

A large, leafless tree stands in a misty, open landscape. The tree's branches are intricate and spread across the upper half of the image. The background is a soft, hazy expanse of sky and ground, suggesting a rural or natural setting. The overall color palette is muted, with greens, browns, and greys.

THE
PURCHASE

A NOVEL

LINDA
SPALDING

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PURCHASE



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SPALDING



MCCLELLAND & STEWART

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*In memory of my brother Skip, son of Jacob,
who was son of Boyd, who was son of Martin,
who was son of John, who was son of Daniel Dickinson.*

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PART 1





Daniel looked over at the daughter who sat where a wife should sit. Cold sun with a hint of snow. The new wife rode behind him like a stranger while the young children huddled together, coughing and clenching their teeth. The wind shook the wagon and the wagon wounded the road with its weight and the river gullied along to one side in its heartless way. It moved east and north while Daniel and all he had in the world went steadily the other way, praying for fair game and tree limbs to stack up for shelter. "We should make camp while it's light," said the daughter, who was thirteen years old and holding the reins. But Daniel wasn't listening. He heard a wheel grating and the river gullyng. He heard his father – the memory of that lost, admonishing voice – but he did not hear his daughter, who admonished in much the same way.

Some time later the child pulled the two horses to a halt, saying again that they must make camp while the sky held its light. The new wife arranged dishes on the seat of the wagon, and the child, whose name was Mary, pulled salted meat out of a trunk at the back. It was the fifth day on the road and such habits were developing. By morning there would be snow on the ground, the fire would die, and the children would have to move on without warm food or drink. They would take up their places in the burdened wagon while Daniel's fine Pennsylvania mares shied and balked and turned in their tracks. A man travelling on horseback might cover a hundred miles in three days, but with a wagon full of crying and coughing children, the mountainous roads of Virginia were a sorrow made of mud and felled trees and devilish still-growing pines.

The children, being young and centred on their own thoughts, were only dimly aware of the hazards of the road and of the great forest hovering. They hardly noticed the mountains which were first gentle and then fierce, because all of it came upon them as gradually as shapes in an unhappy dream. The mountains only interrupted a place between land and sky. The forest got thicker and darker on every side. They had, within a few weeks, watched their mother die, given up home and belongings, landscape and habits, school and friends. They had watched people become cold to them, shut and lock doors to deny them entrance. How were they to understand? There were other wagons leaving Pennsylvania and going south and west, but none were so laden with woe as the one that carried the five children and the widower and his new bride.

Daniel spoke of the trees and told his children which were the yellow pine and which the white oak. He pointed to a deer standing still as vegetation in the bushes, but he made no effort to hunt or to fish for the beings that swam in the streams. As a Quaker, he did not own a gun and would depend on his store of food until he could raise his own crops. It was November, an ill-advised time for travel, but in spite of rain and cold winds and sore throats he looked down at the rushing river and told himself that he had no choice. The Elders had cast him out. He had been disowned and now he was rudderless, homeless, alone on a crowded road. He did not count the new wife or the children as companions. They were plants uprooted before they had formed into shape or type. They were adrift on this high road above a river that divided them from everything they had come to expect. "When I inherit we will have a good piece of land," his dear Rebecca had said whenever he'd chafed at his

dependence on her family. She had always said it and he had eventually decided there was no shame in having a wealthy wife. He had spent twelve years working for the tobacco firm owned by his father-in-law, but then Rebecca had sickened after her fifth childbirth. All of a sudden, it had been, and everyone bewildered while Daniel stared into the flame of his wife's bedside candle, trying to understand. Neglecting his work and forgetting to eat or wash, he gave over the details of the children's daily care to a fifteen-year-old girl he had brought from the almshouse, an orphan. Her name was Ruth Boyd.

Mother Grube fussed in the kitchen while Rebecca lay in her four-poster bed holding her husband's sleeve. The entire Grube family kept arriving and departing without announcement, but when Rebecca died, on the twenty-first day after Joseph's birth, they seemed to evaporate. The sisters were married, with large families of their own, and their parents were elderly. Alone in his study, while neighbours brought food to the kitchen door, Daniel wept and prayed and waited to learn what was required of him.

"Thee shall cause scandal by keeping the servant girl in thy house," his father admonished. "Thee must find a proper mother for thy orphans."

"Ruth Boyd is also an orphan," Daniel had replied. It was a listless argument nevertheless. He had taken her from the almshouse on a bond of indenture and did not feel he could return her. He said simply, "I cannot take her back there." He thought of the way she had run out of his wagon wearing a torn plaid dress and boots so old they were split at the sides. Her cap was unmended, her felt hat unclean.

"And when thee is written out of the meeting for keeping an unmarried girl?" his father had asked. "Then where will thee go?"

"I will go to Virginia." It was a muttering, a threat. "Land of tolerance."

"Land of slavery." Daniel's father had a mason's heavy hands.

"And does thee know what James Madison has done there?"

"Yes, Father. But it is only a very mild law which holds ..."

"Which holds the constitution in contempt," the old man spluttered, "although the Virginians are intent on breeding presidents and, in fear of justified reprisal by the Federalists, are building a militia." Daniel's father had taken his hat off and was fanning his face. "Next they will decide to leave the Union altogether."

"There is religious freedom ..." In Brandywine, the Elders sat in judgment, measuring each person's response to the voice of God within. Discipline. The sense of the Meeting.

"And no paid labour to be had," his father had stated gloomily.

"I shall labour for myself." This was said with a hint of sinful pride. "Thee once quoted John Woolman to me that if the leadings of the spirit were attended to, more people would be engaged in the sweet employment of husbandry." Daniel had gone out to his horse then, remounted, and tried to imagine himself as different from the quiet, internalized person he had always been. He would make himself worthy of farm work, although he had so far never lifted a hand in such labour. He would find rolling land and a fast-running creek. He would drive his children through the Blue Ridge Mountains and by the time they found a homeplace none of them would look back. They had already crossed the Potomac at Evan Watkins' ferry. They had pushed on into Virginia, the old Commonwealth. The children would see this as adventure instead of exile.

When they passed the first plantation, Mary pulled hard at the reins. "There will surely be

someone here to suckle poor baby,” she said, thinking of Luveen, who had raised her mother and then all of them but who would not come with them to Virginia, where she could be mistaken for a slave. *There’s a betta world a’comin* ... It was something Luveen used to sing.

But Daniel would not see his child nourished by slavery. He turned and lifted the baby from his cradle and put him into the stepmother’s empty arms.

They spent a cold night in a roadside field with the children huddled in the wagon and Daniel on the hard ground underneath. He heard nine-year-old Isaac ask his brother if he was afraid of going where Indians might take his scalp. He heard Mary singing Luveen’s lullaby. He heard Ruth Boyd lift the baby from his cradle in order to feed him milk from the cow that had come along on this journey as unwillingly as the rest, and he turned on his side and covered his ears and thought about Joseph fleeing out of Egypt with a young, chaste wife. For twelve years he had made himself valuable by poring over deeds and other documents and he surely knew enough about land and its value to find the right location for a new home where he could bring his family back to respectability. These were his thoughts as he lay on the ground under an ill-equipped wagon, listening to his children complain.

Shouting from the front of the wagon the next morning, Daniel asked Ruth what book she had brought to read in the wilderness. Only a few days before, he'd watched her shifting in her broken boots and running her hand along his sideboard's polished grain. "I have three warrants for land," he had said that day in the dining room to the girl who was not much older than his daughter. "If we take my children to Virginia, thee could travel as a wife." It was possible, he supposed now, looking back at her unwashed face, that she had never had a book of her own. "Thee may borrow my *Aeneid*," he called back to her. "with due care to its binding." He turned to smile, but she had lowered her head and did not see.

But I am reading it just now, Mary wanted to say. That book was the one thing she shared now with her father. It was theirs. She stayed silent.

They were entering that earthly system of hills and gaps called the Shenandoah Valley, said to be ablaze with rhododendron and carpeted with blue grass in the summer but just now covered with early frost and air bitter to the hands and face. Daniel thought for a moment of his house, his table, his chair and his bed, the radiant life he had lost. "I have decided this day that we will give up our 'thees' and 'thous,' " he announced, speaking only to Mary, who sat tense at his side, "so that we do not set ourselves too much apart from our new neighbours."

"I have given up enough," Mary replied, throwing a meaningful glance over her shoulder now at Ruth Boyd, who had come to them as a servant and stolen their name, causing them to lose home and friends. Ruth Boyd! She'd seen her fingering linens hand-cut and embroidered by Grandmother Grube. She'd seen her fingering the silver ladling spoon. She said sternly, "Jeptha, who was a judge in Israel, did thee and thou his daughter, and she did thee and thou her father the judge." She had left her grandparents. She had left her school. She had left her mother in the ground of Brandywine. And Luveen, never to be seen again, never to listen to troubles or joke or sing about a better world. She had been shunned by the children she'd always known. Except for Taylor Corbett, they had turned their backs on her and refused to speak. Because her father had married Ruth Boyd. A Methodist. She thought of the things her father had sold, things she had known so dearly and touched so often, even the camphor trunk with its tropical smell. She had lost everything but her brothers and the babies, one of them thankfully female, but now that she thought of it, maybe the two of them were not fairly blessed. "Thee and me," she said, pulling Jemima, who was almost two years old, up to the front of the wagon to sit on her lap, "are we heading into a bitter world?" She liked to mix up the two words: *bitter* and *better*. She did it now on purpose, but as a baby first learning to talk, she had been teased by her parents for saying after scoldings, "I'm bitter now." She thought of her father making up his mind to move all of them away from home and family and friends. Would a mother make such a demand? And now he wanted to give up their way of speech. "What of that?" she asked, pointing at his big Quaker hat. "Thee going to throw it away?"

"The People called Quakers will not put off their Hats, nor bow, nor give flattering Titles to People." Daniel could quote the old Catechism as well as Mary. "You," he said, turning to try out the new word on Ruth Boyd. It was a simple word, but it stung his lips. "I asked, wh

books did *you* bring?"

Ruth bowed her head and said nothing. She sat on the floor of the wagon and her muscles ached and she longed to stretch but she could not run alongside the wagon like the other children. She was married now. All day the road had been muddy and rutted or icy and slick and even when the children stayed under the canvas, crammed together for warmth, she sat behind the riding board in the wind. She slept with the children on the bed tick Mary pushed down in the wagon while Daniel lay on the ground underneath, but she was apart from the others all the same. "My mother stirs just this way," Mary would say when they prepared a meal. Or "My mother picks those dark kernels out and throws them away." Mary would not speak of her mother as a person who had passed on to Heaven, which Ruth knew to be fact. She would not seem to realize that Rebecca Grube Dickinson was no more part of this earthly life and that Ruth had taken her place as Daniel's wife. In a family, everyone thought alike and ate alike and prayed alike. She had never been part of a family, but she could imagine the narrowness of belief it must require. In this one they were Quakers, so-called, who did not have a preacher and dressed in an old-fashioned way, the men in long coats and shoes, breeches and wide-brimmed beaver hats, the women in gowns without pattern, without colour, without lace. And if any person's thinking or praying got a little different, that different person could not send his children to the school or visit with a neighbour in the street. No one would employ him or give him trade. "Is it myself here in your house that makes trouble?" she had asked one day in Brandywine when she'd stood across from her employer. She'd wanted to say, I am nothing but what God made me, but his thin face had darkened and his eyebrows had come together and she would not defend herself. She could not read, but she could think and see! She had stood by the sideboard, running her hand along the ribbony grain while her employer had stared at her uncombed hair and soiled dress. He was sitting at the table and had one boot braced against his knee. This was the way he liked to sit and now he put his hand on his heart and laid out his plan, as if speaking to himself and never to her. "I shall travel and settle where land is nearly free." She had listened and felt the smooth wood and looked at his face and then looked away. She had felt sorry for the widower. Then the clock in the dining room had started to chime and he'd said softly, "Thee could travel as a wife." How could she ignore the defeat in his voice? But she could count enough to tell the hour and she counted while outside in the street a donkey was braying and upstairs Luveen was rocking a baby whose mother was cold in the grave. One ... two ... three ... four ... The clock had not finished its chiming when Ruth said, Yes.



What had he told his children? He'd said that this road had been there since the Creation. Indians and herds of buffalo had used it. The boys sometimes listened. The newborn cried. Benjamin and Isaac got out of the wagon and ran alongside the ancient trail pulled them up through a gap or across a creek. Forging, they climbed back in and held on and shrieked, sometimes getting soaked by icy water. On the road, they listened to Mary's stories about a flying horse named Pegasus. Borne through space, what would the road below look like? How small would the wagons and travellers be? Pegasus was white, and he had great feathery wings.

In Harrisonburg they stopped for a night in the company of several Mennonite families who were going to make a settlement there. Mary said Tick's milk should be shared and the strangers were glad of it. "Papa, please," said the tired children. "Let us stay here."

But Daniel shook his head, wanting no part of another pious sect. He watched his boys run with the other children as clouds began to gather and the wives covered their cook fires with their capes. He watched the men unhitching their horses and putting them to grass. He untied Tick from the back of the wagon and let her wander at will and watched as his family melted in with the others so easily. Men he had known for years had turned away from him for Brandywine. The Elders had so quickly condemned him that the door to the Meeting House had been locked when he arrived to pray. I will go into the wilderness, he had told his father and labour for myself. His mother had said something about locusts and honey.

"Papa, there is a boy standing there all bare to the skin." Mary pulled at her father's sleeve.

Daniel studied the naked child, who stood on the far side of a creek that ran through the stopping place. The Mennonite men had gathered in a cluster of concern near their wives.

"He must be cold," Mary whispered.

"Will he scalp us?" asked Benjamin.

Daniel climbed into the wagon and came out with a quilt. Mary bit her lip hard to stop herself from crying out that it was her mother's best. She felt a twist in her heart that was both pleasure and pain. A moment later, her father was sloshing across the creek in his boots and putting the quilt around the boy's thin shoulders while everyone stood still and watched. "Bring him to me," Mary whispered, wanting the boy, but Daniel returned alone and spoke quietly to the waiting Mennonite men. "He says Shawnee are coming. He says it is dangerous for us here. He is Cherokee."

"Wants to be rid of us," said one.

"Listen not to savages."

Mulberry and Miss Patch had not yet been unhitched and now Daniel sent Isaac for Tick and turned back to the road. Soon snow began to fall while he sat straight with the reins in his hands and, for a few minutes, felt the light in himself again.

Two days later they came to Looney Ferry, which would take them across the James River. "Here," said the children again because at this point of land, where the Allegheny and the Blue Ridge mountains touched, the ferryman had built a mill and there would soon be a town. "Here, Papa, please." But Daniel told the ferryman to load up the wagon and brace it

wheels. He brought Tick and the horses aboard himself and held their leads in his hand. When they had disembarked, he studied his map, putting his finger on Wallens Creek. It had been forty days since they'd left Brandywine under a cloud that seemed to follow them, and now they crossed the James and turned north, fighting to keep the wagon steady on the narrow track. Days later, when they came to the great Powell River, the horses skirted a ridge that was narrow and icy and laid their ears back. Snow pelted the wagon and Daniel spoke to Miss Patch in the voice he reserved for her. "Now then, good lady," he said, "we have a trial ahead." He had taught this chestnut mare to pull a buggy without long lines by tapping her on her right or left shoulder with a willow stick. He had taught her to whinny in reply to his questions, and now she looked down at the rushing water with flattened ears and rolling eyes while Mulberry, whose darker coat matched her disposition, stood at the edge of the river tossing her head and pawing at the ground.

"We should stop right here," said Mary firmly. "In the morning we will find a better crossing. Think of poor Tick!"

Daniel had set his teeth. "We will cross here and now."

"The bank is too steep, Papa, and the river is wide here and just look at the terrible current." In a smaller voice she said, "It is much too fast."

Daniel folded the map and tucked it under his hat and, because he was unsure of himself, cracked the willow stick and started the horses down the slope at a slant, pulling back on the reins as he urged them forward with his voice. The water was tumbling past with such a roar that both horses balked at the edge, locking their legs as the weight of the wagon pushed them fast into the current, where they ran against branches and fallen trees. Tick had disappeared briefly and resurfaced, paddling her four legs as if she would climb into the wagon and sit with them there. Mulberry began to roll and kick, causing the wagon to tip and Benjamin and Jemima screamed. The baby wailed and Ruth reached to pull him out of the cradle while Mary grabbed at the reins Daniel held. "Lord, have mercy, dear Jesus!"

"Quiet, Ruth Boyd!"

If one of the horses foundered, all of them would be swept downstream over whatever rapids lay ahead. The children were sobbing. The wagon bucked and bounced, cold water streaming in over its sides. Tick choked and bellowed, swimming hard.

"Quiet!" Daniel yelled at the elements.

Ruth clutched the howling baby to her breast. If they were going to die, she would hold on to something. The mares crashed against branches, legs swirling as the wagon plowed into the hitch and the tailgate fell open and all of them heard a heavy splash as the trunk with the store of food slid out. Corn flour and white, bacon, dried beans. The mares pawed at the water, eyes rolling, chests heaving, and the sealed trunk floated for a moment, then sank. Daniel was shouting at all of them, at no one. Mary was holding hard to the reins, bracing herself with her feet, more afraid than she had ever been. This, too, was all because of Ruth Boyd – exile, danger, and foolishness. But four-year-old Benjamin flung himself at Ruth and buried his head in her lap. It was the only triumph of her journey since none of the children had touched her even once since she had first come to their Brandywine house. Now little Benjamin held on to her for dear life, and she put an arm around him and took him into her heart with a love that would never change. Lord Jesus, have mercy, she said again, but only to herself, and some minutes later the horses were crawling out of the river, heaving the

wagon up its short bank, and Ruth saw that Daniel's hands covered his face. Tick had not drowned, but she stood apart from them sullenly as they climbed out of the wagon shivering cold, and wet to the skin. Ruth asked Benjamin to collect some dry branches for a fire, patting him with a confidence she had not felt before so that he ran off bravely, and some minutes later they all stood by a warming fire, small as it was.

Then there was Wallens Creek to be crossed the following day, and it was not so terrible as the river but it made a rushing noise in its shallow parts that worried the horses after the last experience. On the other side, they came to a flat length of ground surrounded by hills and stopped to rest where there was only low brush and emptiness and a few birds holding forth. The boys were longing to be loose and ran off into the field while Mary sat with her father and Ruth stayed in the back under the canvas with the baby.

"Is it you are looking for some place?" A shape had appeared out of cooling mist. Words from an apparition.

Daniel started. "I seek a place indeed, yes."

A wood grouse fluttered in the underbrush. "I got a piece to go," said the apparition, who was wrapped in oilcloth as if rain might descend upon them.

Mary groaned. "No, Papa. Not here," but Ruth moved cautiously up to Daniel's side. They had come to the end of Virginia, and she pushed her hair back and pinched her cheeks. A few miles beyond, the Cumberland Gap divided the world into halves, the far side belonging to Napoleon or King George or to Philip of Spain. But here were mountains and hills and trees dark and bare. The horses were pawing for grass under a thin layer of snow. Daniel got out of the wagon and the two men walked back and forth, talking in voices not to be heard by Mary or Ruth.

That night the family camped under two huge sycamores with brittle, clattering branches. Mary saying this was no place for children to be raised with no houses, no school, no stores and the boys saying they were afraid of wolves and bears while Ruth held little Benjamin and Joseph lay in his cradle. One of the sycamores was almost empty in its middle so that a fort could be imagined within it by the boys and all of them used it for hide and seek, chasing through the dark. In the morning, the field around them was studded with small icy flowers as if they had sprouted under the snow as invitations to stay and Daniel said it was a sight to behold. Later, having studied the six acres offered by the apparition in oilcloth, Daniel offered him a warrant worth one hundred dollars. He had not much else to give. He'd sold the furniture and china and flatware. He'd been sorry to do so, but he'd exchanged those goods for two hundred dollars and three warrants of the type given to veterans by the government. Veterans of the War of Independence had thereby bought this Quaker pacifist his six acres – the first land he had ever owned – but he could smile at the fact of it and scuff up the dirt that was dampened by melting snow and even bring Mary a small yellow flower. He rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, which had not been washed since he'd left Brandywine and set to work building a lean-to, using logs he cut with his axe. The logs did not fit together but they could be chinked. It was cold in the hills of southwestern Virginia, but there were plentiful trees and Daniel worked up a sweat so that by Christmas Day, the family could sit under the lean-to for a cold hour of silent prayer after which Mary served up a pot full of beans she'd been given by the apparition's wife. They were German settlers who also provided the side of venison, a bag of cornmeal, and fodder for the two horses and weary Tick. The fi-

burned feebly on a piece of ground that was cleared of snow, sheltered by the wagon's oil canvas, while Daniel reminded his children to be thankful and the children thought of the mother, sharing one homesick mind. The younger ones thought of her as a ghostly presence while Mary knew her as an absence, a hole in her life. More and more, the person she missed was Luveen, who had been like a tree they were allowed to hold and climb. When the father told the children that the Lord had brought them to a place of tolerance, each of them heard the words differently, some with bitterness, some with sadness, some with anticipation of coming events. There was variation in character among the children, but there was not one among them who refused this Christmas feast.



It had been snowing and the air was so cold that Ruth could watch her breath forming the words. “Would you learn me to write?” She was holding the baby, rocking him this way or that. Ruth could not read a word but she would not say so.

Mary put down her quill and slapped at the baby’s damp coverlet. “Feel this now, Ruth Boyd. It’s shameful, our baby so wet. And I cannot ‘learn’ thee. And I have no time to teach thee when I must see that poor baby is dry and then be a mother to the rest.” Mary tilted her head. “And who would thee write to, Ruth Boyd?” Leaning her back against the rough headboard her father had made from logs, she bent her knees so that Ruth’s view of her paper was blocked. She poked her quill into the small pot of ink that rested on a ledge.

To Taylor Corbett What Adventur we are haveing among Red Indians and bears. A naked boy took my mama’s best-made quilt for his need was greater than ours but we have come to a wild land here where no school waits for us and no store has food for us and we will have to build a house made of trees. I guess I shall ask a travllor to carry this letter with sincer best wishes from

Mary Amelia Dickinson January 1799

“There now, Ruth Boyd,” she said, blowing on the wet words to show her resolve. “Be gone, move those snooping eyes and look after baby.”

Ruth grabbed Joseph and tied him tightly to her front, then walked out into the snow, slamming the worthless door behind her angrily. “The Lord don’t give a thousand warnins,” she shouted, kicking furiously at the ground and feeling the shame of tears because she wanted so very much to read and who was there to teach her but this girl? She kicked at the snow with her still-split boots and what she saw underneath was dark, loamy soil. “So it will never open yet,” she said out loud, ignoring the baby tied to her front as a sweet smell rose up from the wet earth and clouded her in the first happiness she had known for months. Daniel. This was the skill she had kept to herself – this knack she had learned where the orphan boys, always hungry, had to grow what they ate and enough to feed Matron as well. Ruth had made of herself in those years a studier of soil and a collector of seeds. She had tried the raising of five different types of corn and knew well her preference for which to give pigs and which to save for seed and which to send to the cook to grind and bake. She had seen Matron make use of everything in sight – old husks of grain for mattresses, hog hair to fertilize – there was no end of usefulness for anything on this round ball of water and ground the Lord had made. Squalling baby or not, Ruth had saved the ashes from every cooking fire since they arrived, and now, as she dug at the soil with the heel of a shoe, she promised to scatter some in for good measure, as a way to put something in before she took away. She had no way of reading the labels on the seeds Daniel had packed, but she knew them well enough: wax beans, string beans, lima beans, cabbage, turnips, yams and taters, beets, pumpkins, and squash. Soon. Soon. The snow would melt away. The corn she was bound to sort but she found no shell peas to plant, no onions or carrots or cucumbers. What kind of kitchen could do without? And radishes! She liked them cooked.

That night, when Joseph was twitching and wailing in his cradle and the other children

were wrestling themselves to sleep, Ruth thought of those seeds. She thought of the ashes she had saved and the clatter she would make with the cooking pot, even though Mary had laughed at her wrongful idea of a cake for Daniel's birthday. "I would fix him johnnycake," she had told Mary, "if I had an egg."

Mary had laughed. "To think my pap would celebrate his thirty-sixth birthday as if *he* poor as thee! My mama made real risen cakes, Ruth Boyd. Just believe."

Lying stiff in the crowded bed, Ruth remembered her angry reply. "We must be poor in the same way," she had answered, "your papa and me, for I am his wife." But she did not know how to bake a cake, and the next morning it was Mary who told her that Daniel had left for an auction, that it was a long way he had to go, and that he would not return for at least another day.

The road was narrow, full of climbs and turns and so overladen with heavy wet trees that Daniel's wool coat was soon damp. He had thought of leaving Mulberry behind for her right front leg seemed to bother her a little more each day since the long wagon-pulling trip. He had no one to mention such worries to now. Unlike his daughter, he no longer had a friend to whom he could write, since he had kept a girl in his house after the death of his wife and, worse, had quickly married her, and she a Methodist. Everyone had turned against him and if Daniel had need to converse now, he spoke to his mares in slow, thoughtful sentences. "I bring you only to speed our journey," he told Mulberry. "But I will make it easy for you, as will Miss Patch." At midday, he stopped to eat his bread and speak his further concerns to Miss Patch, who, like his dear wife Rebecca, listened but never judged. This mare might glance at him or twitch an ear, as if aware of the self-interest in his debate, but unlike Mulberry, who had no real breeding, Miss Patch was a fine chestnut out of a famous sire and thoroughly compassionate. She had consoled Daniel on many occasions, and now she moved at a pace to keep the man as well as the doleful Mulberry placid.

For a while Daniel hoped, as he drove the mares south and east, that someone might start up on the roadside and offer himself for hire. Then he gave up that thought and began to imagine a runaway slave dashing through the trees and begging him for refuge. This thought excited him a little and he allowed his mind to play over details of such an encounter. He had asked his German neighbour, Jonas Frederick, who preferred to be known as Frederick Jones, about the availability of hired help. That good neighbour had a son named Wiley who was old enough to work but was much needed at his own homeplace. The neighbour had then looked at Daniel in a friendly way and told him to speak to Jester Fox, who lived on the north side of Sawmill Creek. "Have you not seen his house? It was built by black hands skilled enough."

Daniel had said, "I am abolitionist."

His neighbour had shrugged and Daniel had gone then to see Jester Fox in order to put the question of paid labour to him.

"You be takin on trouble," Jester Fox had said when Daniel found him. "But the only choice in this here county is to buy yourself a nigra, rare though they be."

Daniel had said he would do no such thing.

"Well, I speak God's verity," Jester Fox had said. "When it comes to house raisin and not mention if you desire ta farm in these parts, you got no realistic choice less your sons grow into workers overnight."

Astride Miss Patch, Daniel had gazed up at the frame house inhabited by Jester Fox and his family. Every human being was part of the divine; enslavement was abomination, nothing less. Daniel wondered how he could love such a neighbour and looked at him unsteadily, as the very looking implied complicity. His neighbour was red-haired and red-bearded and his freckled face was featureless – eyes, nose, and mouth all sunk into pale flesh.

"Nothing I'd like better'n ta help out by offering a nig for hire," the neighbour had said. "Cept here is what I come up agint. We got our clearin brush and trees, and the wood

split and cartin manure and sowin now it's comin spring. Hear me out now, sir, rather than turn your face away. In buyin, you gone ta give to a nigra a life better'n whar he come out of and most likely whar he is." The red beard, shovel-shaped, bristled, slightly wet. The teeth were small and separate. "They be happier in our care," the neighbour said, adding that there was to be a slave auction down by the Tennessee Line and that Daniel would do best to go down there and pick up the tools he might also need in order to farm. "I see you got no local expertise, so I aim to set you up fair and square. The whole of a farm down at the line is to be sold off so as to put a widow lady's financials to the right. You'd be doin your Christian duty to her alongside your own."

Daniel had lost cornmeal and sugar and wheat flour and bacon in crossing the rushing river along with the salted meat and beans. He needed, as well as food, a good many tools for building. His cow was tethered to the side of the lean-to, since he had not yet built a fence. To begin his house, he needed a pole axe. To split shingles and shim, he'd need a shingle knife. For tilling, he would soon need a plow. *To press deep behind a groaning ox*, he told himself, since Virgil kept his spirits up, although his Pennsylvania mares would have to do for him now.

On his way to the auction, he was travelling alone, as he did not wish the children to take part in any such occasion, although, in the event that he came upon a runaway, how good it would be for them to witness Christian charity. The thought bore into his mind as he drove that by purchasing a slave a man became part of an injury wrought not just on another human being but on the entire society. This he explained to the horses, speaking in gentle tones through the long hours of the journey, imagining that his dear Rebecca could also hear his words and must agree with him as usual. It was only at such times, rare now, when he was alone, that he allowed himself to dwell on his departed wife. Privacy was required for this grief and now he indulged in it, seeing himself as a younger man standing at the foot of the winding staircase in Rebecca's father's house, forcing his eyes away from her rustling gown, which was steely and cool and made a noise like dry grasses against whatever it was that was underneath. Gracefully she came down the stairs as he closed his eyes and let himself drift, following Rebecca into her father's parlour with a pounding heart while his mares pulled him along the narrow road to an event that was going to change several lives. He remembered the lift of Rebecca's chin as she turned her back to pour him a cup of cold coffee. He had not known whether to stand or sit. His father was a Lancaster mason, a cutter of millstones. Daniel had been sent to find new customers among the Brandywine Friends and knowing that, as he sipped the cold coffee, he thought he knew something else. He had been sent to find a wife.

There were eight wagons and two buggies gathered at the roadside when Daniel dropped the reins. He felt dismal, knowing the amount of money he had brought and the variety of things he needed. He must choose carefully and wait for his price. He must guard his purchases. There were thieves on the border. Outlaws. Indians. They might be thieves here among the purchasers. A chunk of land was up for sale, along with a house and furnishings and tools. Word had it that the young owner had died, leaving his wife and children in debt. Briefly, Daniel imagined himself the holder of such an empire. Then he remembered the humiliating sale of his own household goods and felt sorrow for the widow. He saw a wooden stage in the centre of the farmyard and ten or twelve men standing near it. Pulling at his coat sleeves, he took his first steps toward them. "Tennessee trader's in a mighty hurry," he heard someone say and looked up to see a man leaning on the fence, one boot on its bottom rail. "Could be good on us. Or not, dependin'." Daniel fed himself into the crowd, hoping that tools and equipment would be auctioned first, but there was a stir near the farmhouse where a group of slaves stood facing a wall.

The auctioneer wore a black hat and a jacket so shiny it might have been greased. His boots were oiled and the gloves he would wave during his display of wares were a bright shade of yellow. "Gentlemen of Virginia," he intoned in a voice that commanded all friendly and curious chatter to stop, "we are right close to our border here at the finest farm I've had the fortune to put up on offer. We are right here next to Tennessee, where chattel carry scars and bitterness such that it ruins them for work among honest men, but here in Virginia," he went on without drawing a breath, "we sell only well-tended, healthy Virginia-born flesh. That is our law up here now. No more importation, do you see? Parents or grandparents may have made the harrowing journey from Africa. They may have made landfall in the tidewaters of Virginia or Charleston or the Caribe. More'n likely they got brought into New England is my suspicion, where we all know the most profit in black flesh is made. Here now today ... Come on up here close, gentlemen, and see for yourself some fine Virginia-raised merchandise." The auctioneer threw his arms out and a stirring and moaning overtook the slaves.

Daniel remembered the song old Luveen used to sing. *There's a betta world a'comin. Will you go along with me? Oh go along with me!* Once he'd thought of it, he found he could not banish the tune from his mind even as six faces peered out from the pen where they had been placed along with several cows and four sheep. He understood, in that instant, why Luveen had refused to come to Virginia although she had been with his children since they were born and with his wife from her birth to her death. Luveen had been a servant, decently paid and entirely free. This was something very different, something he had not quite imagined even when he listened to the exhortations of Quaker abolitionists. His mouth felt dry. He retreated to his wagon and stood by it, dismayed. *Will you go ... along ... with me ...* Still watching, in spite of himself, he saw a woman pulled up onto the stage. He saw the auctioneer open his dress, where there was an infant latched to her breast. Daniel was not a man who had looked on bare arms or shoulders. He had never seen his own dear Rebecca's entire self, but the dress opened like a wound and he stared now at a woman's flesh.

The auctioneer declared that the girl was full of good seed and rich milk. “Jus you look here at this baby fat and male and worth an extra fifty dolla. Ima start the bid at a hunner for this breeder.”

A bareheaded man standing close to Daniel spat a long stream of tobacco juice into the grass, knocking the dusty hat he held against his knee at the same time. “Ain’t so young by the look of her titties,” he shouted.

“Shut it up!” yelled another man amid other and worse complaints. The crowd was eager. They did not want to tarry or amuse themselves. Someone bid and then someone else and the girl was pulled off the stage while a man held her arm in his bunched-up fist.

Daniel watched a young man of sixteen or seventeen years get sold to the slave trader for two hundred and twenty dollars after he had been made to describe his talents. “Which the Lord says we must not waste,” the auctioneer reminded him, shaking a plump gloved finger. Having spoken, the young man was thereafter silent, never taking his eyes off the yellow gloves, never opening his mouth or closing his eyes for a minute.

Next a pale boy was brought up and two or three people roared out that he should not be on the block. “This lad’s Irish!” someone yelled.

“Here now, gentlemen!” shouted the auctioneer. “Settle your wigs and hear the facts. This lad is the property of the householder like all the rest. How much am I offered for this pretty houseboy?” the auctioneer curtsied flirtatiously. The men gathered below the stage could see the boy’s dark mother come up close and reach up to him. Daniel felt his throat close again but a sound came out of it. He bent his head and moved forward.

The man who’d earlier spat turned to look at him. “Why don we let him go loose, is that it?” He smoothed his hair back with two fingers and put the dusty hat on his head. “But he don have true feelins like us, bein mixed with black. So let us get on with what we come here to do.”

Daniel sat through the auctioning of the boy’s mother, then, and he hated the men as they yelled up their bids but he told himself they would now get to the useful tools when a boy the size of Isaac climbed up on the stage without prodding. He was surely older than nine but no more than thirteen and he got up on the stage as if daring the men below to challenge his right to stand above them. From that height he stood looking down at the pink and white faces below as if he hoped to lock eyes with the one person in the crowd who dared to take charge of his fate – although if his fate can be charged to anything, thought Daniel, it can only be to God as He speaks through each one of us. It occurred to him then to pray for the boy but he did not know where to begin. Instead, he went on trying to organize his understanding of God’s plan and he felt his right arm go up as if pulled by a string.

There was sudden laughter. “Hey! Mister Quaker? Ain’t you wanta listen to the details before you bid?” someone hooted, and the laughter got louder and the right arm would not come down.

The auctioneer started the bidding at four hundred dollars. “And lookee over there where I got my first offer! Somebody goin to raise it?” He joined the surrounding laughter bobbing his head and showing teeth in his smile.

“No, no,” Daniel stuttered, trying to shake his head and yanking at his right sleeve with his left hand. “I haven’t got it,” he said, pulling the arm down forcefully as if it belonged to someone else.

The auctioneer in his shiny jacket, buttoned vest, and black hat had a face blazoned by sun or alcohol and he aimed it at Daniel, as if to inspect a man whose credit was in jeopardy. His hands in their yellow gloves made flourishes in front of his stomach. He walked to the edge of the stage and leaned out.

“Says he ain’t got it!” the spitter of tobacco juice shouted.

“Got a fine pair of mares over yonder,” yelled another.

“Made the bid, dint he?”

“I saw it.”

The gangly boy stood on the stage without moving. He was watching his brother being pushed into coffles by the slave trader and, with another slave, marched away.

“His hand went up, it shore did!”

“For twice moren that nigger’s worth,” someone sneered while Daniel thought of his infant son, though he had no reason to connect the baby to this awful event. There was a pull on the back of his long Quaker coat. Then two men had hold of his arms and were guiding him off to one side of the crowd where there was a table and chair set under a tree. In order to make himself understood, Daniel enunciated carefully. “I have made an *error*.” More slowly, “mistake. I must forfeit the bid.” Each word was a piece of gravel in his mouth because what kind of mistake is a hand raised up by the Lord, which it must have been?

“What cash you brung?” said one of the men, who chewed thoughtfully at a stick he held between his teeth and whose right eye was unfocused, as if it were coated with dust.

The second man said simply, “How much?”

Like most Quaker men, Daniel wore no beard and this, along with his outdated clothing may have increased the antipathy of the men now gathering around him uttering threats. “I have some amount just over two hundred dollars,” he admitted quietly. “A little over, which I was told would buy me a plow and farming tools for my new homeplace. Which is all I have come for today. And which represents my entire life savings.” A Quaker must never entertain debt.

“Might have done so too,” said a man who seemed to bear a grudge, for he nudged Daniel with a stick.

“Except that you are in for two times what you brung,” said another, holding up two fingers and rubbing them together.

A Quaker does not swear or take an oath. Daniel licked his lips. He had been driven from the refuge of his people, but his moral nature was unchanged. He looked at the two businessmen and swallowed the last saliva in his mouth. His dry lips parted. “I give you my word,” he said, biting back shame. “I will raise what I owe.” His mind was swinging. Where could he find such a sum?

“Ain’t no use ta me.” The auctioneer had arrived at the table. “I’ll take a mare,” he said hard and clear.

There was general assent. Yes, that’s it, then. Yes. Yes.

Daniel took a step closer to his wagon. It sat on the other side of the fence but he seemed to be shaking, legs and hips, as he forced his knees to bend, his legs to lift his feet. The two businessmen moved along beside him, focusing on a wagon that was as worthless to them as it was valuable to Daniel, and then gazing at the horses. “That chestnut is nice enough,” one said.

Daniel was partly glad because Mulberry was slightly lame and it would not do to send her off with a careless man. Moving to his more beloved mare, he touched her muzzle and breathed into it and promised her that he would redeem her, that she would not be taken from him for more than a few days. "Even if I have to sell my land," he told her. He said to the auctioneer, "I give her only as mortgage on my debt."

The auctioneer winked at the listeners, who were waiting for drama. "Fine. Fine. And with the lame mare you can get yourself home at least," he added with a note of benevolence. "The road to my place is marked out by old Eagle Rock when you come to redeem."

Daniel touched his right arm, which had betrayed him. He ran the criminal hand along his favourite mare's warm flank. He put his head against her neck and again whispered his promise into her listening ear. By four o'clock that same afternoon, he was moving along the road behind Mulberry, who had been separated from Miss Patch as abruptly as the wiry boy in the back of the wagon had been separated from his brother and from everything else in his former life.

The ride home was slow and silent. All three creatures grieved. The boy thought about jumping out but decided that he was better off with the quiet man who had paid too much for him than with a search party and its hounds. Daniel lifted the reins and cracked them in the air over Mulberry's head to console her, but his own head was very low on his chest. He could not imagine how to free himself from the wretched situation he was in. What he had done.

"I have five children living in a lean-to," he said into space. "I need to put up a house and get a crop in, which means plowing up a field that was never broken yet. And I have no tools. Which is what I came for. And no plow."

Behind him, the boy said nothing.

Was it possible to ascribe blame? An arm had no mind; it was only part of a man. A man was only a small part of God. And had he not been led?

"Can you build?" Daniel shouted over the noise of hooves and the sound of blowing starting rain that came as cold, almost as ice.

"I ken not," came the boy's voice, sullen and forbidding, as if Daniel had taken the lame friend that voice had ever loved in this world, which is just what Daniel had done by not bidding for his brother, who must be in a coffin on his way to Tennessee.

"You have planted." Daniel made it a fact.

The long silence that followed seemed to go on until the sun dropped down behind trees and made its reflected shine on the wet black road. "I brung up pigs," the boy said at last.

Daniel regretted the afternoon with such intensity that he decided it was his father's warning that had doomed him to shame: *A place of slavery ... a place where no paid labour is to be had ...* If I had been innocent of such warnings, thought Daniel, my hand could not have been raised even by the Lord. He thought of Christ telling his disciples that one of them would deny Him ... before the cock crows. He thought that Christ had created Peter's downfall and that it might be best if he should never see his children again. It might be that he should drive on and on with the lame horse and the purchased boy and his shame and apprehension. What hope was there for a world in which earthly and heavenly parents created the holes their children fell into? He should never have come to the auction, where he was certain that his right hand would be raised up in protest or diligence, who knew which?

Had he raised it himself? No, he had not. It was beyond his imagination, this notion of the vile purchase he had made. A human being! A child! And yet, he was now the owner of a boy who could not be given freedom until Miss Patch had been redeemed. Without the boy, how would he ever make enough profit to bring his horse back? He had not a cent in the world. He had no tools and no way to build. Somehow he and this stranger must find, between them, a way to raise two hundred dollars by making with their four hands something valuable and worthy. And it must be quick! They must do it fast. Tobacco, he said to himself, is too slow. And so is wheat. But everything would be slow now, since it was taking twice as long to get back home without a second horse and the dark was falling hard with fresh, cold rain and he had purchased a growing boy for the trade of two hundred dollars and that much-needed horse, which was, in and of itself, a sickening thing.

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