame the bay salt of Brittany? Ah! don't forget the vineyards to spring up at his command and bring forth claret better than the best from Guienne!" He rolled his

eyes. “He proclaims all that even as all know that tobacco is the only crop that will pay its own freight!”

“Yet Southampton cheers him on,” replied Johnson, “as does Warwick. Even Wroth and the other investors have been charmed by his sweet tales. Or blinded by their own greed."

"It is far worse than that, Robert. It’s not only starry-eyed fops like Southampton who are taken in, but the guilds’ men, too! They listen to him in the Company meetings, nod their heads, say nary a contrary word and seem to think they, their widows and even mere journeymen in the Guild will live in their dotage on Virginia profits running as broad as Virginia rivers, rising high as Virginia trees and swelling as great as Virginia berries and beans! Bah! It is near felony, Johnson! The Grocers are in for near five hundred pounds; the Goldsmiths, the Mercers and Tailors in for two hundred apiece or more. All told, the guilds and the towns together have put in thousands of pounds! Thousands!”

He took a deep breath and paused to sip his wine before shaking his head again in disgust. “It is always the same, Johnson. A fool is parted soon enough from his own money, but when a man ventures someone sterling from men he wouldn’t even recognize outside a guild hall meeting, something that makes him mad and throw caution to the wind! It’s a black tearing at your bowels when you lose *your* cargo lost in a shipwreck, but mere embarrassment when you lose someone else’s goods! Governing other men’s goods can change the most level-headed man – much like governing other men’s lives. Sir Edwin Sandys seems never to have learned that lesson….”

Smythe ended with a forced smile. “Ah, pay me no mind, Robert. The years have made me forget my manners.” He took the carafe and filled their glasses. “Sandys is brilliant, I grant you. Nonetheless, he’ll beggar us all if we are not first hanged for sheer stupidity. A truly great fool, as you say; but a *wondrous* great booby."

3. Where *Utopia* ends

The evening wore on. The fire crackled gently. Neither man spoke for a long moment. At length, Alderman Johnson tilted his goblet round and round, letting the ruby-tinted light play across his eyes. Then he set it on the table with a deliberate hand.

"I have been considering, Sir Thomas," he began slowly, "considering that conundrum."

"Eh? What conundrum is that?"

"Why, what you have said earlier: if Sandys is such a clever soul, why does he do such foolish things? And if he is such a fool, then how can he be so clever?" Johnson picked up the glass again, as though to drink, but set it down without touching his lips and an abruptly different tone he asked, "have you heard of Bacon's new essay?"

"What’s that? replied Sir Thomas, confused by the change of tone as of subject. "Bacon?” he repeated. “Fine fellow of course: very helpful when we drafted the charter; excellent scientifical studies, too, I hear. Even Harvey admires his work, though he detests his style. But as for his Bacon’s natural philosophy, well that has never been my *forte*, I fear."

"Yes, well, I'm not speaking of his natural philosophy, but rather the more *un*natural kind: the flight of fancy that Bacon is working on now."

"Oh, that! Yes, I heard it mentioned some time back. *Novus Somethingus*, or the like, is it not?"

Johnson nodded. "Indeed: *Novus Atlantis*. Not terribly original, perhaps. If he ever finishes it, it will be merely another *Utopia*, though not so amusing as the first. It's rather *less* than, uh…More, you might say." He grinned.

"*Utopia*!" muttered Smythe, ignoring the wit. "Another *Utopia*!" he muttered. "One is more than enough, I should think." He shook his head. "I cannot understand it, Johnson. Men dream of women, which is normal enough; and the dear Lord knows what women dream of -- but certainly not of men! Why would any sensible woman waste her sleep dreaming of the beast that slumbers and snores beside her? I hope my Sarah does not! But who dreams of heaven on Earth? What kind of man does that, I ask you? No one up to any good, for no sooner than Jack spies his Paradise, but he finds John blocking his view. So Jack pushes John down, of course, so he can gaze on his heaven *totus solus*. But since John doesn't like it, he pushes Jack back. And then it's all just a matter of who pushes more -- or less, as you say! Look what that fool Calvin did to Geneva! Hmph! Heaven on earth is a hell all to itself! No, Johnson, Heaven is best left just where the good Lord put it, so near to our reach, yet beyond our grasp!"

Johnson smiled momentarily, then hesitated, as though summoning courage. "I agree with you, Sir Thomas, but I don't think Sandys does." He looked his father-in-law in the eye.

"What do you mean by that?"

“I will tell you,” replied Johnson. “But before I start, pray let me lay it out 'in one fell swoop' as they say. Otherwise I may never dare say it at all."

Smythe’s curiosity was piqued. "Speak then, as to the sphinx himself," he said, and lay a finger over his lips.

"Yes, then," said Johnson, draining his wine. "Now, Sandys thinks to build his New Atlantis, his own *Utopia*, if you will, on the banks of the Chesapeake. You know that. Yet he will not stop there. Consider the facts. He has been active in the Company since its early days and was the chief opponent of the royal monopolies --”

“So says he!” exclaimed Sir Thomas, unable to stop himself. “But no one loves monopoly as much as Sir Edwin Sandys, as long as it is *his* monopoly!”

“As you say. But there is worse. He has not scrupled to defraud the original Company investors -- the term is not too harsh! -- with this new-fangled system of private ventures where he grants land to newcomers who plant in Virginia without them paying anything towards for use of the Fort or the quays that our investors have carved out of raw wilderness over a dozen years. His favored friends build on the eighty thousand pounds the Company’s investors have put in -- yet he ensures *them* a current profit on their newly invested, private funds.”

Johnson was speaking easily now. This was what he understood: ventures, funds, returns. "*Idem*: he maneuvered for months, nay, I believe for years! to replace you as Treasurer, currying favor with the small holders, the one-share men who count even with you in the balloting box."

"That is true!" exploded Sir Thomas in anger. "But it was not just his sweet words and games that persuaded me

to give up the post. I had sworn to see the Virginia Company through until it found its way, and we are nearly there, now that Rolfe's new leaf is winning markets and--." Sir Thomas remembered his promise of silence and stopped. "A sphinx, I am. A sphinx!" he cried, and folded his hands on his lap.

Johnson continued speaking as though there had been no interruption. "Now consider our new Assembly in Virginia. He claims credit for it himself, even though it was you who proposed it and --"

"Well of course we had to put an end Argall governing Virginia like a petty tyrant and -- Sir Thomas caught himself and fumbled for his glass.

"Of course. But for Sandys, the new Assembly is about much, much more than stopping Argall's depredations. He plans to make the Assembly his own private Parliament, reporting to him as Treasurer – putting himself in place of the Crown!"

It was Johnson's voice that was rising now. He was talking as much to himself as to Smythe. "Still more: see how desperately he works to people his new *Utopia*. Last year he even bought five score children from the City –"

"Oh, that! Just more of his foolishness, Johnson, and I've gotten too old to argue with every foolish idea and the older I grow the more of them I hear. They often sprout in France, you know, then take root and flourish here!" He shook his head and sighed. "As for those rather useless orphans from last year, it's true I let Sandys take the reins more and more since I was soon to step down. So yes, I let him have his way with the children. Once he got the City to put in five hundred pounds, he had a hundred scoundrels rounded up and off they went. But they were

orphans, Johnson, or so he told us. And as I said, the City provided the children, not the Company. And they were not *bought*."

"Last year, perhaps. But Sandys' vision is too great now for mere orphans and his needs are too great for niceties. The Lord Mayor signed an order not a fortnight ago directing the Aldermen to assemble one hundred children more to ship this winter – and there was no mention of orphans." He paused to take a sip.

"Go on."

"I have Lord Mayor Cockaine's order here." Johnson took a paper from a leather folio at his feet and handed it to Smythe. "He has ordered the arrest of any young vagrants, at least twelve or older, boys and girls both. The roundup has already begun. Sandys is so pleased he plans to take the scheme to the ports next year, buying up children in Bristol, Southampton, Plymouth. There are even rumors from Somerset that men have gone about buying maids for a shilling apiece to add to the shipment. And Sir Thomas" -- here Johnson paused -- "that is not all. The constables are telling the poor on parish relief to give up a child for Virginia, or else to be cut off. It's that paragraph towards the end," he added, pointing to the document. "There where it ends "*they shall receive no further relief from the parish in which they inhabit*."

Smythe squinted; then scowled; and an awkward silence followed. When he spoke, his voice was soft and sober. "So, London's poor must choose between starving or offering up an Isaac for Sir Edwin Sandys' altar? We did not do such a thing last year, Robert. There were no such threats to the families last year. They were either orphans and wandering vagrants, or were willingly sent by their

families, or so Sandys told me…but I left a great many things to him last year, more perhaps than I should…."

But his voice rose indignantly again. "And even so, it never made any sense to send children! The Company needs *skilled* men who can ply a dozen trades a thousand leagues from all the civil parts of the world – not ignorant starving children, no matter badly the City wishes to be rid of 'em!!"

"Even so," replied Johnson, "he's not done with the idea. I've heard that as soon as Dean Donne returned from Europe and enjoys the King's favor, he's taken to badgering him to preach in favor of sending the children."

"More foolishness and more!" exclaimed Sir Thomas. "What does the good preacher know of what Virginia needs or how much it costs to furnish, ship and feed a new settler? He ought to keep to his preaching and his poems, instead!"

"Indeed," replied the Alderman. "But it's not only children. Sandys is so desperate to find a thousand souls to ship this year that he's negotiating for a shipload or two of Frenchmen! Not Papists, to be sure, but foreigners still; hundreds of them, who he'll settle among our own people. And still more! he wants Brewster to begin peopling the northern reaches with true Dissenters – Separatists! – near traitors to the Crown who've been skulking about in Holland for ten years or more! And you know that they do not look overkindly at any king…."

"The northern reaches, you say? How *far* north, Johnson? With all the questions hanging over Popham's charter for a northern company, by what right can the Virginia Company build a northern plantation at all?"

"By what right?" It was Johnson's turn to be indignant. "Lawyerly details will not deter Sandys. Once men have planted in Northern Virginia, who will expel them?"

Johnson stood up abruptly, and began pacing nervously before the fire. "Now we come to the nub. It is not to trade for furs with the savages or to mine ore that Sandys will plant Separatists and Puritans in Northern Virginia. Don't you see? He will not send them to build Bacon's *Novus Atlantis* – but to build Brewster's *New Jerusalem*! They will draw others whose only purpose is to reform the Reform. They will not rest until they have rebuilt a new Church of England that is as pure as their prayers, as barren as their hearts, and London as cheerless as Geneva! *That* is why he sends men to buy maidens to ship to Virginia to breed him new subjects! He intends nothing less than rebuilding Christendom in his own image!

"And who will rule this new realm? Sir Edwin Sandys, who despises the old England that gave him life, and yearns for a new and better England that will do his bidding! And when all this is done a generation or even two hence, he or his disciples will arise in the Commons and say, 'See what we have done? Go now and do likewise!' And the commoners will listen and follow and have done with crown and scepter! *That* is what Sir Edwin Sandys thinks and dreams and schemes, whether he admits it even to himself or not. Yet *that* is what he uses the Company for: not to earn a return but for a headlong rush to build his new world on the flesh and blood of other men's very lives!" Johnson stopped, shocked by the enormity of his own accusation.

"It is beyond treason," whispered Smythe, "it…it is revolution; it means war, even --"

He stopped abruptly when the door behind them opened and a servant entered without a word. He eyed the fire and quickly chose two or three short pieces of pine, hardly larger than kindling, to stoke a pretty flame, then placed goodly oak atop. The flames embraced the pine and cheerily lapped at the oak.

"Thank you, Edmond," said Smythe, trying to speak in his usual voice. "Uh, we won't need you any further this evening; you may retire."

While the servant left as quietly as he had entered, his mere appearance – unassuming as it was – had somehow left a conspiratorial scent lingering in the air.

"Treason and revolution, it is, Sir Thomas," whispered Johnson, when the door had closed. "Revolution above the slightest reproach: treason in plain view; revolution by order of the King, under a charter bearing the Privy Council's seal; treason sown today to be known tomorrow; treason to be wrought by his children and grandchildren – against ours. Revolution, and even war, will come before your grandchildren grow old."

4. A plot is hatched

A log shifted noisily on the hearth, spurting a flurry of sparks as it slipped and then settled on the embers. The men gazed at it a moment until silence fell again and steady flames returned.

"Do you take a pipe, Johnson?" asked Sir Thomas abruptly to break the darkened mood. He rose and reached

into a cupboard for a carafe and two broad-mouth glasses. "Neither do I," he continued as his companion shook his head. "How ironic," he smiled; "here I am, the founder and Treasurer of Virginia Company for all these years, responsible for 60,000 pounds of Virginia leaf brought in this year – and yet I hate that filthy weed as much as the King himself!" He laughed, breaking the ominous mood. "But since I have nothing to offer you to smoke, let me offer you this to drink."

He took the carafe and poured a generous pool of a golden liquid into each glass, just to the limit of reasonableness. "It's very like the *eau de vie* from Cognac, but from the Armagnac, nearby – although this evening we sound like we have indulged in 'Maniac'!" He chuckled. "I was given a cask last year and told to wait a year or two more. I sampled it last week and found it exceptional. There is a great future in it, if we can find a way to keep the Hollanders out of the trade!"

Johnson tasted it and nodded appreciatively, but let the older man continue. "Now, Robert, what you say about what Sandys' plan is right to the mark, but come now! An accusation of treason without proof serve only to destroy the accuser."

"Agreed."

"So how, do you propose to rid ourselves of this most troublesome Treasurer?"

Johnson smiled and shrugged. "Sir Thomas, I have not spoken this way with anyone else, and I fear my words have far outrun my thoughts."

"Oh, of course not, Robert, I know you better than that! You are as bright a fellow as I have met these sixty years past. You have some ideas already or you wouldn't

have spoken at all! So come now: what can we do, when, and how?"

Johnson sighed. "We cannot remove Sandys as Treasurer until balloting this spring. Still, a campaign can be prepared beforehand."

"Yes, yes," urged Sir Thomas. "Of course: complaint after complaint that seems to arise quite naturally. But somehow we must start the flood?" He leaned forward, a glint in his eye. "Our quarterly meeting of shareholder is tomorrow. Can we not find some unpleasant matter be raised?"

"There are the City children, of course," said Johnson slowly.

"What children? What about them?"

"Close to a hundred are already rounded up in Bridewell and Sandys is anxious to begin loading them very soon. *Duty* is ready to sail; *Jonathan* and the *London Merchant*, nearly so. But what if someone should object? What if some of them simply refuse? Or if someone objects for them? Does it not seem odd for the Company to ship away the King's subjects against their will? We're not talking about thieves reprieved from the gallows or the like, but just ordinary subjects, however mean and common. Where is the warrant for shipping them out of England?"

Smythe stroked his beard thoughtfully. "As you say, it's not reprieved convicts, where it's a choice between trnasporation and the noose. But wouldn't Sandys just say its like when the Overseers of the Poor bind a child to serve a master? That's common enough."

"But still not the same. When a unwilling youngster is bound to a master, the master must train him up in a trade, teach him a livelihood, feed and cloth him for years. But

can City bind each one of the hundred to serve *the Company*? Serve a thousand different masters at once, almost all of them here in England since they adventure only their purse here and not their person in Virginia! What right does the Company have to send the King's subjects unwillingly out of King's own realm of England?"

Sir Thomas reflected. "Whatever rights the Company has are in the Charter, of course, the revised one, to be sure. But Robert, who has re-read the Charter in years?"

Robert Johnson gave a sheepish smile. "I have, actually, Sir Thomas. It was just yesterday, and on this very point. I told Sandys that I needed to verify a matter in a private dispute and he directed Collingwood to let me review all three of the Charters."

"Hmph! While Collingwood stood by looking over your shoulder, I suppose."

"Oh, he busied himself around me, trying to see what I was looking for. But he is so new as Secretary – he's really not ready to replace old Fotherby – that he had no idea what I was looking for. I didn't choose to enlighten him.

"Well don't keep me hanging, Robert! Where are you going with all this?"

"The Treasurer, the Company and their assigns are authorized to transport to Virginia so many of the King's subjects *'as shall willingly accompany them*' them. It's that exact phrase. It was in the first charter in '06, and is exactly the same in two revisions. I examined them all."

"'*As shall willingly accompany them*', repeated Sir Thomas slowly. "You are sure of that?"

"I copied it exactly as it was written: the Charters do not allow the Company to transport anyone who is *unwilling*, whether bound servant or not. Not even Edwin

Sandys can treat the poor children of London worse than common thief or murderer. So if *anyone* refuses to be shipped to Virginia, Sir Edwin Sandys will have to go hat in hand to ask the Privy Council for an order."

A mischievous grin spread on Sir Thomas' lips. "But Sandys doesn't know that yet."

"Precisely And now that I think of it, it gets better. Cockaine has only agreed *in principle* for the City to pay the five pounds fee per child as was done last year."

"Three pounds for shipping and two pounds for clothing, if I recall correctly."

"Indeed; but no agreement has been finalized. Cockaine wants the youngsters to be granted some land for their own where their servitude is over, but Sandys keeps refusing."

"Because he wants to reserve more land to grant for the private plantations," added Sir Thomas.

"But let us suppose that Cockaine asks Sandys to produce his warrant for shipping the children -- a warrant Sandys does not have."

Smythe's smile grew broader and broader as he saw how the plan would unfold. "Sandys tells Collingwood to find some provision in the Charter that would allow it!"

Johnson nodded. "And Collingwood discovers that the Company may ship only those who *willingly* will go."

"I see it all now," cried Smythe, clapping his hands with delight. "The ships pressing to sail – dockage fees mounting -- the captains complaining -- Sandys running to beg the Privy Council for a warrant to gie to the City, only to be lectured that while merchants in Parliament may think otherwise, James Stuart is not a King who ships even his meanest subjects a world away from their mothers'

breasts simply because Sir Edwin Sandys claims to have bought 'em!"

"So the Privy Council won't grant approval without the City's agreement and the City says it won't agree without the Council's order – or unless Sir Edwin agrees to fix a term on the children's service and grant them land when their time is over – and perhaps extend those better terms to the five-score sent last year as well. You know the clergy and others have already complained about how they were treated – Parson Whitby has been most persistent in the matter."

"To summarize," smiled Sir Thomas, "if the children refuse, Sir Edwin Sandys will be forced to squander more of the Company's almost non-existent funds, offending the guilds, the other investors, the Privy Council, and the King all at once. A most beautiful fiasco, Mr. Alderman Johnson."

"So it would appear," he replied with some satisfaction. "After such a debacle, how many men will place Sandys' ball in the balloting box come next Spring, or support him if later if he feuds with the Crown?"

On the hearth, the flames, while fading, flickered still. "Robert," said Sir Thomas slowly and emptying his glass to the last drop, "the day you were wed, I thought my Margaret had chosen well. Tonight," he concluded, "tonight, I am sure of it."

5. Bridewell

Cold it was and colder still: as the short winter afternoon drew to a close, the chill cracked though Will

Micklewood's coat and scarf and pierced an unmatched pair of mittens that had worn so thin that holes might appear unannounced at any of a dozen unhappy spots. Cold and colder still: the sun disappeared, red and mutinous, into the coal-tainted twilight haze; and the damp rose from the river, with its ever-present mist.

Will shivered under a wagon on Trig Lane. He grasped tightly his small sack of chestnuts and wizened apples at his side, waiting for nightfall. It was hot in Virginia, they said. So hot in summer that sweat ran like a river and a man didn't need a shirt, couldn't bear a shirt, they said. Will tried to imagine a hot summer day where the air was still and the heat pressed down from a tropical sun. He tried to feel the heat weighing heavy on his chest and creeping down his arms and his legs, seeping at last into fingers and toes.

It was no use: the cold would not go away.

He figured that if he turned himself in now, they'd toss him into a cell in Bridewell with a dozen other lads, heated by little more than the animal warmth of the crowd. But they would feed him, he thought. He was pretty certain of that; soup perhaps; some bread. And he'd have a roof over his head all night long. So what if they then shipped him on a six-penny bark that leaked to let in the whole Virginia Ocean? His stomach growled, loud enough to summon every watchman in the Ward. But the quiet of the lane was undisturbed. A hacker drove by with a fare from time to time; Widow Denton huffed along the wall with a child in tow: the ordinary flow of the city.

Will hugged his knees against his empty belly and waited for full night, for the stars to appear. Life had been a blur these last days, ever since Maggie had told him that her uncle wasn't going to send *her* to Virginia, no matter

what. He'd sworn it, and told her he'd send her away to some cousins until the storm blew over. Will had decided that if Maggie wasn't going to Virginia, then he wasn't either. He'd been on the run ever since.

He was safe in the great sea of London humanity beyond Dolittle Lane, he thought – safe, but penniless, hungry and cold. Worse, he had to keep coming back to the Lane each night after dark, looking for a bite of bread, a cup of small beer, or a sack of nuts and apples like what he had now. Each time he came, though, there were some who eyed him while trying to look like they weren't. He knew who the snitches were, and would settle up with them when he had a chance. The cook's boy up on the Strand might be one: he'd given Micklewood a funny look when he'd spotted him in the street that very afternoon. And that rogue Will Guylliam was always looking for trouble, too. There could be others; and everyone knew the Watch was picking up anyone they could from the streets these days, bundling them off to Bridewell.

The darkness deepened. Will had begun to relax when a flurry of voices broke out behind him. "There 'e is! Micklewood! Micklewood! Behind the cart, there! I told you 'e'd be 'ere!" cried a voice up the lane.

Will was blinded by a rush of dancing torches that blocked the narrow space between the wagon and the wall, then by others behind: vague shapes hurrying up in the dark. He pitched under the wagon and rolled a full turn toward the center of the alley – but rolled back underneath as the watchmen rushed to find him on the other side.

Will grabbed his sack and waited a moment. The waving torches and confused cries flowed around him. As soon as the watchmen saw that Will hadn't come out on

the street, they raced, cursing, back toward the wall. Now for it! He rolled again under the wagon: one turn, two turns; then leaped to his feet and ran, tossing the nuts behind him, where they rattled and clattered on the cobbles, bouncing and rolling underfoot. His pursuers dashed after him, but slipped and stumbled on the nuts. No one fell, but a stumble was enough. Jus as the constable nabbed at Will's sleeve, he slipped on a nut: his knee gave a twist; his arms threw up madly, grabbing for a support. At that point, his torch leaped from his grasp and arced like a comet across the darkening sky. While the torch landed safely on the cold, hard cobblestones where nothing would burn, the constable himself landed on the warm, soft bosom of unsuspecting Widow Denton and set it ablaze despite Tewman's frantic efforts to damp the flames: "Beg pardon, Madam!" he cried, pulling himself away, breathing hard. "Had no wish, none at all, I assure you, Madam, to fling myself like…." Her sudden smile vanished and she snapped up her child's hand and dragged it away down the lane.

The posse poured past by them, a dozen or more; some after the bounty, but most for the joy of the chase. Torches flared; boots pounded the street like horse hooves after a fox.

Ahead in the darkness, Will Micklewood let the breeze clear his head. He cut right onto Little Carter Lane, then doubled back down Sermon Lane. He felt the cathedral's imposing presence behind him before he stopped abruptly: the wrong, wrong, way, he thought: the church yard was open space where a watchman's call could carry to the far side and summon someone to bar the way. No, he thought, he needed to work his way through Breadstreet and so to

Cheapside, where he could blend into the street life again. He just needed to catch his breath a moment….

At that moment however, a hand came down on his shoulder, and seized the scruff of his neck. He never even saw who it was, but they dragged him down the lane, into the street, and into Constable Tewman's waiting grasp. They yanked him around another corner and slung him into a waiting high-walled wagon. The gate slammed shut and Will heard the chain rattle into place. Exhaustion and cold overcame him. He slumped against the siding as the driver gave a whistle. The horse whinnied and the wagon click-clacked over the cobblestones: the only sound of civilization in a city frozen in silence, and already, or so it seemed, a world away.

It was the onion soup that wakened him: sharp, sour, half-rotted onions kept in a basket from August, perhaps; but onions in soup for all that, with a carrot or two thrown in for good measure. He opened his eyes and stared blankly into the darkness. He was alone. The other lads must have followed the smell of the soup without bothering to waken him from his stupor, since less for him meant more for them. He scratched his unkempt hair and tried to sit up but dropped back with a faint groan from the pain in his side. He probed his ribs gingerly, wincing as he found the mark. "Damn you, Tewman," he muttered.

He tried lying unmoving, but his empty belly would hardly let him. From downstairs came the muted sound of benches scraping on stone and the dull clatter of wooden cups and bowls. Visions of an empty soup pot rose before him, with the left-over steam swirling above the copper, there where gallons of soup ought to have been; and his

stomach growled again. With another curse, he forced himself to sit up, leaning against the wall. He was just preparing to try standing when he heard footsteps in the corridor: light steps on the stone floor; the swish of a dress.

"Will," called a soft voice, "Will, are you awake now?" She pushed the door and a dim light came in.

"Maggie? Oh Maggie! That's you! Thank God you're here!" He stopped. "But why are you here? In Bridewell?"

"Don't fret about all that, now. I brought you some soup that I saved for you. Come, let me help you with it. Careful now: if you spill it, there'll be no more."

She set a bowl on the stone floor, pulled some thick bread from a pocket in her apron, and bent down in front of him. "Let me help you up now; take my hands." He grabbed her wrists, held his breath, and pulled himself up. His side still ached, and he wavered a bit, but at least he was on his feet again.

In the faint light from the corridor, he could just see her, in a dark dress and a white apron. Her hair was pulled back under a sort of wimple, from which a few blond strands escaped at the temples. Her breath was full and warm. He finished the soup while still standing. Then Maggie took his hand and led him down the corridor towards the common room where several long rows of plain tables and benches stood nearly bare. A half-dozen girls dressed like Maggie were finishing the clean-up. In the near corner, there was a large wedge of very dark bread next to a wooden bowl.

"Hurry now, William," she whispered, "supper's done and I must hurry back to work. We can't speak during meals here, anyway. Have what's left of the soup; you can take the bread with you." She turned to go.

"But Maggie, is *this* Bridewell?" asked Will in the same low whisper. "And where'd you get that dress?"

"Of course, it's Bridewell! And they *gave* me the dress, Will. *Gave* it the morning after I was registered! Can you believe it? Ain't it the finest thing you've ever seen? You'll get your new shirt tomorrow – well not tomorrow, seeing it's Sunday, but surely on Monday for work."

"But what –" Will was cut off by a wide-hipped, red-cheeked woman at the far door who clapped imperiously to summon Maggie. The woman looked as though she had not smiled this century, thought Will. Maggie ran towards the door and, her eyes lowered and meek, slipped out under the woman's unblinking gaze.

The unsmiling woman spoke to someone in the next chamber and pointed dismissively back at Will. So he grabbed the bowl with both hands and swallowed the rest of the soup as quickly as he could. He was just in time for a tall, heavy-jowled man appeared in the doorway.

"You!" he commanded. "Get cracking, boy!"

While the last drops of soup dribbled down his old shirt, Will scooped up the rest of the bread and trotted between the benches, trying to ignore his aching ribs.

Will's first meal at Bridewell was his best, as he soon discovered, for Bridewell was devoted to *work*, or rather to certain ideas about work that Will and his new companions found particularly confusing. As explained by their jailors (for jailors they were, for all the high-minded talk), Bridewell's purpose in life was to make the poor work – to *teach* them to work – and work as they ought to have worked before they were brought in, since if they had only

worked beforehand, they wouldn't have been so poor as to be sent to Bridewell in the first place.

Will's new friend Tom Cornish explained it all to a bewildered Will one evening as they lay on opposite sides of the dividing board in a common bed in a long row of such beds. The inch-wide board in the middle gave a pretense of privacy, but what theory said was twenty-four inches of bedding for each sleeper had been condensed by practice – sharp practice indeed – to a good deal less. Tom Cornish explained that some long-forgotten carpenter must have convinced Bridewell that a forty-two inch wide bed could pass for the required forty-eight inch variety.

It was what Cornish called 'sterling reasoning' After all, a little bit of extra sterling under the table was a very sound reason indeed in Bridewell, since there was never very much of either sterling or reason. Besides, since a plain two-by-four was a quarter-inch less than two inches and a quarter-inch less than four, why couldn't twelve times two equal twenty-one which after all was exactly half of forty-two, Tom explained to a thoroughly befuddled Will.

"You'll get along just fine, here," Tom assured him, "if ya just remember that Bedlam has more sense than Bridewell!"

The new arrivals soon saw how they stood out in Bridewell like gentlemen in Billingsgate. Most were younger than the others, of course. More important, though was that, what official reason had been given the ancient scrivener who recorded their names in Bridewell's thick register book, the newcomers knew (or soon learned) that they'd been brought to Bridewell for the sole purpose of being shipped away.

Mocking their official register entries was one of the first things the new Bridewellians (as they called themselves) had in common; and they delighted in sharing the official reasons for their arrest. Liza Harris explained sheepishly that she had been 'taken for a vagrant' when in truth her uncle had shouted 'and good riddance, too!' as Constable Tewman had led her away. Mary Nicholls boasted that she had been brought in from the Bridge as a 'lewd vagrant', and offered to prove it to any who doubted her – and after her first three days in Bridewell, there were no doubters at all.

For Ann Momford, however, the constable had told the Register that she'd been brought in because she lived an 'incontinent life' and would 'take no warning'. Since Ann didn't know what 'incontinent' meant, she figured it referred to her habit of kicking any drunken rogue who tried to fondle her; so in Bridewell she declared she'd be 'incontinent' whenever she wished. In fact, Ann looked at her arrest as reward for good behavior, since she was dressed better now than any time since her mum had died. She knew Virginia was further away than Calais, which she had seen once, across the water from Dover – but didn't care so long as it wasn't as cold as the bloody London rain.

When someone said that the maids brought in from St. Brides should be called the 'Brides' bound for Virginia, the name stuck; and someone else declared it only fair for the lads to be the "Grooms", although many were young enough they could only hope to be horse grooms for some years to come.

The influx of all these newcomers confounded the harassed men and women in charge of Bridewell. For one thing, they were instructed that these recent arrivals were

not whipped at registration. It wasn't natural since everyone brought in to Bridewell was greeted with a dozen lashes (and every child with six). It was an expected public spectacle: not as popular as bear-baiting in Southwarke perhaps, but attractive for those who took delight, hidden or open, in watching young women be stripped to the waist and whipped. Thus it had been for many years for the prisoners sent from the courts for various petty, and sometimes not so petty crimes. Yet the Lord Mayor had directed that those arrested only for shipping to the plantations should be 'kept at work' as usual, but should not be whipped at registration. But a stream of ordinary prisoners continued to arrive, including some reprieved from execution and transported to Virginia as well as the usual flow of petty thieves and other rogues, all of whom would have been whipped at Registration in the usual scheme of things.

This all created confusion as to who should be whipped and who spared. The Registrar settled the matter in a pragmatic way by whipping all newcomers on some days and none on the others. This was bound to cause problems eventually, of course, but the Registrar hoped those held for shipment by the Company's would be gone before real trouble arose.

Will had arrived on a no-whipping day, which was just as well since Constable Tewman and the posse had already paid him nicely for the trouble he had caused them. On his first Monday, he got his promised shirt, oversized to be sure, but it came with a firm admonition to be sure to grow into the sleaves before the elbows were worn through.

With the shirt came a promise for new shoes as soon as they could be made. Bridewell wasn't ready to outfit a

hundred new arrivals with shirts and shoes While Bridewell expected to receive 40 shillings apiece from the Company for clothing the transportees, the Company had not yet reached firm agreement with the City and so the money had yet been paid. Two hundred new shoes were yet to ordered, but less delivered. Yet another headache!

As Tom explained to Will, the good folk who ran Bridewell thought there was more work to be done than folks to do it, rather than the other way round. For them it was pretty clear that the reason for all the poor thieves and beggars in London was because of all the poor thieves and beggars found there….

Even worse, thought the authorities, were all blackguards who would work for wages so low they could barely eat – which meant everyone else had to do near the same!

Tom Cornish had been in Bridewell for a couple of weeks already, brought in by the judges of the Middlesex Sessions court for theft; at the lordly age of 17 or perhaps 18 (he'd never known for certain which), he was an acknowledged expert. Bridewell's reasoning was unassailable: since there wouldn't be no poverty without the poor, then the poor were plainly the source of the problem! It stood to reason! For Bridewell the solution was straightforward. Because masters in the City wouldn't pay servants to do work they didn't have, Bridewell would force the poor to work for even less – for nothing at all, in fact – and make goods that were so shabby no one would buy them anyway…. It was a perfect solution, said Tom – before breaking into gales of laughter. All that was left, he added between fits, was to order the merchants to buy all

the brummagem stuff that Bridewell produced and pay full price for it all!

This had all been explained to the children in great earnestness, in different terms, of course, and indeed explained several times to those who had been there a week or two. They in turn regaled the newcomers by going over it again, just as Samson Hollyday did the next day after the Sunday service. He held forth in the courtyard on Will's first Sunday in Bridewell. A baker's dozen of newcomers, some freshly clothed, others still in their street-worn rags like Will, gather about Hollyday with puzzled faces.

"Didn't ya listen?" said Hollyday would say with a grin. "If you 'aven't figured it out by now, then God save you a'cause I can't. But it's like this: the Cooper he won't take you 'prentice because he can't sell all the barrels he'd teach you to make, right? An' the mason he won't take you since he's a'teaching his own lad and don't have no brick to lay this winter anyway. So you run from dawn to dusk trying to find a fetch-and-carry for the day so's you can eat your daily bread.

When you find nothing, they bring you here and set ya at a broken loom t'weave cloth so bad even the lice don't want to be seen on it! Then comes the Sabbath and they tells us we're damned to Hell since God must not love us 'cause we're in here instead of on the street.

"There ya have it, lads! Stay a few weeks and you'll get it all down pat. But not from me, 'cause I'm for Virginia, soon as the first ship sails. Ain't no Bridewell in Virginia, that's for sure! No, nor no Clink and no Newgate prison neither!"

6. Right damned bastards….

As days went by, rumors ran rife in Bridewell's courtyard and along the benches in the refectory. Some said they would be shipped to Barbados. No, insisted others: they were bound for the plantations in Ulster, or maybe Jamaica, or the Bermudas. Still, most said Virginia, which was what the constables had said even though no one much believed anything the constables said.

In sum, no one knew for certain, so rumor built on rumor and tale capped tale. Samson Hollyday claimed that fish in the great bay of Chesapeake jumped into the fishermen's boats with no need for either a net or a line. He claimed the woods were filled with so many deer you had to watch out they didn't trample you as they dashed about.

"You poor fools," Cornish called out to the crowd one day, after listening to Hollyday's fables. "If Virginia was like that, d'you think they'd be sending the likes of us? It's like me uncle always said: he wouldn't want to go nowhere anyone would pay good silver to send 'im, right?" But Cornish was shouted down, and the latest rumor ran 'round again.

Someone said it'd take a year and half or two years to get to the Chesapeake. Nonsense! cried another: if you climbed Rame Head just west of Plymouth Sound -- on a clear morning with the sun at your back, mind you -- you could see Virginia lying dark just along the horizon. Their heads swirled from one story to the next since no one really knew what fate awaited them. But although each day dawned fair and a favorable wind came steady from the

west, the wait went on; the tension rose; the rumors grew more outlandish.

January was nearing its end. One day, when Maggie was sent to retrieve a trifle left in the dormitory, Little Liz still there, weeping again in the corner. They called her Little Liz because they had to call her something even though she wouldn't give her name to anyone, not even to the Registrar when an rough-faced cove named Owen Evans had brought her in with about a dozen other girls that he said were from Ottery Parish in the West Country. When Evans said she was called Mary Crystel, the girl had screamed that it was a lie, that she'd never even heard of no Mary Crystel. But Evans had slipped the Registrar a coin when he thought no one would see, making the clerk grin like a clown and say 'certainly, certainly. Crystel, Mary' as he wrote something in his book. Then he had pulled her in and thrust her into the care of the woman who never smiled.

Ever since, the Brides had just called her Little Liz and left her alone.

On this day when Maggie saw her sitting alone on the floor, the girl had her arms wrapped around her knees and was rocking back and forth and softly crying. Maggie squatted down, put her arms around her, and gradually the rocking stopped. Abruptly, the girl looked up with a face so full of hatred and hurt that Maggie had to make an effort not to turn away.

"Maggie," she whispered, "he *sold* me! For twelve copper pennies, he *sold* me! No more drunk than usual, but he took Evans' six filthy tuppence, put his mark on their

paper, and they took me away. My *daddy* sold me for Virginia…." Her voice broke down in a fit of sobbing.

Maggie said nothing, but sat holding the girl's head and staring at the wall behind, waiting Little Liz' heaving breaths to calm, bit by bit, even as the girl whispered '*twelve copper pennies!*' over and over again.

In that moment, Maggie recalled how her own uncle had sworn that he'd never give her up for Virginia – but then the very next day, he'd begun saying how everyone knew Virginia was finer than England, how he wished he was young like her and could go some place where a man could make something of himself. He'd heard that a maid in Virginia could have her pick among the men – maybe even marry a gentlemen with thousands of acres of prime land ready for planting. But no, he'd insisted, he wouldn't go back on his word, even though Maggie's poor dead mum and dad would've understood if she had chosen to go for Virginia. *They* wouldn't have stopped her from seizing the chance of lifetime.

Then a few days later, two men had come to the door, spoken quietly to her uncle in the next room, and had led Maggie to Bridewell.

'*Twelve copper pennies*…' Little Liz mumbled one last time before seeming to doze.

How much, Maggie wondered: how much had her own uncle gotten for her?

The next day, Little Liz started talking with the others Brides. The day after that, Maggie saw her in the courtyard giggling and chatting with Alice and three or four others as though she hadn't a care in the world -- but when Liz saw Maggie looking at her, she turned quickly away.

Maggie sighed, and forced Little Liz from her thoughts. She was more concerned about Will. He had left that morning in a work gang but hadn't returned. It was already late, the soup would soon be served, yet there was no sign of Will and his group. Just then, she heard a commotion at the main gate and saw Old Ugly Jackson -- the guard the Bridewellians hated most – as he led the work gang back in with their tools. They clustered around the shed, handing shovels back to the husbandman. Will was standing next to Old Ugly and the husbandman, and there seemed to be some argument. Suddenly, an angry voice carried across the courtyard: "…don't care why he ain't got it! I gave you twelve spades this mornin' for a gang of twelve to clean the Bridge, so you owe me twelve back tonight. Let 'im can keep using his bloody hands till Doomsday for all I care 'til 'e returns the bloody shovel."

The voices died away; and Maggie watched as a dazed and filthy Will stumbled across the courtyard towards the common washtub fed by a downspout from the roof. His arms were black; his new shirt was smeared with horse manure. He plunged his arms into the frigid water and cleaned off what he could.

"Will, Will!" cried Maggie, running to him, "What happened? What have they done to you?"

He looked up and grimaced when he tried to smile. "Not much," he muttered; and returned to scraping caked manure off his arms. He worked diligently as Maggie stood by him, ignoring the stench, but too appalled to speak. Supper was called and the courtyard emptied out until he and Maggie were the only ones left. Will looked for a relatively clean spot on his shirt to dry his arms. Maggie waited.

"They're right bastards, Maggie," he said quietly. "Right damned bastards. They set us to shoveling manure off the Bridge, you see. Then, when Old Ugly was away at the front of the gang, some rogue springs up behind me, shouting and damning us all to hell because the merchants pay *him* to clear the Bridge, says he; and he'll be damned if he'll let us shovel his manure for free. Then he started shoving me and I so shoved him, and before I knew it he'd grabbed my spade and tossed it into the river. Old Ugly came running, but blamed *me* for losing the shovel and said I could clean up after every horse in London with my bare hands -- or use my nose -- for all he cared. And do it again tomorrow." He paused and added as a calm matter of fact: "Right damned bastards."

Will looked her in the eye and for an instant Maggie thought he would break down. Instead, he just shrugged and walked towards the refectory, repeating "right damned bas-tards" in rhythm with each step, leaving Maggie staring behind him.

But Will didn't go out the next morning at all. As the regular work crews were being assembled after breakfast, a constable came into the courtyard with the Registrar. They looked over the crowd and when the Registrar pointed to Will, he strode over and barked "William Micklewood?" When Will nodded, the officer twisted him 'round and slid a club to pin his arms behind. With a hand on either end, he shoved Will towards the entrance, intoning as he went: "William Micklewood: in the name of the King, I arrest you for suspicion of felony theft." They were gone before the stunned crowd realized what had happened.

Maggie went to her weaving that day with death in her heart. Theft was a hanging offence. They all knew it. No one expected him to return. No one talked about Will that day. It was as if he were already tried, convicted, hanged, and his body jostled into a pauper's grave: unknown; unmarked; unremembered.

They didn't talk much about anything that day and Maggie talked about even less. She didn't even hear the new rumor that three Company ships were now at the quays: the *London Merchant, Duty, and Jonathan,* loaded with cargo and ready to sail.

7. Mr. Pelham's interview

In a spacious room not far from Bridewell, Sir Robert Naunton, Principal Secretary to his royal majesty James Stuart, leaned back in his chair and stared at the ceiling, as he often did when he worked. One hand rested easily on an untied stack of papers on his desk while with the other he fingered a large, unfolded letter. Before him sat a solitary, straight-backed chair, presently occupied by a smooth-chinned, insignificant-looking young man with a stylish cloak and an anxious face. He was perched on the edge of the chair, plainly unhappy with his assigned task.

And well he ought to be, thought Sir Robert, well he ought to be.

Having formally delivered the Company's letter, the poor fellow – Naunton had already forgotten his name – was now insistently repeating that he'd been sent by Mr. Collingwood, the Secretary of the Virginia Company, whom, he understood, Sir Robert knew, of course; that Mr.

Collingwood worked under the Treasurer, that is to say the principal officer, as it were, of the Virginia Company, Sir Edwin Sandys – Sir Robert surely knew Sir Edwin, too? – and that Sir Edwin had asked Mr. Collingwood to deliver this request to the Principal Secretary, that is to say Sir Robert; but as Mr. Collingwood was suddenly indisposed, he had sent his assistant, himself, instead.

The young man paused at last, wiped his narrow forehead with a silk handkerchief, and endeavored a smile. "The Company's request to the Council is quite clear, I should hope," he concluded, smiling again.

Naunton had let the poor messenger flounder on – Pelham, that was his name – tedious as it was. Naunton knew perfectly well that Collingwood was chief scrivener for the Virginia Company; that the Company was a band of grasping upstarts for the most part; and that Collingwood's sudden indisposition this morning must certainly have come as he turned Sir Edwin's scribbled notes into the Company's formal request and realized how unpleasant it might be to present it. That, and much more, was all *too* clear to Sir Robert, especially after the most informative conversation he had had with Alderman Johnson yesterday afternoon….

"In sum then, Mr. Pelham," replied Naunton at last, "the Virginia Company seeks a warrant from the Privy Council to allow the Company to do what the Company has already done *without* such authority. Have I stated the matter succinctly?"

"Why, no, sir," exclaimed Pelham. "That is to say –." He saw Sir Robert's arched eyebrow and tilted head, and he struggled for a better reply. "Uh, I mean, fairly

succinctly, perhaps, but perhaps rather…that is to say, the Company seeks…uh, seeks what the letter requests…."

Sir Robert's silent stare brought an end to Pelham's miserable efforts. "…you've stated perhaps…", he concluded, "perhaps the nub…the nub of the matter, I mean.…"

I usually do, thought Sir Robert; I would be deaf, blind or fit for Bedlam not to see the nub of these interviews when men came with pitiful lies to beg the Crown for 'just this small favor' or some 'unimportant indulgence' – a mere trifle, they would say, they would *always* say –'not really needing formal action' – or whatever other sonorous lies they might invent. He had seen such charades dozens of times since becoming one of the King's principal advisors. It had grown tedious long ago.

He ignored Mr. Pelham and re-read the Company's letter: *Right Honorable,* Sir Edwin Sandys had written, *being unable to give my personal attendance upon the Lordships, I have presumed to address my petition in these few lines unto your Honor….*

Even this was a lie, thought Sir Robert. Since the letter was dated this morning, Sir Edwin was plainly in London and could very well have come from his fine home near Aldersgate. Only pride had prevented him: a stubborn refusal to admit that the Company was in a very nice pickle of Sandys' own doing and that he had no choice but to beg the Crown to resolve it.

Continuing to read, Sir Robert saw that the City had chosen some hundred children "*out of their superfluous multitude*" (Sandys could always turn a phrase, thought Naunton) to be transported to Virginia as bound apprentices. The City had agreed to pay five hundred pounds sterling to transport and clothe the chosen

hundred, who would receive '*very beneficial conditions'* at the end of their term – conditions left both undefined and unfunded, mused Sir Robert.

He came at last to the Company's request from the Privy Council:

> *Now it falleth out that sundry of those Children are ill-disposed (fitter for any remote place than for this City) and now declare their unwillingness to go to Virginia. But this City lacks the authority to deliver (and the Virginia Company the authority to transport) these persons against their wills. Hence, the burden is laid upon me by this humble petition to the Lordships to procure higher authority warranting their transportation.*

Sir Robert's pulse quickened in spite of his unmoving face. A Company of fools they were, from Southampton (Earl that he was) on down: hundreds of seemingly sensible merchants and gentlemen caught up in this mad idea of building a new England in the wilderness – or growing rich while someone *else* built it for them. Each time they proclaimed a duty to Christianize the Virginia savages, they seemed to forget how many papists remained in need of conversion in this very kingdom! If the Company believed in its evangelical mission, why not send pastors to convert *them* instead? Why, whole villages in Cornwall and Devon were reported to cling to the old superstitions: lighting candles and mumbling Latin charms before golden statues, like the Israelites had done with their golden calf! Or the Company could send its ships mere hours away to Calais, where millions of romanists could be found in France, Spain and even Rome itself -- all within reach of a comfortable coach with decent food and water along the way? Wasn't there anyone at the Virginia Company with an

ounce of practical sense? Small wonder they were perpetually in need of funds and couldn't even pay the poor scrivener they'd hired to make a register of their own shareholders!

Turning back to poor Pelham, Sir Robert dropped the Company's letter dismissively on his desk and picked up another in its place and showed it to Pelham. "Is this the Lord Mayor's order directing the constables to round up the lads for Virginia?"

"Quite, so, Sir Robert," replied Pelham after a glance. "But of course it's not just lads. They're to take up wenches as well, you see, all at least twelve years or more."

"And where are you holding them? Newgate? Or have you tossed them in the Clink?"

"Not in the Clink, my Lord!" exclaimed Pelham. "Nor in Newgate, either. Many are mere vagrants. No, they're being assembled in Bridewell, awaiting shipment, per the order. And as you see there, the City has indeed promised to pay for shipping."

Sir Robert smiled slightly – a very bad sign, for those who knew him. "Ah yes, five hundred pounds to ship one hundred children: five pounds apiece. Now, that's the going rate for passage to Virginia, isn't it?"

"Yes, your Honor. It varies a little, of course. A gentleman might pay six, for example. But five pounds is about the cost of passage for the common sort."

Sir Robert smiled again. "I see, then. The City will pay almost exactly what the Company needs for shipping to Virginia."

"There you have it, your Honor," replied Mr. Pelham, relaxing a bit. "And clothing is included as well. We at the Company have worked with the City for some months on

this, building on what was learned with last year's shipment, too."

"Leave last year's shipment to one side for now, shall we? But help me with my calculations: if it costs five hundred pounds to ship a hundred waifs, and the City has agreed to pay five hundred pounds, who will pay for all the rest they will require in Virginia? For tools to be used in the trades they will learn? Or food to eat on their arrival, perhaps? Is the Company planning for them to eat?"

"Why as for such additional details," said Mr. Pelham as his face turned pale, "Sir Edwin can give you the Company's costs, I'm certain. He is so deeply knowledgeable of the Company's affairs."

While Sir Robert began to reply quietly, his tone soon began to rise. "Come, come, Mr. Pelham: we both know the cost of planting a new settler in Virginia isn't just five pounds for passage, but a *full twenty* pounds. I have an itemized list of what is required right here!" He tapped on yet another pile of papers. "Your five pounds from the City will merely transport an English body to the Virginia strand, which means you will be lacking fifteen pounds of sterling for food, tools, housing, and all the rest! Will the savages provide all that?"

He left no chance for Pelham to look for an answer. "And turning back to last year's shipment, why did you not ask for authority from the Privy Council then? Did your Company think it might ship whichever of his Majesty's subjects wherever, whenever and however you pleased?"

"Uh, certainly not, your Honor," Pelham stammered. "There was, uh, no question of sending anyone unwillingly last year! While I did not have the honor of serving Mr. Collingwood last year, men of such high honor and station

as those of the Virginia Company would certainly never have presumed –"

"Leave honor and station aside, sir!" interrupted Naunton. He picked up yet another sheet and waved it before Pelham's unhappy face. "See here! The Privy Council has already received complaints of your abuses. In Dorset, this man Evans, Owen Evans, says your Company hired him to press maidens for Virginia and so he paid four shillings for four maidens in Ottery Parish. A shilling a head – or a maidenhead, you might say, Mr. Pelham! And look here! Thomas Crocker swore he was warned he'd be hanged if he failed to press maidens to be shipped to Virginia! No, no! do not deny it, Mr. Pelham, the sworn testimony is all right here. Evans bought Mary…uh Diamond" – Naunton glanced down again – "Mary *Crystel*, that is. Bought her from her father for twelve pence. Evans' gang has so raised up the people in Dorset that dozens of maids – *forty!* it says here – have fled their homes for fear of being kid napped and sold for Virginia. Not even their families can find them now! This is what your Virginia Company has done already and only *now* do you beg the Council for a warrant?"

Mr. Pelham said nothing. His eyes darted around the room, looking for someone, anyone, something to help him. But the room was bare and Sir Robert bored in. "Mr. Pelham?" he demanded.

"Why, my Highness, I mean your Lord," mumbled Pelham miserably, "this is…I do not rightly know what to say. I don't know this Evans – that is, I have heard some few mentions that the Company sometimes engages certain services…but that was before I assumed my present duties –that is, I was not here when the Company

hired him. What I mean is that Evans was not actually *employed* by the Company when he bought those maids in Dorset. Rather, we – *they*, I mean, that is *the Company* –let it be known that they sought maidens to make wives for planters in Virginia. And, uh, the Company may have provided some, uh, monetary assistance for those helping to find such maids. But those were not *Company* men, not Company men at all, just acting as per a particular agreement, or contract, if you will. But separate and distinct from us – I mean, from them, the Company – separate and distinct like two of Monsieur Descartes' ideas. You have read M. Descartes, perhaps?"

Sir Robert stared, unblinking and unyielding; and Mr. Pelham fumbled frantically for a way to end the matter. "And the Company did not *buy* maidens for shipping against their will," he exclaimed at last. "Nor send lads unwillingly, either. They all went quite willingly in the end, I believe."

"Those shipped last year went willingly? You could testify as to that?"

"Why, Sir Robert, how could it have been otherwise?"

"As you say, it could *not* have been otherwise," replied Sir Robert (even if perhaps it *was*, he added silently).

Pelham gazed miserably at the floor like a condemned man awaiting the fall of the axe.

Mercifully, Sir Robert brought the meeting to an end. "Our interview today is over. Tell Mr. Collingwood and Sir Edwin that I will *not* recommend approval of a warrant at this time. Your Company is asking to ship ordinary subjects out of the kingdom against their wills – not prisoners, not condemned men – but ordinary subjects of the Crown, however mean and common they may be. You

say they will be bound apprentices with beneficial conditions – but no such conditions appear in your letter. Moreover, they would be bound to serve your *Company*, some amorphous amalgam of a thousand or more men in London! Which of these thousand masters will teach a lad a trade? Will the Goldsmiths teach gold work in Virginia -- where there is no gold to be had? Will a Merchant Tailor teach a lad to trade all manner of broadcloth or kersey to savages who wear no clothes at all? Moreover, the five hundred pounds promised by the City will provide just enough to for these hundred souls to starve in Virginia until fifteen hundred pounds sterling *more* might magically appear to feed them! Even worse as of today, the City has merely *promised* five hundred pounds, but not a single silver penny has actually been *paid*!"

Sir Robert shook his head in utter disbelief. "Yet you dare seek a warrant to *force* the King's subjects to sail under such terms? Could the Crown ship Sir Edwin Sandys to Virginia along with his shilling-apiece maids? Would that be a lawful act, Mr. Pelham? Would not your Company cry out against such tyranny! Or do your Fishmongers, Girdlers, Drapers and Dyers think that that is justice and the law? If so, know that the King values justice and the law more highly than Edwin Sandys and his *gentlemen* at the Virginia Company, no matter how many friends they claim to have in Parliament!

"This blackguard Evans in Dorset has already raised an entire parish against you! Do you wish all London to join them? To bring Wat Tyler springing from his grave to lead the mob? When such a rabble rises up, will you offer *your* head for the pike?"

Pelham sat speechless, shrunk deep in his chair and unable to bear Naunton's ferocious glare.

Sir Robert's voice turned suddenly soft and reasonable. "Now, Mr. Pelham, I have a suggestion. Surely, your Company can reach a fairer agreement if you try again. I suggest you return to the Lord Mayor and see what can be done. If you bring revised terms back, I promise you the Council will review them and decide whether to grant the authority you seek. Please inform the Company of my suggestion. In the mean time, I bid you a good day, sir."

Just a few moments later, Sir Robert gazed out a window on the courtyard below just as the unfortunate Mr. Pelham came running out, nearly flattening two gentlemen on the pavement as he rushed away.

Sir Robert smiled. Within a few days, Company would certainly give in to the City's demands, promising better conditions for the deportees, at least on paper. The Privy Council could then proceed to authorize the Company to do whatever was necessary to dispose of these unfortunate waifs.

All in all, Naunton was pleased with his work this morning: King James will be happy to have brought Edwin Sandys down a peg or two and remind him who governs England. The City's aldermen will be happy to see the riff-raff finally taken off the streets, with the real costs to be borne by the Company, not the City. In sum, everyone will be pleased except the Company's investors -- but since they had already lost so much on their ill-advised Virginia venture, the waste of a few pounds more would scarcely be noticed.

As for the poor souls being shipped into an uncertain future…well, Sir Robert reflected, it was hardly possible to please everyone. He sat again at his desk, untied the string on the next dossier, and summoned his assistant to admit the next petitioner.

8. Twelve to nineteen?

Maggie was wiping tables and straightening benches when the Constable and the Registrar brought Will back, pushed him forward into the refectory, then turned and stalked out. Will stumbled a few paces to where he could steady himself against a table, then looked up, grim-faced and pale. Maggie rushed over and took him by both hands, saying nothing.

"Maggie," he croaked, "remember Davis, the cook on the Strand, up by St. Mary's church? His 'prentice and that blackguard Will Guylliam stole his grain and when Tewman found 'em out, he said they were good to hang for it; but they claimed that it was *me*! Said that all they'd done was hide what I'd stolen." He paused and lowered his voice even further. "They mean for me to hang in their place, Maggie!"

She stifled a gasp. "What will you do?"

"Tell the truth again tomorrow," he shrugged. "What else can I do?"

"Tomorrow!"

"Trial's tomorrow morning, they said; it'll all be done by tomorrow night." Will stood up. "Be here at breakfast, Maggie, will you?" He tried to smile, but couldn't. Before

Maggie could think of anything to say, Will mumbled "got to sleep", pulled his hands away from her and walked out.

He was so different now than just weeks ago, she thought. They were all different. Life on Dolittle Lane had never been easy, but folks faced it together. There, Will had been plucky, scrappy, as carefree as only a lad of fourteen can be. That was gone now; now, he was like a man grown up before his time. No, that was not quite it either. The men she knew were weighed down with things and either grew strong enough to bear the load or else buckled. Like her uncle, she thought: he wasn't a bad man; just weighed upon until he had bent like a pillar asked to carry too much. It was not like that with Will; more like he had simply been stunned, perhaps that he'd entered a world where things you did or said almost without thinking might break, or even end, a life.

Will reached the far door but just as he passed through it, he turned back at last and winked at her, flashing a shadow of his old grin.

"Oh dear God," she said silently, "Let truth be enough tomorrow. Just this once."

The proctor appeared; and clapped twice to shake Maggie out of her reverie. "Yes'm," she muttered and grabbed up the last bowls, swept the bread crumbs into a cloth and hurried to clean the next bench.

The next morning dawned full of rain and a blustery wind that blew straight up the Thames from the east. Surely, no ships could sail today, thought Maggie. She came down early, looking for Will, but there was no sign of him. When breakfast was done, she went anxiously to her weaving, talking to no one. The morning's work was a blur.

When they stopped for lunch, she hurried into the courtyard for news. The rain had stopped, and the clouds looked ready to break. Change was in the air; and they all sensed it. When Maggie spotted Tom Cornish in the crowd, she rushed over.

"Where is he –" she began.

Tom cut her off with a shake of his head. "Nobody really knows, Maggie. Old Ugly came in this morning at first light with a constable. They pinned his arms like yesterday and bundled him out. So like I said, Maggie, nobody knows – but it don't look good. And don't look like he's comin' with us. Sorry." He tried to put an arm around her, but she pulled away and hid her face.

At that moment, the bell rang to call them back to work. Maggie joined her group silently and went to the workroom filled with spinning wheels, looms, and great spindles already thick with yarn. Mechanically, she set about preparing her loom and went back to the routine gestures, trying to lose her worries in the rhythm of the loom. There was no talking: just bobbins unspooling; the light clicking of the looms; and the soft thud as another row was battened down against the warp.

As she worked, all Maggie could think of was Will standing alone before a black-robed judge, alone before false witness; alone before crime on crime. She tried reciting a prayer, or a verse, or anything to fight the panic rising in her breast. But as she worked, the rhythms of the loom began to damp the fear..

The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want….

The psalm had come on its own: the first phrase, then the next, and the next, again and then again. She let the gentle verses flow:

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside the still waters…

Her breathing slowed; the panic ebbed. Even her loom seemed to fade as well, and instead she saw a greensward climbing a hillside beneath graceful, towering oaks and a calm pond fed by a singing stream. The terrible, black-robed judge vanished from her mind's eye.

He restoreth my soul….
He restoreth my soul….

The cadence ran on as the alchemy of the loom transformed thread into cloth. Her hands worked on their own: London, Bridewell, Dolittle Lane; Virginia, ships, storms at sea – they all disappeared in the psalmist's art.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

It was late in the afternoon, in the brief spell before supper, when the Bridewellians again filled the courtyard. The wind had veered sharply and was now chasing the clouds down river, towards the sea. Maggie was near the gate. The psalm had faded; the calm remained; and so she sat on the stone steps, waiting for news. Supper had nearly come when the gate opened and the Director marched in, flanked by two guards. They strode directly to Ugly Jackson, as he stood surveilling the yard. Maggie saw the Director take out a scroll of some kind and handed it to Old Ugly with a series of emphatic gestures.

This *was* unusual: the Director was nearly never seen. The newer Bridewellians didn't even recognize him and ignored his arrival completely. Maggie had barely begun

thinking what this might mean when the gate opened again and Will Micklewood came stumbling in. He was barely recognizable in a brand new shirt (with sleeves that even matched his arms this time) and wearing new shoes that creaked when he walked. Maggie ran up and embraced him the way her mother had used to sweep her into her arms after a nightmare. To her surprise, Will just pushed her away.

"Listen to me Maggie! There's no time. We're leaving! Right now!"

"But…what happened to you? Today?"

"Later! There's no time! Listen: when they give out the numbers for the girls, you've got to be from twelve to eighteen! If they give you a different number, find a way to switch! Do you hear me? You've got to –"

A bell cut him off: a harsh, unmusical clanging. Before it had faded, the proctor's voice rang out, harsher and less musical still: "Form your rows! Men and boys to the left, beginning here" – pointing with a staff – "girls over there! Quickly now. No talking! Do as you are told! Hurry, there is no time to lose!"

Two lines began to slowly form. Old Ugly appeared behind Will and shoved him towards the line on the left, as Maggie stared stupidly after him. Will twisted back and silently mouthed "twelve to eighteen!" before he was driven into the straggling mass being herded into line. The girl's line was forming to the right: forty or more. Still dazed, Maggie joined the end of the queue. She saw Will one last time across the courtyard, giving her a look of utter desperation. Then the boys' line advance and he was lost from view.

Now it was Ugly Jackson's shouting to the girls, calling in a voice of brass. "Hear me now! You will be counted. Remember your number! D'ye hear me now: remember it well." He then began to count from the front of the line, pointing and calling out the numbers as he went: "five, six, seven…." She waited no longer. She pushed forward, elbowing her way around the girls ahead. What had Will said? Twelve to nineteen? No, that wasn't right, was it? What had he said?

The girl in front of her pushed back and Maggie almost fell down. "Twelve, thirteen, fourteen…" she heard the count proceed. Like a cat, she jumped ahead, dodging and weaving towards the front.

"Seventeen, eighteen – what are you up to?" Old Ugly had fallen into an argument just ahead of Maggie where an oldster stood, who must have been near thirty. Another guard hastened over. "Not in this courtyard, you," he ordered. "Get out! Get in the next courtyard over! Not even Virginia want you! Go now!"

Maggie had pushed forward again and now found herself just behind Little Liz and Alice Larrett as the counting resumed. "Eighteen, nineteen, twenty!" Old Ugly called, pointing to Liz, Alice and Maggie, before sweeping on down the line: "twenty-one, twenty-two….".

"Alice," panted Maggie, can I switch with you?"

"What for?" replied Alice, immediately suspicious.

"Just because."

"Because what"?

"I like nineteen."

"You're twenty; what's wrong with that?"

"Nothing," shrugged Maggie. "I just like nineteen better."

"If *you* don't want to be twenty, why should *I* take it?" insisted Alice. "Nobody never gave me nothin' that was better than what they had! I'm not moving."

Maggie tried to push by but Alice stepped into her path. Suddenly Old Ugly's switch came whistling down on Maggie's calves. "Quit pushing! Stay in line! Silence!" Alice made a face at Maggie and stuck out her tongue.

The line began to move towards the entrance to the main building. She was number twenty and Will had said twelve to nineteen, hadn't he? But did it really matter? Matter for what?

Maggie's calves still burned from the switch. She glared at Old Ugly so fiercely as she passed him that he actually took a step back and turned away. Still, needing to do something, he flicked his switch against the wall where it made a fine *snick!* And he shouted to no one in particular: "keep moving now, all of you. Stay in place! Take your bag as you come by the table; then move forward again. No talking! Take your sack and keep moving."

She could see the lads' line now on the other side. The Director and the Registrar were there and appeared to be checking names against a roll and separating the lads into two different queues.

When Maggie neared the table just inside, she saw that three of the old Bridewellians, women in their thirties, stood on the other side. A large jumble of bulging canvas bags was piled behind them. As each girl arrived at the table, she was one of the sacks and her name was marked off a list. Little Liz, Alice Larret and Maggie each took their bundle and marched towards the gate.

"Alice," whispered Maggie again, "be a good girl for once and switch with me, just for friends?"

Alice shook her head without a sound and looked the other way.

They were leaving Bridewell now and Maggie saw that there were wagons pulled up in a row, waiting for them. She *had* to no more than nineteen, Maggie thought. Will had said so and he must have had a reason. It was nineteen, wasn't it? *Wasn't it*? They were almost out into the street when Little Liz leaned around Alice and whispered to Maggie. "I'll switch, if you want." Ignoring a black look from Alice, Maggie nodded quickly and slid past. As they passed, Little Liz lowered her voice to the softest whisper: "But you won't tell nobody what I said about my daddy, cross your heart?"

Maggie nodded solemnly. "Never ever."

Alice grabbed Liz and shoved her back into Maggie's former place just as Old Ugly came up and began counting again. When he reached eleven, he lowered his staff to stop the queue and directed the first eleven girls to mount the first wagon. He shut the gate behind them and the wagon clattered down the lane. "Next," he cried, "here's for *Jonathan*." He counted under his breath as the girls passed by: "seventeen, eighteen…" Then he lowered his staff like at a toll gate behind Maggie – right in front of Alice Larett's nose. Alice's face filled with a sudden panic as he bellowed: "All right, now: twelve to eighteen! Up you go!" And he pointed them to the waiting lorry.

As Alice saw Maggie climb into her wagon, she stared at Maggie with hatred and envy. "You cheated!" she screamed, pushing up against Old Ugly's still-lowered staff. "You tricked me, you!"

Jackson jerked his staff back, then poked her stomach. "Silence, I said!" Alice doubled over, gasping as Little Liz

watched as the horse neighed, anxious to be away. Just before the wagon gate closed, she gave Maggie a tiny smile as the chain rattled home. The driver called to his team and they lurched forward. Maggie heard Alice's curse die away as the wagon turned the corner.

She had won, Maggie thought. It was twelve to *eighteen* that Will had told her. But she still really understand how Will had known or why it might really make a difference. Or what would happen to Alice, Little Liz and the others further back in the line. The questions piled up and she fought to recover the calm she had found earlier in the day. The wagon jerked from side to side over the cobblestones. Ann Momford sat in the straw beside her, rocking back and forth and moaning softly.

So was this it? Were they bound now for Virginia? A wagon wheel dropped in a rut and threw her down into the straw where she let herself lie still. She knew she and the others were "for Jonathan". That much, she understood.

But who, she wondered, *was* Jonathan?

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!

10. *"Quickly aboard bestow you…"*

The order for the maids to board came at last. Mary Nicholls was first. She stepped across the gangway into the new world of pitch, wood, oakum and sail that would be home for months to come.

The change was immediate. When Mary looked behind her, she saw men with staves glaring at her and the others; while before her were sailors who smiled and gave her a hand in the darkness, guiding her across the deck to the steps reaching steeply down to the hold. Here, there were no harsh words or curses: sailors knew hard luck first-hand. They also knew with moral certainty that a ten-inch plank was all that separated them from their Maker. That did not make them soft or cuddly, nor abolish their varied (and sometimes quite imaginative) vulgarity. Still less did it do away with their profound appreciation for a good-hearted whore or those they dreamed was such -- but it did spare them that certain habit of contempt for the "mean and common folk" practiced so widely among what passed as the better classes of London society.

Guided by these well-meaning, calloused hands (and by the firm injunction to touch nothing, absolutely *nothing* around them), the Bridewellians passed over the gangway, across the deck, and down the ladders: down, down into the 'tween decks and hold, where partitions of spare planking had been raised to form makeshift compartments

with space for a dozen or so of the prisoners on either side of a narrow walkway. With a lantern barely bright enough to show the way, they went in an almost sacred silence. The few steps from shore to ship had brought them abruptly to a different world filled with new smells and strange shapes, with sounds and motions that detached them already from their prior lives. It made them as ghosts to the old London world disappearing in the fog behind as they glided in a soundless space through the hatchway, and down the ladders.

Maggie had already disappeared below when the last of the lads came aboard: Will, Henry King, Willy Weston, little Richie Davis and the several others. The gangplank rang firm but hollow as Will crossed it and set foot on *Jonathan*'s smooth wooden deck. The breeze had freshened as evening came on.

While the breeze was already beginning to chase the fog, and would soon be rattling the halyards against the masts, Will was barely aware of it. He stumbled on, completely and utterly drained. His trial just hours ago already belonged to a different world. That liar, Guylliam, hadn't appeared in court and Constable Tewman swore the only reason he'd arrested Will was because he'd heard Guylliam say that Will was the thief. To Will's astonishment, the judge cut off the officer and said he didn't care whether Tewman had heard Guylliam *say this* or heard him *say that*, and that unless the good constable had any real evidence -- and not just what he'd "heard say" by someone else -- then the trial was over. Tewman had turned his palms up empty and shrugged, and the judge had declared the accused "exonerated." Not knowing the word, Will feared the worst until the judge explained that

he wasn't to be hanged after all, and that the Company now was free to ship him to Virginia instead. The constable was red-faced with embarrassment; the victimized baker red-faced with anger.

As a result, it had been a chastened Constable Tewman who led Will back to Bridewell and tried to explain to the Registrar that Will had been acquitted, but didn't really want to say why or how. This left the Registrar at a loss as to what to record in the registry book. He and Tewman were still debating the matter when the Director walked in with Mr. Pelham and two others. The debate over Will was immediately forgotten. He stood against the wall as the Registrar said "yes sir, and "certainly sir," to the Director and then "whatever the Company wants, Mr. Pelham" as they spelled out how Bridewell was to gather the designated transportees, group them for the wagons and send each wagon to the right ship.

Will had been at a complete loss when he'd found himself assigned to *Duty*. But the mistake had been corrected, he now was aboard *Joanthan*, Maggie was already below, and that was all that mattered for now….

He looked up at the sky, where the breaking clouds unveiled Venus, low in the west: a sparkling gem; untouched; a virgin star. The winter air reached deep in his lungs and he found that the pain in his ribs from his arrest was completely gone. The humiliations and fear of the last few days was behind him. The stars, the stars were calling him forward; calling for Virginia. And Maggie was waiting below.

He'd almost never seen the stars on Dolittle Lane. The tenements leaned so far over the lane, they blocked much of the sky. As for rest, the sea-coal smoke that rose

throughout the city darkened the air most days anyway. He only dimly remembered the open country skies of his childhood. They seemed impossibly distant now, farther even than Chesapeake Bay.

When he lowered his gaze, he saw an impatient Mr. Pelham stamping his feet and swinging his arms to keep warm, and obviously wishing for the boarding to be completed. "We're all that stand between him and his fire and a hot supper," thought Will. He rather enjoyed making Mr. Pelham wait.

At last, he saw Pelham take out some papers and call to the mate. "Mr. uh…uh. Sir," he said.

"Eh?" the sailor replied. "Red Sam; just call me Red Sam. But if you want papers signed, you'll have to come back tomorrow to see the Captain." He bent down to remove the gangplank.

"Mr. uh Sam, then," said Pelham, "I really must insist that you acknowledge the Bill of Lading. I've delivered the five-score shipment as per the contracts. I've got signatures from *Duty* and the *Merchant* already, so if you would be so kind…." he trailed off.

Red Sam looked at Mr. Pelham' fine cloak and fashionable hat. He was about to say "you've done your bloody job, mate, so just you let me do mine!" when a carriage came clattering up alongside and voice boomed out.

"Excuse me. I'm looking for *Jonathan*, a Virginia Company ship bound for Chesapeake. Can you tell me which one is she?"

"You're Mr. Keyes, sir?" replied the mate. "Mr. Thomas Keyes? Thought I recognized you. I'm Red Sam, the mate, at your service. I was with Cap'n Each when you

were discussing with him last week. This is our *Jonathan* right here. You coming with us, then?"

"Indeed I am! Paid six pounds to the agent; all goods and tools are crated to go; said my farewells to home and hearth -- all except a final fare-ye-well to fresh-brewed English stingo, which is what I mean to do now if I can bring my dunnage aboard tomorrow. Will the morrow serve?"

"Have everything here at least an hour before the tide turns and I'll see to it myself, Mr. Keyes. Everything below is packed so tight, you can't hardly f-- that is, we're packed right tight, but I can take of it. So have as many pints as you pleaset, Mr. Keyes -- so long as you're here tomorrow early!" He gave a jealous grin: "But truth to tell, you'll have another chance for nut-brown English ale in a couple of weeks when we gets 'round to Plymouth. We'll fill up our water and add final supplies there and I'm planning to fill up on good English ale myself 'cause we won't have a decent brew after that for many a month!"

The unexpected mention of 'Plymouth' had brought a gasp from behind Will where Richie Davis -- barely eleven -- exclaimed "Plymouth? It's *Plymouth!* So we're not going to Virginia at all!" Richie pushed past Will and ran madly ahead to the hatchway ladder pushing and shouting all the way until his cry "not going! not going to Virginia at all!" was swallowed up in the *Jonathan*'s hold.

Below, in the dim light of a few lanterns and ignoring Richie's shouts, the Bridewellians had stumbled forward to the designated compartments. Each group barely had time to cast down sacks and find the chamber pots in a corner before the door was closed and barred by a two-by-four

dropped roughly in place, leaving them in near total darkness. Some threw themselves onto their bag of clothing and sobbed; some lay back and gazed up blankly overhead; some joked or whispered with their friends.

Will's group was last to be loaded. Will threw his sack against the side of the ship, then pushed and punched and pulled until it was as comfortable as it could be got. Then their door was closed and barred and they were left in the dark. Will lay against his sack and thought that lying in the dark here wasn't much different than lying in the dark on Dolittle Lane. And Maggie was there somewhere, too: not far away, just like on Dolittle Lane. He almost chuckled as he thought that, all in all, not much had changed these last few weeks….

As he lay there, waiting for sleep, a bit of verse sprang to mind. It was something Samson Hollyday had heard somewhere and had recited time and again in Bridewell's crowded courtyard:

Virginia, Earth's only paradise.
Britons, you stay too long:
Quickly aboard bestow you,
And with a merry gale
Swell your stretch'd sail
With vows as strong
As the winds that blow you.
Virginia,
Britons you stay too long…..

"*Earth's only paradise*," he repeated to himself. Will Micklewood was no theologian, but he was pretty sure neither Adam nor Eve had been shipped to Eden from Bridewell. Smiling at the thought, and rocked ever so gently by the river, he soon was fast asleep.

11. Where tomorrow lies

"Clap on! Mr. Keyes, and you'll be up in an instant." Red Sam leaned over the rail and grasped the outstretched arm. A moment later, Tom Keyes was standing on the deck of the *Jonathan*, looking out over a sunlit Plymouth Sound. More than two weeks had passed since the *Jonathan, London Merchant* and the *Duty* had cast off from the London quay, tided glided down the Thames, and then beat their way west along the coast, a few miles a day until they had finally reached Plymouth, the last real port before the open Atlantic.

"So how is our Plymouth Town?" asked Sam with a smile.

"A fine city, Sam and what a port! Why, there are more ships in less space in the Pool than you would ever think possible; you couldn't fit so much as another dinghy! But then, you know Plymouth perfectly well, I suppose."

"Tolerably, sir; and it's right snug when you've passed the Barbican, that's for sure. We watered there and added stores last year, too, and I had a good ale or two -- or a tad more, sir, to tell the Gospel truth, and with the whole crew. It won't be like that this year though. No sir! Most of the crew won't have much of a chance in town this time 'round."

"Why not?" asked Keyes. "Why can't the others go with you? And why are our ships the only ones moored over here in Mill Bay instead in the Pool? I was only joking about there being no room in the port."

"Why as for that, Mr. Keyes, it's not for me to be told the whys and wherefores, if you take my meaning. But Captain Each has made one thing clear as Venetian glass: he won't have no runnagates from *his* ship!" He nodded significantly towards the bow where the prisoners were getting their time on deck. "Last year, we carried mostly gentlemen like yourself, sir -- along with a half-dozen or more families with all their household, everyone all paid up full if you follow me: children, servants and all. If they wanted to go into town and not come back before we sailed for Virginia, that was their own affair. More food and water for everyone else! Not that any run off, of course: they were like you, Mr. Keyes, sailing to make their fortunes in Virginia. So, we could moor right against the wharf in Plymouth proper -- no more than a hundred paces to the best ale-houses in Dorset. Me and the hands had liberty near every day, waiting for the wind to come 'round right. We didn't have any felons or horse thieves last year like they've got on *Duty* this time. But we did have a load of London brats, not as many as we've got this year, but enough, and some of 'em jumped right onto the quay one night and took off, which the Company in London took badly when the news got back.

"This year's different, with all the riff-raff we're got, not to mention all the rogues on the *Duty* who'd be hanging on the gallows if they hadn't been transported. There'd be a half-dozen jumping ship the moment you turned your back and go sidling through town robbing every merchant and his mistress and then slipping out into the countryside and back to Cheapside to start all over again! Think Captain Each would put up with that?"

Sam scratched his beard. “It’s a bit different with these City nippers and idlers from Bridewell, of course. With their mouths they say they'll go anywhere other than back to London Town. But their eyes say they're lying and they’ll jump ship the first chance they get. See how they stare!” he continued as a group of Bridewellians emptied bucked over the side. “They didn’t have much in London, but even so, most of 'em would head back if they could. That little blow we had off Beachy Head last week gave 'em a taste for what the sea can do, and even the ones that didn't sit all night with their head over a bucket had enough."

Keyes grimaced at the memory. It wasn’t just the prisoners who had had the head over a bucket!

"You see,” continued the mate, “adventure is fine and good, but it's best left to me and my mates -- and men like you who know why you’re putting up with it all! So like I said, if we moored next by the wharf in the Pool, there’d be two dozen gone like that!" Sam snapped his callused fingers with such force that a dozen startled Bridewellians turned to stare. Sam met them with a stone face.

“Captain said the Company would fine him ten pounds sterling for every runaway on his watch! So the Captain tells us it’s either ten pounds or ten times that in lashes, and seeing that neither me nor the hands have ten pounds sterling at hand, it’s the lashes that we’d worry about."

"Ten pounds sterling," repeated Keyes quietly. “Hard to believe they’re worth as much as that."

He watched the youngsters shuffle around the ship’s waist with their hands stuffed in their pockets or leaning against the rail and gazing absently at the water. Scattered around the Bay were oystermen, cocklecatchers, netfishers

and every kind of local fishing boat coming in on the tide, trying to catch the wind, or drawn up along the banks. While some the the Bridewellians gazed at the boats, others peered longingly at the roofs and spires of Plymouth Town that spiked above the meadows beyond. A few others stared at the mouth of the Bay, where the south wind was whitecapping the open waters of the Sound and driving breakers against the flanks of Mount Edgcumbe. Farther still, the heights of Maker parish and the barren rocks of Penlee marked the deadly Cornish headlands that closed the Sound on the west.

There was one lad, however, who ignored these sights and fixed Red Sam and Tom Keyes instead. He stood at the foot of the ladder up from waist and seemed to be edging toward them. "

"In London," said Keyes, "before we sailed, I heard that the City had paid five pounds to the Company just to be rid of them. If the City's already paid for their passage, why should anyone care whether they jump ship or not?"

"When you put it like that, sir, I can't rightly say. Someone must think they're good for something in Virginia, though it's hard to see why!" He laughed.

"Excuse me, sirs." It was the lad who had been eyeing them. He kept at a respectful distance, just close enough to the other prisoners to avoid a reprimand from the turnkey, Old Ugly Jackson himself. "I'm Will, Will Micklewood. May I have a word with you? Please?"

Red Sam shrugged. "All right by me, mate." He nodded his approval to Jackson and gestured for Will to climb the ladder. Jackson scowled, but didn't interfere. When Maggie saw Will climb up, she hurried to join him.

Red Sam had noticed her before, more than once in fact -- she was a fine-looking wench, after all. Tom Keyes had noticed her too. She was prettier than his Martha, he had to admit; rounder, too, though she couldn't be more than a year or two younger. And, Keyes told himself, he wasn't really engaged, not fully. Still, he turned his gaze away.

"I'll leave you to your duty," he said to Sam. "I must put these things away downstairs, or, uh…stow them below," he added with some pride, gesturing to the purchases he had brought back from the town. He gave Maggie no more than a kindly glance and walked away.

"What's on your mind, lad?" asked the mate. "Out with it!"

"We want to know if it's true," mumbled Will, trying hard to look Red Sam in the eye.

"Know if *what's* true?"

"Go ahead, Will," said Maggie softly. "Tell him." She put her hand on his arm. "Tell him what Tom said."

"Tom *who*," demanded Sam. "You're not making any sense, lad. What's this all about?"

"Why, Tom Cornish, sir," said Will. "In London, he said --"

"Another Cornish troublemaker!" interrupted Red Sam. "They give you nothing but trouble! Who let him into London, anyhow?"

Will ignored the question and pushed ahead. "Back in Bridewell, you see, well, Tom said his old uncle was Cornish and told him once that if you climb the church steeple atop the hill west of Plymouth -- if the sun's bright and the air's right – well, that you can just see Virginia, lying low at the very edge of the world. So, is it true?" he added.

Red Sam looked down at the two expectant faces -- fearful, hopeful, desperate faces -- and remembered the departure last year. There had been faces like that among the children last year when they'd first set sail, but those faces disappeared long before they reached Virginia and had been replaced by tired, seasick, homesick, heartsick, hungry faces. Would they have wished for such a fable?

"If I tell you, can you keep it a secret?" Red Sam whispered at last. "Both of you?"

Will looked up solemnly and nodded, looking Sam straight in the eye; but Maggie just stared at him and Sam looked away.

"Well, they don't like to let it be generally known, you know, but, uh, well, Virginia ain't so far as you hear say sometimes. See, if every Tom, Dick and Harry in London Town knew how close Virginia really is, why they'd be thousands and thousands going, rushing off to make a new life. Just like that Mr. Keyes who was here just now. We'd have to beat 'em off with boat hooks if the word got out! You see up there?" -- he pointed south to the barren Maker Heights, perhaps two miles away -- "that's where Cornwall begins, right there, on the far side of the river. Nothing but stone and sand, maybe a bush or two -- and Cornishmen babbling away so foreign you wouldn't know you're still in merry England. Well, just a little bit farther, past the Point, hat's Rame Head."

As Red Sam pointed to the west, Will rose on his tiptoes and stared. "And it's pretty close to what your friend said: there's a church up there with a steeple so tall it's in the clouds half the time! Mark my word, lad, if there's any place where you could make out Virginia, it'd be right

there, that's for sure. Why on a fine spring day, you could see *tomorrow* from up there!"

Red Sam felt the force of Maggie's knowing gaze and was suddenly ashamed. She was old enough to have been told too many sweet lies to fall for such a tale. But it wasn't being caught out by her that shamed him. That was all just fun. What shamed him was the way she stood by Will, knowing Red Sam's lie for what it was, yet saying nothing. Sam felt his cheeks grow red beneath the beard but couldn't stop himself, half hating himself and half hating her for knowing and not telling.

"Uh, and you know what that means, don't you?" he continued. "If you can see Virginia from Rame Head, then when the light is the other way 'round, you ought to be able to make out Rame from Virginia, don't you see? So, when you get to Chesapeake and you're feeling low and thinking of Red Sam or your friends back London way, find yourself a good hill, look back east over the sea, and maybe you'll see all the way back home!"

"Then it *is* true!" cried Will, his eyes burning.

"Of course it is!" whispered Sam as he motioned Will to lower his voice. "Whoever heard a sailor lie about the sea? Right, lass?" he ended, turning suddenly to Maggie: "Would I lie to this lad?"

It was a risk, but Sam understood Maggie as well as she understood him. "Of course not," she said, "we'll look for the highest hill on the coast of Virginia, soon as we get there-- and we won't tell anyone else," she added to Sam.

"Sam! Red Sam, there!" roared Captain Each, as he came out his cabin. "Get the boat ready, I'm going ashore." Sam leapt to his feet, laid a finger to his lips, winked at Will and Maggie, and strode away. The other Bridewellians were

being cleared from the deck and taken below. Ugly Jackson summoned Will and Maggie, and they were soon climbing down the main hatch ladder with the others. Just then, Tom Keyes came up from the ladder below them. Will and Maggie edged to the side of the narrow steps to let Keyes pass. But Keyes pulled off his hat as soon as he saw Maggie and made an awkward effort to bow before her on the ladder. "After you, Miss," he said.

Maggie hesitated not an instant but straightened as tall as the ladder way allowed and passed before him with the sternest expression she could muster and the most discreet of nods. Despite her effort, Keyes saw the hint of a smile, or thought he did; and he stayed motionless watching her until Will slipped down the ladder in front of him with a mumbled "excuse me then sir".

Will paid no attention to his fellows as they were all hurried below. There he lay, hands clasped behind his head, staring thoughtfully at the ceiling and wondering how he might find a way to mount Rame Church's steeple and glimpse his tomorrow.

12. Red Sam's bad bet

The March wind blew still from the south and the days ran by. Each night the Captain retired to his cabin with a prayer for fair wind, and each morning it again blew foul. Tom Keyes spent his days in Plymouth Town with all the other passengers who could afford inn-fare. Those who couldn't ate into their private provisions for the voyage and wondered how they would survive on salt pork and ship biscuit when all else was gone. The mate and his crew were

busy enough, replenishing water and beer every day so that each morning they were ready to weigh if only the wind would serve.

Busy, yes, but not entirely so. On more than one night, Red Sam returned from Plymouth Town with a song and a stagger, his head still full of stingo. The first time he made such a ruckus that Richie Davis cried out the return of the Spanish Armada. But soon they all heard Red Sam's singing, his voice floating across the water from the boat bringing him back aboard:

Twill make a man indentures make
'Twill make a fool seem wise
'Twill make a Puritan sociate
And leave to be precise,
'Twill make him dance about a cross
And eke to run the ring, too
Or anything he once thought gross,
Such virtue hath old stingo

After that first night they grew used to hearing Sam's song. Every night was different, and every night the same. He sang of the ale of Southwarke; he sang of the ale of Chepe; he sang the tinker's treasure, the poor's man pleasure; he sang the peddler's jewel, the beggar's simple joy that makes the wise a fool. Every ale-house song or ditty seemed to have found a place in Red Sam's malt-sogged brain, and as he had a goodly memory, it all came back when his tongue was loosed. It was much amusement for the passengers, but irritation to the crew whose closest approach to the ale-house was carrying Red Sam home.

One night he'd been rowed back late and trundled to his cot in the finest voice, praising English ale: "she's

hazel-nut brown, the true merry-go-down, for it slides so merrily down, my lads, it slides so merrily down….'

The next morning came far too early for him after such a nut-brown night. He'd been roused out by the morning watch and came on deck looking worse than the night before. He now was squatted on deck, staring rather stupidly at several new tackles and the many lengths of rope still to be hitched to the rings and shortened. It was chill and his hands were redder than his beard, closer indeed to the cheery red of his Monmouth cap; but his eyes were redder still. After a moment, he became uncomfortably aware that he was worked under the watchful eyes of two remarkably small sailors -- Will and Maggie, that is -- who sat idly at their ease on the ratlines. Their eyes were watchful and solicitous of him – *too* watchful and *too* solicitous. On a normal day, he would have chased them away without a second thought. But this morning his head hurt too much for even a first thought, never mind a second; and no matter how drunk he had been last night, he was sober enough now to know it.

He knew he could hardly hide how he looked and far far less how he felt, so he tried to ignore his audience and bend to his task. He had finished the next to last hitch when Will suddenly cried out. "That's not right! You left out a turn!" Will's shout had begun well enough, with a creditable imitation of a sailor's cry, but his voice broke unexpectedly in mid-phrase and ended an unfortunate octave higher.

Sam looked up and frowned. "And how would a young lubber like you know the difference, Master Will?"

"Because I do!" came the retort.

"And what say my Lady Withering," replied Sam, recovering a piece of his usual good nature despite the merry-go-down, hazel nut-brown, fresh-brewed English stingo). "Was not the hitch the same?"

"'T'was not," shrugged Maggie. "T'was not the knot you knotted last."

Sam smiled finally. "And how would the Lady know the difference between a knot and hitch?"

Maggie's turned grave. "'Tis Master Will who so decrees. If my Lord Micklewood say a knot is not, then not it is -- or I know naught!"

Red Sam laughed in spite of himself. "Then naught you know, I swear! Get you down from your balcony, Will Micklewood, and get to work! If you're so sure, then prove it here or soon you'll be telling me how to set my sails in a topsail breeze!"

Will jumped down on the deck and cocked his head. "But if I do get it right, *then* will you let us?"

It was suddenly no longer a game. For the past three days Will and Maggie had both been badgering him to let them gaze a final time on the shops and sights of an English town, just for a few hours, of course. But not merely *let* them go, but *help* them!

They weren't the only ones asking such a favor. Henry King had come by a dozen shillings – or so he claimed -- and offered them all if Sam would help him to shore. Others had done much the same, but Sam had had no trouble turning them all away since he knew perfectly well that not of them would return to the ship, no matter how much they claimed they would.

But this was different somehow, or at least so he told himself, for he actually believed Will when he promised to

return to the ship, perhaps because he'd seen how Will seemed to be thriving aboard the ship and seemed to more than a bit of the sailor about him. He stared at the stays, the shrouds and the running rigging to see which ropes ran where and why – and he hadn't even been sick in the storm when the turnkey Jackson, who was supposed to look after the Bridewellians, had vomited a green lava like some deathly volcano over Jonathan's clean deck. Jackson had been so sick for so long that the Captain had sent him below and told Sam to let his charges come on deck instead. Red Sam had seen then how the others looked to Will as their leader. No, thought Red Sam, Will had the makings of a sailor man.

But above all, there was the challenge itself. The first hitch he'd been using was the usual one and was tricky enough itself for a beginner. But the second was a variation on the first and was of Sam's own devising and rarely used. Sam was sure that Will couldn't have seen it before – yet now was boasting he could do both hitches on his own, just like that. Impossible! Or at least so Red Sam felt certain, although the song of nut-brown ale still rang in his head, and the short night and early hour perhaps affected him more than he was willing to admit.

Whatever the reason, Red Sam looked Will in the eye and accepted the challenge. "All right, lad, here it is: you do what I just did, both hitches, exactly as I did 'em, no more and no less - and just as taut when you're done or it don't count. Agreed?" Will looked up unflinching and nodded. "And swear that nobody ever taught you these before this very minute and that you've never seen 'em done. Swear it!"

"I swear," replied Will quietly.

"And one more thing: swear that if you win, the two of you will be back by sunset, even if you have swim from one side of the Sound to the other!

Will nodded again and repeated: "We'll be back. I swear it."

Sam couldn't believe he was doing what he was, but thrust out his arm anyway. "Shake on it then, lad." Will pushed up a sleeve and grabbed Sam's leathery paw. "All right then," snapped the mate. "Get to work!"

Will frowned as he gathered the hemp line before him, striving to remember Sam's expert moves. A loop with the left: that's how it started. Then over and under; around like this -- *no*! -- around like *that*! He felt Sam's incredulous stare as Will worked. But in few more seconds, with some starts and stops, the first hitch was done. Will turned to Maggie with a questioning look which she returned with exasperated rolling eyes that said "why-would-you-ever-think-I-know-if-you've-done-it-right?".

Will presented the first hitch to Sam who said nothing; but nodded for Will to go on to the second. Will began the second hitch. It started like the first, Will was certain of that, and he finished that part with a flourish. But the next part was different. *Why* was it different? What was the point? Stumped for a moment, Will started to loop the rope with his left hand; he paused and then began again - and immediately he heard two sharp breaths. Red Sam's was a too-eager breath of relief; Maggie's was a warning because she'd been watching Sam.

Will stopped and closed his eyes to picture the finished hitch as Sam had just done it. He imagined it as it ought to be in order to do what it must have been *meant* to do….

"Of course!" he cried as he saw the answer, saw it as clearly as though Red Sam himself had taught him. His eyes flashed open. He reversed the loop, ran it the other way round, tucked it through and back around, made the final turns and yanked all tight. With a confident grin, he held it up for inspection – but Red Sam just whipped the cap off his still pounding head and threw it on the deck in disgust.

Maggie smiled all too sweetly at the mate. "Have the boat ready by ten, please sir," she purred, "if quite convenient."

13. The Virgin's tears

Barely a half a mile separated Plymouth Town from Mill Bay, but they were different worlds. The town had grown up on the east side of a narrow peninsula, along the banks of Sutton Pool. It was the true Plymouth port: calm as a lake and fortified at its mouth with an opening so narrow that no smuggler could pass un-inspected. To the south, facing the sun, Plymouth Sound opened grandly on the Atlantic itself. On the west side was Mill Bay, whose broader waters touched the rugged Cornish headlands to the west. Only a few homes or warehouses could be seen there, and even fewer ships. But among them – and the largest -- were the *London Merchant*, *Duty*, and *Jonathan*.

Aboard the *Jonathan*, Red Sam was still furious at himself for the foolish bargain he'd made, but he took comfort from knowing that the Pool was a forest of masts, English, Dutch and Breton for the most part, with perhaps a few Portuguals trading under special license, and the streets and quays were crowded with a polyglot mass of

strangers from all Christendom. Two more strangers wandering in the city, no matter how oddly clothed, would draw no questions as they gawked at the ships or pressed their noses against the windows of shops where they couldn't even afford a "good day". If Will was as good as his oath – and Red Sam had sworn he'd have his hide dried and stretched for a sail if he wasn't – he and Maggie would be back on aboard *Jonathan* before nightfall and Sam would have no cause to worry, not even if Ugly Jackson called a morning muster.

It had been easy enough to slip them into a dilapidated Cremyll scow that came to sell his morning's catch. Sam quietly bought a few more whiting than the ship required – or were delivered -- and gave him instructions. He next told Jackson he needed the keys to rouse out some stores kept with the Bridewellians below. He had stomped noisily on the far side of the girls' compartment, drawing stares from the mystified prisoners -- while Maggie slipped unnoticed out the open door behind them. He performed the same charade for the lads, adding a few choice curses as he rummaged around with his lantern while Will darted out to join Maggie in the darkened corridor. Thinking himself the greatest of fools, Sam joined them a moment later and re-locked the door. Wordlessly, he tossed them some clothes he'd left in the corridor and began to leave – before he hesitated and turned around.

His lantern lit their anxious faces, but deeply shadowed his own. Only barely could they see his exasperated smile and heard him whisper: "Impossible reckless scoundrels! If you're not back tonight, I swear I'll find you and thrash you to an inch of your life. Now get

you gone before I change my mind!" He'd twirled around with his lantern and disappeared, leaving them in the dark.

Some moments later, they arrived on a mostly empty deck. Sam's old Monmouth cap was pulled low over Will's eyes. He wore the mates' spare trousers with the legs turned up almost to his knees. Both he and Maggie had a hooded cloak that had been lent to Sam a wink and a nod by one of his crew with no questions asked nor answers expected.

Sam was nowhere to be seen when they dropped into the fisherman's boat as arranged; and so it was that Sam never saw them sail west to Cornwall – not east to Plymouth Town…. They veered quickly across the Tamar River, rounded the loom of Mount Edgcumbe and ran up onto a pebble-strewn beach in a cove near the little town of Cremyll. Will and Maggie splashed ashore, leaving the old fisherman wondering silently at their change of instructions, but asking no questions. He told them how to find a boat to take them from Cremyll back to the ship -- not that he expected them to do so, for he knew a runaway when he saw one.

He didn't see why the mate would help a runaway, and even less why these two would head straight toward a dead end which would lead them to barren rocks in front of the sea. But none of that was his concern. He stayed a moment, watching them hurry up to the path along the lower flank of Edgecumbe hill, then shrugged, pushed his boat into the water and clambered aboard.

Maggie and Will had already forgotten him before they had gone more than a few hundred paces. The path rose steeply at first, and they discovered behind them a fine

view of Mill Bay, with the *Jonathan* and the others rocking gently on the far side. Will regretted having lied to Red Sam, but thought it was simpler to say he wanted to admire Plymouth's shops than to explain that he sought to climb an ancient steeple on a barren moor to spy far-off Virginia….

Up they walked along the lane. Bald hills rose on either side and before them as well. Further ahead, the lane would slope up and curve down and eventually run through the tiny port villages of Kingsand and Cawsand sitting right at the edge of the tide. There was only a single lane all the way to the church, and no way to get lost.

At first, they walked without speaking, enjoying the solid earth under their feet and the first hints of spring in the fields. The weather-beaten hills were nearly bare; and covered only with close-growing heath and a few scattered sheep. When they began to talk at last it was about the ordinary things they saw: a bird soaring over the hills or the early flowers at the foot of the hedge. But the farther they walked, the less they talked. They could hardly believe they were free to go where they pleased and do what they wished. It was as though they were out for an ordinary walk in the countryside, and they were almost afraid to talk, for fear of breaking the spell.

After less than an hour, the path plunged down to a place where, rounding another bend, they saw all of Plymouth Sound laid out before them: a living tapestry of wind-swept grandeur. Beyond the green flanks of Mount Edgcumbe and Maker Heights they just glimpsed Saint Nicholas' island. Beyond it, five miles or more, rose the citadel guarding the entrance to Plymouth Town and the Pool. Further still, stone headlands of Devon rose above

the restless sea, wreathed with white surf, while nearby, the low stone houses of Kingsand nestled between the water and low cliffs behind. But of the great Atlantic itself they could see nothing at all, for Rame Head reared up above the town and barred the view.

"Come on, Maggie," cried Will, his reserve breaking down as his goal came into view. He left her behind in his hurry to scramble ahead. By the time they reached the village, Will's stomach was growling despite his excitement. They searched out a comfortable place to stop, and Maggie took out yesterday's bread and two small, wizened apples she had saved for their venture.

"Mary Nicholls says everything is bigger in Virginia," said Maggie at last, contemplating the remains of her apple.

"How would *she* know?" mumbled Will, still hard at work gnawing carefully his apple's stem.

"Her father told her so, the night before they brought her to Bridewell."

"How would *he* know?" repeated Will, now staring at the last crust of bread.

"Well, everyone says *something* like that, Will! Some of it has to be true. It's what they all say."

Will gave the skeletal core a disappointed look and spat the final seed into the morning sun. It arced gracefully over the cliff and dove toward the waters below.

"Do you believe 'em, Maggie?" he asked at last, not daring to look at her.

She looked down and tried to smooth her unfamiliar, wrinkled trousers. "Do you?" she replied.

He didn't answer at once, but held out a hand to help Maggie rise up and they continued along the path.

"I don't know," he said at last. "I don't, really. But then I guess I do, at least a bit. Maybe fish don't jump into the boats like in Samson Hollyday's stories. But there *are* plenty of gentlemen -- and ladies too -- who've gone for Virginia, just like Red Sam said. Why would *they* be going unless it's better than here?" Will swallowed the last piece of their dark bread. "I heard Red Sam tell Mr. Keyes that he'd had sailed up the bay last year and that Chesapeake is a dozen times larger than Plymouth Sound; says it's more like a sea than a bay. You can't even see acrosst! And even the rivers are so wide you can't hardly see across them either. Sam said he'd sailed up the bay all the way to where the Patowomeke or Potowotomacke or whatever the savages call it comes in -- and it's twice as wide as the Thames at its mouth!"

"Do you believe him, Will?" Maggie asked again.

"Why do you keep asking like that, Maggie? Why should Red Sam lie to me? And besides, Mr. Keyes says the Company is giving him - *giving* him -- fifty acres along a river just because he's paid his passage himself. Imagine buying fifty acres in England for five or six pounds!" He paused. "I wouldn't mind serving a planter like Mr. Keyes in Virginia."

"*You* serve a planter! Will, you don't know any more about farming than I do!"

"Well I can learn, can't I? I learned Red Sam's hitches just by watching! Why can't I learn farming by watching Mr. Keyes."

"He's doesn't know farming any better than you don't! He's a city man by the look of him. What's his trade, anyway?"

"How should I know?" snapped Will. "All I know is that nobody grabbed him up off the street or pulled him out of Bridewell or the Clink to ship him to Virginia! I know at least that!"

She didn't like to see him like this. He was the one who had got them on board *Jonathan* together; he had amazed -- *amazed* -- Red Sam with that hitch, and won them this lovely day in the hills; and she didn't want to spoil it with an argument. And she didn't want him to be unhappy, especially not with her.

"Will," she declared suddenly, stopping in her tracks. "There's another way. You don't have to serve Mr. Keyes or anyone else in Virginia." She pointed to Kingsand's houses jumbled together in a row of granite walls and thick thatch roofs that sheltered the fishermen and their families from ocean-born storms. They heard a baby's cry come from one open window and the sound of children at play from another.

"You can bind yourself 'prentice to one of the fisherman here, or anywhere else along the coast. They don't know how we got here and probably wouldn't care if they did." She paused. "We don't have to go back to the ship, Will. We could stay here."

He stared at her; and for just an instant, he hesitated. The Cornish coast was sparkling in the sun; the eternal stone hills kept the town between the windswept heights of Rame Head above and the life-giving waters of the Sound below. He could stay; *they* could stay, after all….

He shook his head. "No, Maggie. It won't do. I gave my word: I promised, just like Red Sam promised we could see Virginia from the steeple." Then he laughed. "Besides, I want to see if the fish in Virginia really do jump into the

boats, like Tom Cornish says! And if Virginia's not all they say it is, then we can always come back when our terms are up -- I mean, *I* could come back," he corrected himself awkwardly. "Not you, Maggie. Some rich Virginia planter will have married you before long."

He laughed again; but Maggie didn't. "We'll see, then, won't we," she said quietly.

Will glanced at her for an instant, then bent over to choose a pebble polished by a million tides, aimed it at a piece of driftwood twenty yards further on, and struck his target square on. "Come on, Maggie," he grinned. "No more questions! Let's go see Virginia!"

With a determined pace now, they passed through the town and its sister village of Cawsand just beyond. A few fishermen passed along the strand and stared at them, but no one asked questions or tried to stop them.

Past the last house, the lane led up and up again between the looming, treeless hills that were covered now with heather and gorse and gorse and heather and nothing else at all. A wind blew from the ocean and they pulled their caps over their ears.

"When we get to Virginia, I want to see the savages everyone talks about," said Will after a while. "They've got bright red skin and they all go about naked, you know."

Maggie blushed. "Will!"

"Well, not naked I mean, but they just don't wear any clothes," stammered Will. "Not like we think of, I mean…the womenfolk don't that is."

"*Will*!" exclaimed Maggie again; but she was smiling as well as blushing red like an Indian herself.

“Oh, Maggie, you know what I mean!” exclaimed Will. “Besides, no matter how they're dressed, none of 'em could be as pretty as you.”

Maggie said nothing and while they both looked straight ahead as they walked, Will saw out of the corner of his eye that she was smiling; and he was suddenly unbearably pleased with himself.

The lane here was hedged on either side and they could not see very far. But when at last the lane turned sharply to the left they caught sight of a stone spire crowning the hill on the far side of Rame village.

"We're almost there!" cried Will, and he grabbed Maggie by the hand to pull her on. The few houses they saw hardly amounted to a village. Still, as they neared the first house, they met an odd figure, slouched against a wall, with his feet on a low bench. A large, but very scrawny, mutt lay alongside. They came closer still, and heard a soft wheeze coming from under a shapeless hat that was pulled over the man’s eyes. A hand bell balanced on his lap. The mutt bared his teeth as Maggie and Will approached; but when Maggie gave him their very last crumb, he wagged his tail like a puppy, and his master wheezed on in peace.

As they came to the other houses, everything seemed completely empty: no children in the lane; no girls hanging laundry; no men returning from tending sheep or fields. It was as though everyone had fled, leaving a dozing man with the bell to proclaim the news to an indifferent world. They exchanged an uncomfortable glance but hurried on towards the church. Already, they caught glimpses of the sea in gaps between the silent houses. Will burned with excitement.

When they passed the last house, they came to a mottled gray-green stone church, crowned by a steeple of stone. Beyond was rock-strewn land that sloped unevenly down to a tiny rock chapel perched on the edge of the immense, unbroken sea. Will grabbed Maggie and fairly dragged her to large wooden door. "Come on, Maggie!" he urged; and pushed the door open.

It swung quietly inward on a sight neither Will nor Maggie had never seen -- a world long forbidden and now nearly forgotten in London, where voices floated on incense-laden air, and gentle plainchant echoed at the far end of the darkened chapel, rising and falling like the swell of the encircling sea. *Pange lingua gloriosi, corporis mysterium*…. Near at hand, where the stairs rose to the steeple, dozens of candles flared before a stone Lady who was hiding in her niche by the door and weeping still after sixteen centuries. A false panel, carefully whitewashed to match the wall, leaned alongside, ready to cover the niche again on a moment's warning.

Will stared open-mouthed at the graven image that gazed serenely back. He stumbled a few steps into the nave while Maggie stood petrified in the doorway. The sound of Will's new shoes on the stone floor spread like ripples in a pond. Faces turned toward him in surprise, then horror, then despair. The plainchant faltered and died; and scores of pale faces fixed Will and Maggie and people drew apart to let them pass.

A robed priest emerged from the shadows, his shoulders bent. In the dim light they could not see his eyes but sensed a grim resignation in his measured step. He held up a hand and greeted them: "*Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum*." But as he drew closer he saw from their young –

and blank – faces that they were no investigators searching to discover forbidden Roman rites. He repeated with a softer voice: "the peace of the Lord be with you always."

Will and Maggie barely heard him: they were transfixed by the sight of the object behind. It was a cross, but not a cross of the risen Christ they knew, clean, straight and sober. Instead it was a hideous Thing -- defaced by a twisted, bloody Body that hung there in the flickering candlelight. This was no symbol of their Lord raised gloriously from the dead to save his chosen ones, but a broken pitiful man nailed forever in painful barbarous death.

The priest gazed at their young and uncomprehending faces, and guessed that that old fool of a watchman Battersby had let them pass without a warning, thinking them harmless. But in some ways, this was even worse than a surprise visit from the churchwardens in Truro who, at least were local. The Rame folk knew many of them, knew who would stay silent, and whose silence could be bought. These strangers were complete outsiders and completely unpredictable. Their wide-eyed wonderment could make them more deadly since there was no telling where they would go, who they might talk to…or what they might say.

The priest had barely begun to consider what to do when a dog's barking and a harsh ringing bell sounded outside. The door burst open suddenly and framed frantic Battersby against the bright March sun. "Put all away!" he shouted uselessly. "They're coming, they're coming…." He saw the two figures in the midst of the congregation and his voice died miserably in mid-cry. The ringing bell echoed against the whitewashed walls until it, too, died away and

the mutt was left sniffling Will and nuzzling Maggie, hoping for another crumb.

No one moved, until a quicker-thinking Maggie spoke. "Please excuse us, Reverend, we didn't know anyone was here. We just wanted to climb the steeple tower, sir; for the view you see; if it wouldn't disturb your…" She sought the right word, and not finding it, ended with "disturb your Divine Service. Sir."

"Of course, of course, young Mistress," replied the priest, catching her game. "We were just gathered to sing uh, sing in the Cornish fashion. A bit different than in London, or even in Plymouth. You *are* from London though, are you not?" They nodded and he went on, "I thought so by the sound of you, though I might not have guessed it from your look." He smiled slightly as he began to sense he might yet survive the encounter. "Perhaps you've come from a ship in Plymouth? Bound for Virginia perhaps?" he guessed.

Will started to reply, but Maggie cut him off. "Just to climb the steeple, sir, and we'll be on our way." She glanced a bit conspicuously at the forbidden crucifix before adding, "And you can finish your, uh, Cornish songs in peace. We'll mind our business and let you mind yours." She hesitated again and then added, "As we both might prefer."

"Of course, miss, of course," the priest replied with relief. "Mr. Battersby here will show you the way. There is indeed a fine view of the Sound from the top. It will not disturb you if we sing?" They shook their heads. Almost immediately, someone in the back started a country folk prayer:

God let never all come at ill
But through Jesus own will,

Sweet Jesus Lord, Amen.

Forty voices joined in before the end, and the "amen" rang out firmly before the prayer began again.

God let never all come at ill…

Battersby tugged Maggie's sleeve and she and Will followed him back towards the entrance. They came again to the Virgin, who seemed to be guarding the curving stairs leading up to the steeple. The candlelight played across the Lady's sorrow-filled eyes. Such was the long-dead sculptor's craft that Maggie thought for an instant the stone indeed was weeping. Then she saw the whitewashed panel against the wall, and remembered tales she had heard about Cornish papists gathering at night for prohibited sacrifices. But Battersby set his bony hand on her shoulder and guided her firmly toward the stairs, then let them climb winding steps alone. As they went up, the ancient plainchant rose behind:

Fructus ventris generosi

Rex effudit gentium…

Around and around they climbed the worn stone steps. The light grew brighter as they neared the top. Will reached the platform first and gave Maggie a hand up the final steps. Then he jumped to look out the first window he saw. It faced east, and had a commanding view of the Sound. Plymouth was hidden by the heights above Penlee Point; but all the rest of the Sound lay below: sails of the countless small craft and a few ships riding the southwest breeze home to port. Just topping the hill in the distance, he saw the masts of the *Jonathan,* the *Merchant* and the *Duty* in Mill Bay, waiting to sail to an unknown fate.

Maggie was already at opposite window, facing the west. Will rushed over and nearly knocked her down in his urgent need.

"Show me, Maggie! Let me see!" he cried. "Where is it? Show me Virginia! Now!"

Maggie stepped aside silently and let Will push forward. He looked out on the heather and brilliant yellow flowers that covered the headland below. Further beyond, the sea danced in the westering sun. Further still lay the horizon -- the vast empty horizon -- where the sea embraced the sky: and between sea and sky, there was nothing, nothing at all.

Will stared for a long moment at what he'd already known but had refused to believe. The wind swirled through the open tower, swelling his heaving chest even as the empty horizon emptied his soul. Maggie touched his arm. "Will," she whispered, "Will…."

He turned and looked at her, unseeing; and Maggie saw the same face Little Liz had made that day in Bridewell: betrayal and loss; the pain of private treason. Then Will's eyes closed as he broke down at last and wept, sobbed as he had not done since his mother died, wept in great gasps against Maggie's breast. "He lied! Maggie; he lied!" he cried at last. "Even Red Sam! He said it was there! He swore it! He lied, Maggie! They all lied! Virginia is all a lie! a lie! a lie…."

She held his head tight against her as she gazed at the horizon and thought of the desert that had welcomed the Israelites to bondage in Egypt, there to make bricks without straw and cry their lamentations to the Lord. What bondage, she wondered, what bondage awaited them in the

Virgin's namesake across the sea? What songs would they sing in a strange and distant land?

Maggie barely heard it when Battersby blew out the candles at the foot of the stair and restored the false panel to close the niche. Secure in the darkness, the forbidden Virgin wept once more.

Ave Maria, gratia plena….