

the  
*Ballantyne*  
LEGACY 1

*Love's*  
RECKONING

A NOVEL

LAURA  
FRANTZ



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To Randy, my Silas



The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want,  
He makes me down to lie  
In pastures green: He leadeth me  
the quiet waters by.

My soul He doth restore again;  
and me to walk doth make  
Within the paths of righteousness,  
Ev'n for His own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,  
yet will I fear none ill:  
For Thou art with me; and thy rod  
and staff me comfort still.

My table thou hast furnished  
in presence of my foes;  
My head Thou dost with oil annoint,  
and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life  
shall surely follow me:  
And in God's house for evermore  
my dwelling-place shall be.

23RD PSALM OF DAVID IN METRE,  
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND HYMNARY

# 1

*He that would the daughter win  
must with the mother first begin.*

ENGLISH PROVERB

YORK COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA  
DECEMBER 1784

'Twas time for his daughters to wed, Papa said.

But he had a curious way of bringing wedded bliss about, sending all the way to Philadelphia for a suitor. Eden Lee felt the dread of it clear to her toes. The ticking of the tall case clock turned the quiet, candlelit room more tense. Was it her imagination, or was her father about to do something rash? For days she'd sensed something was coming, something that would turn their predictable, unhappy world upside down—and now this unexpected letter from the city . . .

Liege Lee stood by the hearth, his firm-jawed face darkening as he looked down at the paper in his hand. Beside him, Louise Lee piped a rare request.

“Liege, please, we have so little news from the East. Read it aloud.”

Eden smiled a bit tremulously at her mother's quiet plea, her gaze falling from her father's sternness to the soft contours of her sister's face as she sat mending by candlelight. Yet her attention kept returning to the post, her own sewing forgotten, as his gravelly voice resounded to the room's cold corners.

"The trade guild promised me another apprentice several months ago. At last we have a letter." He unfolded the crumpled paper, spectacles perched on the end of his narrow, pockmarked nose. "This man is a Scot, trained in his home country before being bound to an American master in Philadelphia. Since the war's end he's been at a forge manned with a dozen apprentices in the heart of the city. His master has died, and he's seeking a position in the West to finish his training. He comes well recommended." Clearing his throat, he returned to the paper in hand. "The man writes, 'I am unsure if this post will reach its destination. Likely the package I am sending will not. My hope is that one or the other of us will arrive safe and sound by December's end.'"

There was a stilted pause, then a gasp. "December's end!" The linen slipped from Mama's work-worn hands into her lap. "Any day now? But I thought he wasn't coming till spring!"

"Aye, any day," Papa growled, turning to take his daughters in.

He lingered longest on Elspeth, Eden noticed, and with good reason. But her great roundness was buried beneath her sewing, and she didn't so much as lift an eyebrow at Papa's stern scrutiny. Any day now Elspeth's child would be born.

But which would come first? The apprentice or the babe?

This was what worried her father, Eden knew. He had plans for her wayward sister that couldn't be breached by the early arrival of the stranger.

"You both know what this man's coming means?" he thun-

dered across the small parlor. The stern words made Eden's insides curl. She looked up, waiting for Elspeth to do the same, but her sister was simply ignoring her father, as she was prone to do when she disliked his dictums.

"Elspeth Ann!"

She finally snapped to attention, light and shadow playing across her lovely face, and met her father's eyes.

"You both know what this means, aye? You and Eden?"

"Yes, Papa," Elspeth murmured dutifully.

Eden's needle stilled and she simply nodded, grieved, barely detecting the telling sympathy in Mama's eyes at their predicament.

"The plan is this," he went on. "If the apprentice comes before the babe, the jig is up and he's to wed Eden. If he comes after the babe is born, he's yours, Elspeth. You know how things stand with an apprentice."

Mama nodded, her wistful expression revealing she knew of such matters firsthand. Years before, Papa was apprenticed to her father, a master gunsmith, and she'd been part and parcel of the contract. Though rumored that she loved another, tradition held sway. 'Twas a time-honored practice that apprentices marry into their master's family, as if some ironclad rule passed down from King George himself. Though times were changing and the war had been won, Papa was holding on to the past with both fists.

Studying his craggy face in the low glare of lamplight as he pondered the letter, Eden bit her lip. She suspected Papa's scheming had less to do with marrying them off than tying the man down for more mercenary purposes. Though every eligible suitor in the entire county trooped into their blacksmith shop to beg, barter, or pay coin for the ironwork turned out, none had yet passed muster—or could abide the thought of her father as father-in-law. How like Papa to forge

a liaison with a complete stranger, one who knew nothing of their affairs.

Oh, if she could but protest! Warm words festered on her tongue and raced round her head as she returned to her mending. *In all fairness, Father, this stranger you speak of is hardly a youth. He's at the tail end of his apprenticeship and shouldn't be coerced into keeping such a tradition. Besides, there's such a thing as love.*

But she couldn't be contrary. Her father's word was as unyielding as the metal he worked. Once, when she was five, she had spoken up—sassed him when she should have stayed silent—and had born a welt on her backside for a fortnight or better. Any backtalk had since been confined to her head.

"What's the man's name, Liege?" Mama asked, hands idle atop her lap.

"Ballantyne," he replied, perusing the accompanying package. "Silas Ballantyne."

Eden drank in every syllable, thinking it strong. Solid. Memorable. The last apprentice had been one George White, bland and utterly forgettable. Papa had disliked him from the first and nigh starved him, liberally applying the lash. He'd been but a boy. But this tradesman, from the sounds of it, was no mere lad. She'd not be sneaking him food like she had poor George, surely.

The rustle of paper and snap of string brought her head back up. The package this Scotsman had sent—cocooned in cloth and tied with twine—was slowly unwrapped. For long moments Papa looked at the metalwork as if struck speechless before holding the gift aloft. 'Twas a copper lantern, three sided, with a large hanging loop. From where she sat, Eden could see that the hinged lid bore a pierced scrolling pattern, every line elegantly worked. When her father lit the wick,



they all watched in a sort of trance as the lantern's mirrored back reflected twice the light.

"Upon my soul, he's a city smith—and a master engraver!" Papa's eyes narrowed and nearly gleamed. "No doubt I could sell this for a pretty penny."

"'Tis a gift," Eden whispered, forgetting herself. "Gifts aren't for sa—"

A sudden jab to her ribs silenced her. "Gifts are kept solely by sentimental fools." Elspeth's hiss held characteristic sharpness. Lifting her chin, she looked at their father. "Think of it, Papa. Why not let it be a template? Think of the orders you'd gain! A fine Philadelphia lantern here in the wilds of York County."

Eden marveled that even pregnancy had failed to soften her sister's business sense. In the glare of lamplight, Eden's eyes traced the profile of Elspeth and their father and found them startlingly alike. Elspeth should have been a son. Papa had said so a hundred times or better. If she closed her eyes, she could almost imagine her sister in breeches and a linen shirt—and pregnant to boot . . .

"I'll wager this work would stop Jacob Strauss's boasting," Papa muttered. "The old German may be the best inventor in these parts, but I'll wager he's not seen the likes of this. Speaking of Strauss, has he settled accounts for that iron trim we made him?"

Elspeth lifted her shoulders in a slight shrug. "Best check the ledgers. I finished tallying them this morning."

"Check them? I cannot find them." His scowl deepened. "I've told you to return them to the parlor, yet you leave them continually in the smithy."

With a sullen gesture for her to follow, he left the room, Elspeth trailing. Eden glanced at Mama, now engrossed in sewing a baby garment as if nothing unusual had happened,

no marital pronouncement had been made. Thomas played near the hearth with some wooden soldiers, making baby noises he'd yet to outgrow at age two. Sympathy softened her, and for a moment she forgot her own plight.

*Oh, little brother, what is in store for you?*

Wearied, she set aside her sewing and crossed to the table where the lantern rested, its rich copper winking at her with a beguiling light. The same admiration that gave her father pause filled her as she took in its fine craftsmanship.

"So he's a Scotsman." Mama's eyes, gray as the doves that nested beneath their eaves, settled on her thoughtfully. "'Tis an interesting name he has. It sounds well with either Eden or Elspeth."

Warmth snuck up Eden's neck. *Eden . . . Ballantyne?* Hearing them paired so made her squirm, yet she couldn't deny that what little she knew about the man was pleasing. He owned a fine name, could pen a handsome letter, was generous with his talents. Not all apprentices were so blessed. Still, she whispered, "Perhaps he's big as a barn and missing all his teeth."

Mama gave a rare chuckle. "Perhaps he's handsome as a midsummer's day. He's certainly generous to send so fine a gift. 'Tis a wise man who wins your father over before the work begins."

But once the work began, would he stay on? Eden expelled a ragged breath. "Papa cannot seem to keep an apprentice."

"'Tis not your father's fault two lads have run off," she returned. "George White was not physically fit for the trade—so thin a strong wind would have pushed him over. As for Bartholomew Edwards, though big as a barn, he hadn't the smarts of a louse, your sister said."

"Papa does need an extra hand at the forge."

"Indeed, he does. York County is burgeoning and has but one able blacksmith." Mama's needle plied the flannel fabric

with a sure hand as she recited the facts. "Your father is aging and the workload is heavy. Elspeth is almost one and twenty, you yourself are nineteen. 'Tis time—past time—one of you were betrothed."

*Betrothed.*

The very word sent a shiver through Eden. A man—a *husband*—was on his way, and she'd not yet felt a flutter of romance for any suitor . . . or the touch of a man's hand. "So the babe is to decide our fate."

Mama nodded. "You heard your father. If the babe arrives first, Silas Ballantyne is betrothed to Elspeth. If not, he's to be yours. There are worse things in the world than an arranged marriage, Daughter."

Looking up, Eden saw a shadow cross her mother's face, as if she'd caught herself in a lie. Had their present predicament sparked one too many painful memories? Gauzy bits of gossip gleaned over the years about her parents' beginnings swirled through Eden's head, tempting her to ask questions she'd not dared to before. But she simply said, "Does this man—Mr. Ballantyne—know there's to be a match?"

"That he's to wed one of you?" Mama lifted plump shoulders in a shrug. "Your father hasn't said, though the apprentice is likely aware of the tradition."

"I care not for such traditions."

"Eden Rose!" Mama blanched at this rare show of defiance. "Has Margaret Hunter been filling your head with rebellious notions—or Jemma Greathouse with the books she lends you?"

"No, Mama, I just don't care to be married. To anyone."

Mama looked at her like she had two heads. "Then what else would you aspire to?"

The probing question cut Eden to the quick, though she had a ready answer.

*I aspire to something beyond the stifling confines of this house, far beyond Papa's fierce temper and Elspeth's contentious spirit, and the endless monotony of my days.*

But she couldn't give it voice, not with Mama peering at her like she was privy to the inner workings of her heart and soul. No one must know her secret. *No one.* She'd best tread cautiously till the plan was in place. And pray the babe came before the apprentice.



Standing by the meadow pond the next afternoon, Eden tried to look at everything through a stranger's eyes—through Silas Ballantyne's—but since she'd been born and bred here, that was hard to do. Now, in early winter, the place held few charms. The landscape was skeletal at best, full of shivering oaks and elms, low stone fences, and a ribbon of road in shades of gray.

Even the pond gracing the near meadow looked more puddle, swollen by rain, yet devoid of its blue brightness. 'Twas simply an uninspiring dove gray like all the rest, mirroring the dullness inside her. She longed for a little color. Her soul felt nigh starved for it. But she was no better, totally nondescript in butternut wool, worn leather shoes, and fraying bonnet.

Her gaze strayed to the little church on the hill, her imagination filling in what she couldn't see beyond the snowy rise—a muddy road, more meadows and fences, a few farms, then the tiny hamlet of Elkhannah with its gristmill, a school, and a scattering of timbered houses. The village of York, far larger and busier, was just beyond.

Though she'd just come from the neighboring estate, Hope Rising, she already felt the pull to return there. The rich taste of imported tea and raisin scones lingered on her tongue, compliments of its housekeeper, Margaret Hunter. Each Sab-

bath she and Margaret met regularly and saw to the needs of the tenants who lived on Hope Rising land. There were but twenty of them at last count, but someone always seemed in need of a basket or tonic, a pair of mittens or a kind word.

Eden glanced down the lane to the big house a final time, a great yearning skewing her insides. But it seemed Elspeth stood there watching, about to rebuke her for her gawking.

“You can find no fault with Hope Rising and no good at home,” her sister had once said, a bite of bitterness in her tone.

Eden acknowledged the truth of it now. She’d always loved the very land the Greathouses owned, every hilly, timber-rich inch. Even in the depths of winter it never seemed to be lacking, nor steeped in mud as was their own home place. The glazed brick house topped with a gambrel roof glowed a rich red, warm as a fire’s embers, as did every dependency surrounding it—smokehouse, icehouse, necessary, and summer kitchen—right down to the bricks in the garden walkway. Even the gate with its fancy scrolled ironwork seemed to smile in rich defiance at winter’s bleakness.

Hope Rising was the only respite from what had always seemed a dreary life. Even with Master David and his cousins away, ’twas grand to her. Ever since she’d been small she was welcomed there, had imagined herself one of them. The cook had snuck her sweetmeats. The gardener showered her with flowers, tucking a peony or rose into the buttonhole of her simple homespun dress. The stable master, long dead now, let her ride a pony named Tomkin. And the elder Greathouse, a conundrum though he’d been with his rare smiles and rollicking temper, allowed his nephew and daughters to befriend her and Elspeth.

But it was not to last. Time and privilege had wedged its way between them. The three Greathouse girls had gone to

finishing school and become proper Philadelphia belles while David went to England, enrolling at a fancy school called Eton. Eden and Elspeth remained behind to manage the wear and tear of ordinary life in York County.

Tucking the faded memories away, Eden focused on a redbird atop a shivering branch. She supposed she made a strange sight, standing forlornly by the pond. If the apprentice happened by, he'd think her fey—or a hopeless dreamer as Elspeth did. The thought spurred her down the tree-lined lane toward home, but as she went she was trailed by another, larger worry.

Just whose husband would Silas Ballantyne be?

Perhaps there was no need to fret. Perhaps he wouldn't arrive but become lost in the woods between here and Philadelphia. Or become the third apprentice to run off before his time. Such ponderings made her almost dizzy, like she'd been skating in endless circles on the pond for too long, just as she'd done in childhood.

When she was halfway across the icy meadow, snow began to fall, covering her worn cape with a lacy dusting. She felt a rush of wonder. Oh, let a snowfall dress the landscape like a bride! When the apprentice came, the only home she'd ever known would seem a magical place.

Not misery.

## 2

*Much may be made of a  
Scotchman if he be caught young.*

SAMUEL JOHNSON

The winter landscape was like an old man—or a poor one like himself, Silas Ballantyne decided. Full of sharp angles and bony barren places, never quite comfortable or at rest. But he was rich in spirit, he remembered, lest self-pity take root. He had some tools. A violin. A vision. And he'd traveled nearly fifty miles in two days, lacking but thirty more till he reached York County. If he pushed harder he'd be there on the morrow, but his gelding was acting a bit sore-footed, and then the snow came, at first fragile as a dusting of flour and then thick as goose feathers.

Squinting through the twilight glare he saw a light in the distance—an answer to prayer. His stomach cramped at the aroma of wood smoke and baking bread. What he'd give for some bannocks and mutton stew. The memory of his Highland home sharpened and turned melancholy, so he thrust it aside and grappled for a gracious thought. *The Lord giveth*

*and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.* Tonight the Almighty seemed a giving God, and Silas uttered bethankit before seeing the colorful shingle flapping in the swelling wind.

The Rising Sun Tavern. A far cry from the Man Full of Trouble Tavern he'd frequented on Spruce Street in Philadelphia. There he'd downed seared ham with raisin sauce and applejack each Sabbath, his one ample meal of the week. Here he smelled roast sweet potatoes and goose and something else he couldn't name—or afford. A handbill had been nailed to the front door, which he perused tongue in cheek. Not all taverns were what they claimed to be—nor were people, he mused.

Guests must be treated with kindness and cordiality, served wholesome food, and all beds, windows, crockery, and utensils to be kept in good order.

Tired and tempted, he tied Horatio to the hitch rail in front and entered the large, smoke-filled public room to find it bursting, the rattle of dice at gaming tables sounding like dead men's bones. Shoulders slightly bent with the weight of twin haversacks, rifle in hand, his first thought was to stable his horse.

"How goes it, stranger?" A voice boomed from behind a scarred counter, overriding the surrounding din.

"Well enough," Silas answered, turning that direction. "I've a lame horse to see about."

With a nod and a whistle, the apron-clad man summoned a servant and then bent to hear the lad whisper in his ear. He straightened with a scowl. "The stable's nearly as full as the inn this snowy eve. What else will ye be needing?"

"I've little coin left," Silas admitted. "Mayhap I'd best see to my horse."



The shillings crossed the counter and disappeared into one of the man's many linen folds. He was enormous—big as a ship's sail, or so it seemed. Silas tried not to stare, stepping aside when the door behind him opened to admit a retinue.

A gentleman swept in ahead of three women, his beaver hat frosted with snow, the jewel-colored capes of the ladies the same. Beneath the wide brims of their bonnets, the feminine trio stared at Silas without a speck of primness as if he were a horse at auction. Heat crept beneath his collar and rose higher, encroaching on cold cheekbones. He shifted his rifle to the crook of his other arm, perusing the tavern floor with its alternating boards of white ash and black walnut, made bright by wooden and tin chandeliers.

"Ah, Mr. Greathouse!" The innkeeper tossed out a greeting and gave a little bow. "What brings you to the Rising Sun?"

"The weather and naught else," the young man answered moodily, knocking his hat against his knee. Snow spattered to the floorboards, glistening like discarded diamonds. "I'll wager we'll be snowed in here till New Year's and not make it to Philadelphia."

"You're abandoning Hope Rising then?"

"Just till the ice harvest. The place is deadly dull in winter, or so my cousins tell me." He slid his eyes in their direction, a rueful pinch to his mouth. "They crave the comforts of the city and all its distractions."

At this, the three women tittered and talked in whispers. Silas turned his back to them, overcome with the scent of lavender sachet and their powdered, feminine faces.

"I've one room left for your party, but it needs a good tidying first." The innkeeper summoned a harried serving girl. "Your cousins can wait in the ladies' parlor, and I'll have Effie serve them tea."

"Very well." Greathouse nodded his head at the women,

and they left the room, obviously familiar with the inn. He cast an appraising eye over the crowd, his ruddy features relaxing. "I'll have whatever they're having . . . if there's any left."

Chuckling, the innkeeper moved toward a far door Silas supposed was the kitchen. The supper smells were intensifying, and he was suddenly bone weary. Shifting his load, he waited for Greathouse to step away from the door and take the only remaining table before he made his way to the stable. The thought of a hay-strewn space, though cold, was far preferable to a flea-infested room where they slept six to a bed.

"So, man, have a seat." The gentleman—Greathouse—was looking at him, gesturing to a chair.

Surprise and suspicion riffled through Silas at the invitation. There were but two seats left in the room. He'd not insult the man by refusing. Besides, he had no wish to seek shelter in the stable just yet, though he did need to see to his horse. He disappeared for a time, then returned and lowered his belongings to the floor, taking the offered chair, eye on the huge stone hearth gracing the low-beamed room, its flames burnishing the paneled interior a pleasing russet.

"Are you traveling east or west?" Greathouse asked, hanging his cloak on a peg behind him.

"West," Silas answered, removing his battered hat.

"Oh? We're in need of an extra man at Hope Rising."

"Hope Rising?"

"Our family's estate—*my* estate." A look of bemusement lit his features. "Sometimes I forget my good fortune. My uncle passed last year, God rest him. Since he had but three daughters and no male heir, everything passed to me."

"You're not sorry about that, I suppose," Silas said wryly.

Greathouse chuckled. "His father, my grandfather, made his fortune as a privateer in the Seven Years' War." There was

unmistakable pride in the words. “His first ship—a sloop—was called *Hope Rising*.”

“I ken the name,” Silas said quietly, a cold realization dawning. “I’ve seen the *Sally* and *Antelope* at anchor alongside it in Philadelphia.” *Slavers, all*, he thought with a twist of disgust, appetite ebbing.

“Ah, yes, we’ve some business in Jamaica and the West Indies, and occasionally dock in Philadelphia. But I let my factor handle any unsavory matters.” He averted narrowed eyes, clearly anxious to change the subject. “You’re going west, did you say? You have the look of an able hand.”

“I’m apprenticed in York County.”

“Apprenticed?” Surprise lightened his features, and he raked a hand through unruly, straw-colored hair. “You wouldn’t be bound for Liege Lee’s, would you?”

“Aye,” Silas answered as the innkeeper returned and set down a steaming trencher of more food than he’d seen in a fortnight.

“Two pints of ale and another plate,” Greathouse ordered without pause. “I’m not a man who likes eating alone.”

Taking a steadying breath, Silas wondered just what he wanted—and what he knew about Liege Lee.

Greathouse forked a piece of meat to his mouth and chewed thoughtfully, eyeing him with renewed interest. “How long before you’re a master tradesman yourself?”

“A year or less.”

“I could use a good blacksmith. My estate borders the Lees’ should you, um, have need of employment in future.”

The second plate was plunked down. Mindful that Greathouse was watching, Silas bowed his head anyway and uttered a silent prayer. The raucous laughter and rolling of dice all around him resounded far louder than his low amen.

“So you’re a religious man. A Presbyterian, I’ll wager.”

His smile was thin and laced with warning. "You shall need a prayer or two before your time with the Lees is through."

Silas sat back in his chair, the man's insinuations wearing thin. But he lifted his own tankard in a sort of toast. "If they're such heathens, mayhap I'll convert them."

At this, Greathouse nearly spewed his ale in amusement. "That I would like to see, though their youngest daughter does have Quaker leanings."

"God is good at making silk purses out of sows' ears, aye?"

"She's no sow," Greathouse murmured around a mouthful of bread.

Smiling now, Silas took another sip of ale and pinned his gaze on the young man opposite, who was turning a shade shy of beet red.

Greathouse blundered, "I mean—well, our land borders the Lees' and—you see, we have occasion to meet."

"Who?"

"Me . . . and Miss Eden."

*Miss Eden.* The laird of Hope Rising was undeniably smitten. Warming to his easy manner, Silas decided to learn all he could. "So there's a daughter, then?"

"Yes, indeed, more than one." He wiped his mouth with a napkin, still looking like he'd been caught snitching something. "Though the eldest has been ill for some months and confined to the house."

Hearing it, Silas felt a clutch of concern. Two daughters too many. He wanted no distractions, no romantic entanglements. He simply had an apprenticeship to finish. And his future, unenviable as it was, lay far beyond York County.

"There's also a younger brother and the mistress of the house, Louise Lee. They've been there thirty years or better, since the time my uncle built Hope Rising." Greathouse

studied him intently. “If you don’t mind my saying so, you’re a bit on the mature side for an apprentice.”

“The war got in the way,” Silas said simply. He looked to his plate, cutting off a bite of meat and wishing he could do the same with the conversation. He had no wish to recount his personal history. His main concern was the Lees and the situation he was walking into.

Greathouse leaned back in his chair. “The war, yes. I didn’t serve myself, being the heir. My father and uncle forbade it and pressed someone else into service. You’re from Philadelphia, then?”

“Nae, Scotland.”

“I’d gathered that, given your speech. I see the outline of a fiddle in your baggage there. How long did you say you’ll be with the Lees?”

“A year or less, unless . . .”

The sympathetic smile returned. “Unless you become the third apprentice to quit before his time?”

*The third?*

Silas set down his fork. Dread danced up and down his spine and nearly stole his appetite. He’d not been told this. The trade guild had simply given him a name and address. Liege Lee on Elkhannah Creek, York County, Pennsylvania. With the war won, he was fortunate to find a place, or so he’d thought. Like himself, nearly every apprentice in the colonies had collected a bounty and enlisted in the rebel army and was now seeking a position.

“I’ll wager from the look of you that Liege Lee has met his match,” Greathouse said with a smug smile. “And like I said, work awaits you at Hope Rising, should you need it in future.”



Silas began the remaining thirty miles of his journey, fortified by a good meal and a sound if frigid night's sleep in the stable. 'Twas Tuesday morn, the last of December. Horatio, rested and well-fed, with no sign of lameness, gave him little trouble even in half a foot of snow. Yet he found himself wishing the journey was far longer, that something warm and sure and good awaited him at day's end.

As it was, the scanty facts learned at supper with David Greathouse left him at loose ends. Liege Lee sounded like a tyrant of a blacksmith with a wife. At least one bonny daughter. A young son. Two failed apprenticeships. The latter was common enough. Masters and apprentices did not always mix. Bound men ran off all the time. He'd considered it himself, but his convictions held him fast. He pondered it now, fighting anxiety.

Mayhap he'd best keep going and bypass the Lees altogether. His ambitions lured him westward to Fort Pitt, far beyond the boundaries of York. The lyrical names of the rivers there played in his mind like a melody. The Monongahela. The Allegheny. The Ohio. Indian words, all. But much as he wanted to, he couldn't push west till he'd fulfilled the terms of his contract. He'd have need of it in future.

The Lee farm, Greathouse told him, lay a league south of Elkhannah Creek. Silas measured his steps, taking note of his strange surroundings. He passed beneath a giant oak holding fast to a few stubborn leaves, majestic and stalwart in the newly fallen snow. All around him the countryside was rolling and open, so pastoral it reminded him of southern England. Gentle hills and meadows abounded, nothing as abrupt or raw as his Highland home. He'd expected more wilderness, a wild and rough beauty, and felt disappointment pool in his chest.

In time he passed an ornate gate with an *H* and an *R*

wrought in fancy iron, much as he'd worked in Philadelphia. Hope Rising? A long drive snaked past an abundance of linden trees, but he couldn't make out the house at road's end. David Greathouse was a man of means—a gentleman—thus his house would be the same.

His misperceptions shifted once again. He'd not thought to find signs of civilization—wealth—this far west, just modest farms at best. For a few moments he felt disoriented in the glare of blinding snow. He couldn't ask for directions or inquire how much farther he had to go, for no other steps marred the ground but his and Horatio's. A strong west wind was picking up, keening like women at a Scottish wake, and he looked uneasily in its direction.

His gaze snagged on an ice-encrusted pond just beyond a low stone fence. Greathouse land, he guessed. Surely the laird wouldn't begrudge him a swim. Though hardly the River Tay of his youth, nor the heat of summer, it would have to do. He reeked of horses and hay, hardly fit for company, even that of a tyrant blacksmith.

A good quarter of an hour later he was clean, though made of gooseflesh. A clean linen shirt, scratchy breeches, thick woolen stockings, and worn boots covered his frigid skin, and he was only too glad to slip into the confines of his frayed greatcoat again. His two days' growth of beard he could do little about, as he was lacking a razor. He'd lost both shaving kit and comb between here and Philadelphia when Horatio stumbled, spilling him into a ditch, but hurting little more than his pride.

On he walked, making note of every shrub and rock that raised its head above the snow, listening for the echoing cadence of a hammer striking iron. Heavy snowflakes began to dance down, and a biting wind made ice of his washed hair. Another quarter of a mile and he was soon in sight

of a farm he knew was the Lees', given the distinguishing feature Greathouse had told him about—a bold, wrought-iron weathervane atop a large barn adjoining a blacksmith's shop, its stone chimney puffing smoke. The farmhouse was simple, if sprawling, and made of local limestone. All around it fallow fields lay like faded squares of an old, fraying quilt.

Would the Lees be expecting him? Had they received his letter? The lantern? 'Twas all too quiet below. Nary a dog barked. He felt a niggling worry for all that awaited based on David Greathouse's ominous words and his own Scottish good sense. And then his faith thrust him forward, checking his dread.

*Father, to this place You've led me, and I thank You for safe travels. May Your purposes be accomplished here, whate'er they may be.*