

Chapter One

Return to Guilford

The weary horsemen rode hunkered down in the saddle as they climbed the Deep Gap Trail of Grandfather Mountain. Snow blew into their faces, turning eyebrows and other facial hair into curly little icicles. The men weren't dressed for such extreme cold this late in the spring. They chose this route because, under normal conditions, going over the mountain was faster than going around the mountain along the river trail. Mother Nature's surprise obscured the panoramic view of the Watauga Valley and the town of Boone below in the distance. Adam's grown sons had often heard their father describe the view from the top of "ole Grandfather."

Adam hollered over the shrieking wind. "Robert, you best take the lead now—your eyesight is much better than mine. Everyone into single file."

The drifts of snow now came halfway up to the horse's knees. The two short-legged pack donkeys tethered to the last horse sensed their precarious predicament. They struggled and pulled back on the reins as John, the youngest Mitchell on the trip, tried to coax the stubborn animals forward, knowing that the donkeys had ample reason to resist.

"We best stop," Robert, the oldest of Adam's sons, yelled back. "I can't see the trail any longer. We could wander off a cliff."

Adam pulled on the reins to stop his horse. "I know you're right, but we could freeze to death on this mountain."

William, the middle son, agreed. "We best take our chances on the mountain."

Adam shouted over the howling wind. "I'm sorry I brought you over the mountain rather than going through the valley." He shook his head. "Had no idea this spring storm was coming."

Robert looked at his brothers before he spoke. "We know, Father."

"You did what you thought was best at the time." Jimmy Witherspoon yelled to be heard over the howling wind.

Adam dismounted. "Best make some type of shelter."

They found a heavy thicket where a herd of deer had taken refuge from the storm. Their approach startled the deer, and they scattered. The heat of the bodies of the creatures that had been lying there caused a smoky steam to rise.

Jimmy knelt to feel the warmth by holding a bare hand over the exposed dry ground. He looked up at his companions and smiled. "I think we should take

advantage of the dry ground”

The men placed a heavy oilcloth tarp on the ground to sit on and used the rest of the tarps carried by the donkeys to create a makeshift shelter. They huddled beneath the tarps in a circle, clutching the bulky material the best they could to prevent it from blowing away. Their backs were up against one another to preserve body heat. Each spread his bedroll over the front of his body—shoulders to feet. The scant fire was too small and too far away to provide warmth, but it would deter the predators that roamed the mountain. Snow drifts piled up against the tarps, forming a wall that would help protect their bodies against the whistling wind.

Jimmy removed a small, leather-bound Bible from his satchel and clutched it reverently to his chest. The Bible had been a gift to the minister from members of the Hebron Presbyterian Church. “Will you pray with me?”

They prayed, and Jimmy recited Psalm 23 from memory as it was too dark to read from the Bible. They found comfort in the Scripture and Jimmy’s prayers.

They knew someone must stay awake if they were to survive. They told stories and jokes far into the night, trying not to succumb to unconsciousness and sure death.

Adam volunteered to stay awake so the others could get some rest. He reminded himself of many dangerous experiences they had survived and prayed they would get through this situation. He and Elizabeth were fortunate that all their children survived to adulthood, except for baby Joseph, who had been taken in his sleep by a bolt of lightning. *God must have needed him for an angel.*

As he slept, Robert began to shake and utter the strange sounds that his father and brothers had heard many times before.

“Please, don’t bring any more bodies. No more, please,” Robert pleaded in his sleep.

Adam leaned over and spoke softly to his son. “It’s all right, Robert. It’s just a bad dream that will go away when you wake up.” He sighed, knowing that Robert’s nightmares would never go away, nor would his.

Before dawn, the wind began to die. Adam could see stars and a waning crescent moon through a small hole in the tarp over his head. The moonlight gave the new fallen snow that covered the mountain a bluish tint. Grandfather Mountain was known for its snow-covered cap into the summer, but a blizzard this late in the year was unusual. Adam leaned over and placed a hand on the clergyman’s knee to wake him. “You did good, Jimmy. Our prayers have been answered.”

Jimmy tried not to reveal that he had fallen asleep. “That’s g-g-ood.”

“At daylight, we’re getting off this mountain and on to Guilford Courthouse,”

Adam said.

Jimmy yawned. "It's now called Martinsville."

"I know, but it will always be Guilford Courthouse to me."

Robert stretched and rubbed his eyes with gloved hands. "Sounds like a strange name for a town."

Adam shrugged. "Never was a town, just a few farmhouses near the courthouse of Guilford County. For lack of a better name, we just called the community Guilford Courthouse. I believe it was our neighbor, Francis McNairy, who first called it that."

Robert said, "I went to school with his son John."

"That's right. Matter of fact, Francis and John both witnessed the sale of Mother's farm to Mr. Hamilton.."

John wrinkled his forehead, "I don't understand why someone would give back land that they paid you good money for."

"From his correspondence, it seems the responsibility of protecting hallowed ground was more than Mr. Hamilton could endure," Adam said.

His sons became very quiet, each in their own thoughts of that dreadful March day when their home was destroyed by the British and their lives altered forever. Jimmy had often heard the stories and shuddered at the thought of what the family had endured during the battle. Not only was he their minister, but he had also attended Samuel Doak's Salem Church and school with Adam Mitchell's sons. Now he was assisting Peggy, the eldest Mitchell daughter, to teach at the Hebron School.

After a short silence, the men started to move. Once out from under the smelly oilcloth, they could see the sun slowly rising over a few dwellings in the far distance.

Adam pointed. "That's smoke billowing from fireplaces in Boone. Boys, get a good look at it—you dang near gave your lives to see it."

"Is Boone in North Carolina or Tennessee?" John asked as he rolled his bedroll.

"Don't know for sure." Adam shook his head. "It was North Carolina when ole Daniel Boone first settled it, but it's so close to the boundary of three states it could be anyone's guess. Might even be Virginia."

They fed the animals cracked corn. The men gnawed on deer jerky and didn't bother to build a fire. They just wanted to get off the mountain.

The snow had stopped, but the ground was covered with drifts of white powder—knee-high in places. Leading the horses, the men trudged down the northeast side of the mountain, a descent that would take most of the day.

Half-frozen and wearing wet clothes, the men stopped at the only inn along the road.

“Welcome to the Boone Inn, gentlemen.” A little man of no more than five feet spoke with a British accent. “I’m Jonathan Wilkes, the proprietor. What can I do for you?” he asked, looking nervously at the gun-toting mountain men. Then he relaxed when he saw Jimmy’s collar and the Bible he cradled.

“We need to warm up, eat a good meal, feed our animals, and get some rest,” Adam said.

“I have a large room upstairs with a fireplace that the five of you can share. Three can sleep on the rope bed, which has a fine feather mattress, and two can roll out bedrolls on the floor.”

“Sounds good, don’t you think?” Adam looked at his traveling companions, who eagerly nodded their approval. “We’ll take it.”

Opening the door to the room for his boarders, the innkeeper asked, “Where are you from?”

Adam answered, “From Knob Creek, north of Jonesborough.”

Mr. Wilkes led them to the barn. Once the horses and mules were cared for and the men had eaten a warm meal, they retired to their room.

The roaring fire in the large, limestone fireplace warmed their bodies and dried the heavy linsey-woolsey clothing hung about the room.

At breakfast the next morning, Mr. Wilkes asked, “What brings you this far from Knob Creek?”

“Headed to Guilford Courthouse on business,” Adam said.

The young innkeeper appeared to be about the same age as Robert, who was twenty-seven. Mr. Wilkes said he was a newcomer to the mountains, having recently moved from New York to buy the inn from the previous owner.

He stood only a few inches from Adam. “Must be important business,” Wilkes said, peering inquisitively into Adam’s eyes.

“Yes, it is.”

The innkeeper leaned closer to hear more, as if he expected Adam to whisper a secret into his ear. Adam ignored Mr. Wilkes’ question and leaned back away from him.

“Were your parents loyalists?” Adam asked.

“They were neutral,” Mr. Wilkes snapped. “Would you like more biscuits?” He held out the breadbasket toward Adam.

Adam grabbed the breadbasket and slammed it on the table. “They had to be either Tories or Patriots. Only Quakers were neutral. With your inn serving whisky, I don’t think you would be of that sect.”

The other four men looked at their elder, surprised at his sudden anger toward this little man.

"I was just a child during the Revolution. My parents always told me they didn't get involved in the war." Wilkes picked up the breadbasket and turned away to offer biscuits to the other men.

Adam jumped up from his chair and shouted, "How could your family *not* be involved in the Revolutionary War?"

The innkeeper remained silent, looking down at the dusty buffalo hide that covered his hard-packed dirt floor, obviously uncomfortable with Adam's outburst.

"Adam, the war is over," Jimmy said. "We won our freedom. What difference does it make?"

Adam's face turned red. He glared at Jimmy, then at his sons, then at the innkeeper. Shaking his head, he stormed toward the door without his coat. At the door, he turned back and took a deep breath. "I best check on the horses. You need to gather your belongings."

John followed his father. "Let me help you."

Jimmy said, "I have never seen or heard Adam Mitchell speak to anyone like that, Mr. Wilkes."

"Me, neither," Robert said.

"Sounds very bitter about a war that his side won." Mr. Wilkes picked up Adam's plate.

Jimmy took a deep breath. "Yes, but that war cost him everything he had."

Robert's and William's thoughts drifted for a moment back inside the spring house when they were young boys listening to the cries of the wounded in their cornfields.

John followed Adam into the stable adjacent to the inn. "What happened in there? I've never seen you so angry at anyone."

"His accent and his looks reminded me of the British guard who taunted me and the other Guilford Militiamen in the pigpen where we were kept prisoner after the battle."

"He reminds you of someone who mistreated you?" John asked.

"Yes." Adam looked down at the ground. "But, more than that, I dread seeing the farm fields that your grandfather and I cleared, knowing that all those bodies are buried in what was our farm."

"I understand, and I think my brothers and I feel the same." John put an arm on his father's shoulder. He looked into Adam's blue eyes and saw a small tear from a man who seldom showed any emotion.

"I just don't know if I can oversee the land from so far away."

“Don’t you think Reverend Caldwell would help? He lives nearby.”

“I know he would if he could, but he and Rachel are both getting old.” Adam took a deep breath.

John said, “You have sons who will follow your wishes.”

“That’s right!” William said as he entered the stable.

Adam smiled at his sons. “I know, but you boys are all getting married and soon will have your own families to care for.”

“Father, we’re family. We’ll do what needs to be done,” William said.

When the reverend and Robert came in, Adam said, “Get your horses saddled. I’ll pay our board and apologize to Mr. Wilkes.”

The sun shone brightly without a cloud in the sky. The travelers rode hard to make up for the time they had lost in the snowstorm. As they approached a fork in the road, they reined in their horses.

“Things are beginning to look familiar,” John said.

William pointed straight ahead. “I remember that fork.”

“I think we’ve made it, boys.” Adam spurred his horse forward.

When the others caught up to Adam, they found him on his knees in front of a small rock structure embedded in the side of the creek. Adam gently caressed the rocks he and his father had laboriously stacked so many years ago to make a cool place for the family to store dairy products and eggs.

Adam looked around the tiny space. “This is what’s left of the spring house.”

“It’s amazing that it’s still standing,” Robert said.

“If the British army couldn’t destroy it, nothing else could,” Adam said.

John and William stood up in their stirrups to look down into the roofless shell of the spring house from the top of the creek bank.

John looked around and spoke. “It seemed much larger when I was a child.”

“Of course, everything seems larger when you’re a child,” William said.

John shook his head and mumbled, “I don’t even want to think about it.”

Adam and Robert stepped into the ruins, followed by Jimmy.

Jimmy looked at Adam, and then around at the tiny space. “You mean this is where Mother Mitchell, Elizabeth, and the children hid during the battle?” The stories Peggy told him were beginning to make sense. He visualized them inside with the door shut, thousands of soldiers going at one another, guns and cannons blazing amidst the clang of swords and bayonets.

Adam and his sons didn’t say a word, but all nodded their heads to acknowledge the question.

Adam led his horse a short distance up a small knoll. The boys followed, leading their horses and the pack animals to the spot where their home had once

stood. It also was in shambles, another victim of the horrific fight that had taken place here.

Standing in front of where the front porch had been, no one said a word. They just gazed at what had been their home. Suddenly a mongrel bitch came charging out from under the remains of the porch. The yellowish dog stopped three yards in front of the men and growled menacingly, the hair on her back standing up straight. She appeared to be nursing.

“She has a pack of pups under there that she’s protecting.” Adam approached her slowly, holding out a piece of deer jerky. “Here, old girl, take this.”

“Careful,” Robert said.

“She’s starved from nursing her litter.” Adam reached out further to her.

The excited dog wouldn’t take the jerky from his hand, so he tossed it in front of her. She grabbed it and scurried back under the rubble. As soon as her head disappeared from the men’s sight, they heard sounds of movement and a babble of yelps.

“Hear the pups?” Adam asked.

“Sure do,” John answered.

Adam looked around the area and then at his sons. “What do we have that would fill her stomach?”

John reached for his rifle. “I’ll go shoot a rabbit before it gets dark.”

“Good idea. We can camp here by the ruins tonight and give the old girl some human company, whether she wants it or not,” Adam said.

The men worked together to build a fire and create a shelter with the tarps. They would be in Guilford County several nights, and Adam remembered the frequent spring rains of the Piedmont.

A gunshot rang out. Everyone jumped.

Adam took a deep breath. “Sounds like John hit something.”

“Hope it’s a big one.” Robert patted his stomach. “That ole mamma dog isn’t the only one who’s hungry.”

“Me, too,” William said.

Jimmy said, “You won’t have to wait long. I hear John coming now.”

“That’s the biggest rabbit I ever saw!” exclaimed William as he pulled the large deer carcass off John’s horse.

“I came up on a rabbit, and just as I was about to fire, this deer came out of the timber. I only had one shot, so I took the best one.”

Adam patted his son on the back. “Good job. We can feed the mongrel and still have meat for us.”

“You sure do worry about that dog.” Robert helped William hang the deer

spread-eagle in an elm tree to bleed out before butchering.

“She reminds me of Lulubelle. She’s the same color but a different body shape.” Adam sighed deeply, remembering the death of the family dog the previous summer. “I sure miss Lulubelle. Wonder how this dog ended up here at our old home?”

“This is for her.” John pitched a handful of innards under the rubble of the house.

“Did you see how fast she wolfed that up?” Robert asked.

The reverend leaned down to look under the house. “She’s pretty weak—couldn’t catch a mouse in her condition.”

After a hearty meal of venison, cornbread, and red beans, the men laid out their bedrolls and were just about asleep when a raspy voice cried out of the darkness. “Adam, is that you?”

John and William instinctively reached for their guns.

“I’m Adam Mitchell. Who goes there?”

The voice, sounding like that of an old man, answered, “Adam, it’s Trapper John come back to haunt you.”

Adam strained his eyes, trying to make out the features of the strange-looking man through the billowing smoke of the campfire. The man held a long shepherd’s crook. He wore a full-length cloth robe tied at the waist, and his belongings were strapped to his back. The center of his head was bald. His thin, shaggy, gray hair and long, gray beard had only a few thin streaks of dark hair. “Is it really you, Trapper?”

The men met halfway and embraced in a bear hug so intense they almost fell in the campfire. Robert, William, and John jumped up and joined in the welcoming celebration as Jimmy enjoyed watching the reunion of old friends. “Which one of you young ’uns is Robert?” Trapper asked.

“That would be me.”

“Can’t believe you’re all growed up. Do you remember me carrying you in a papoose as I plowed your father’s fields?” Trapper asked.

“I don’t remember that, but I remember you coming to our house for breakfast.”

Trapper looked at the other three young men, “You must be . . .”

“I’m William, the next oldest—exactly four years younger than Robert.”

Trapper looked at the two other men and turned to one of them, “I think I see a family resemblance. You must be John.”

“That’s right, the third son.”

“Well, then, who is this fellow smiling like a possum?”

Adam said, “Trapper, meet Reverend James Witherspoon, our pastor. We

call him Jimmy.”

Trapper grinned, showing only a few teeth. “You Mitchell boys getting into so much trouble you have to bring your preacher with you all the way from Knob Creek?”

“Reverend Witherspoon came along in hopes of meeting Reverend Caldwell and Rachel,” Adam said.

“I’m honored to meet a man of the cloth. I know Reverend and Missus Caldwell are excited about seeing Adam and the boys. I’m sure he’d want to meet you.” Trapper bowed his head.

“The honor is mine,” Jimmy said.

“Have you eaten? We have lots of stewed venison left.” Adam pointed to the pot sitting beside the campfire.

Trapper stepped closer. “You know, I wouldn’t turn down something to eat.”

The men gathered around the campfire and watched as Trapper gulped down three big bowls of venison stew and the remaining cornbread. They put a pot of coffee on the fire for what would be a long night of catching up between old friends.

“Can I get you anything else?” Adam asked.

“Jist another cup of that coffee, if you please. Widow Jessop doesn’t keep any at home. She thinks it’s bad for me.” Trapper shook his head. “After all the rotgut whisky I drunk, what difference does it make? I sure miss a good cup of campfire coffee now and then.”

“How did you know I was here?” Adam asked.

“Mr. Hamilton told me you would be here by the first day of May. Course, I can’t read or write, so I don’t know what day that would be. I guess he got tired of me asking every day when you would be here. So he told me in three sunrises you’d be here. This morning was three sunrises since he told me that.”

“Then you can count,” Adam said.

“I can’t count much, but I can get to three. So I went to the courthouse this morning, and Mr. Hamilton said you wrote that you would be here today. He seemed put out that you weren’t here. I told him that if you said you was gonna to be here, you’d be here—and here you are!”

“We planned on being here sooner, but we got caught on Grandfather Mountain in a snowstorm,” Adam said.

“This late in the spring?”

“Yes sir, it was some blizzard. Thought we were going to freeze to death.” Adam made a brushing motion with his hand as if to wipe away that thought. “Now I have to know how you escaped the Hessian soldiers when they captured me. For all these years, until I got John Hamilton’s letter, I thought you were

dead. Tell me what happened.”

Trapper chuckled. “Once those Hessians broke through the front line of the Guilford County Militia near Hoskins Farm, everything happened so fast.”

Trapper took a sip of coffee.

Adam said, “Yes, it did.”

“I followed you up a cliff jist behind you a little ways. As I got to the top, I seen they had you. No sooner than I seen you, the ground underneath me gave way, and I was jist swallowed up.”

“Swallowed up?” Adam asked.

Trapper looked down, “I felt so bad I couldn’t protect you like I promised your mother I would.”

“There were too many of them; there was nothing you could have done,” Adam said. “How did the earth just swallow you up?”

“The bank of the creek gave way under my weight. I fell backward into the dry creek bed, and the cliff jist caved in on top of me. As luck would have it, my face fell next to a big fallen timber. An opening under that log gave me jist a crack to see and breathe. I laid there on my face for a long time. That dirt was so heavy, it felt like it was crushing my bones.”

The listening men looked at each other with expressions of horror.

“I thought I was dead, and then I heard the voice of a sweet old lady—reminded me of your mother. All I could see was her shoes in the creek bed jist a few feet from my face. I begged her to please help me. She couldn’t figure out where I was, and I couldn’t tell her because I didn’t know. She got some men, and later on they tole me they dug all day and night to get to me. I was pretty far gone by the time they got me out. Miz Jessop was the lady what found me; she took me home and cared for me until I got better. It took quite a while, though.”

“The cliff caved in and the soil covered you up. That makes sense.” Adam nodded. “For nearly sixteen years, I didn’t know what happened to you. I’m so glad you’re alive.”

Everyone just sat there without speaking or moving as they contemplated Trapper’s story.

Jimmy broke the silence. “Praise God!”

Trapper looked at Jimmy, his brow furrowed. “What do that mean? The Quakers say that all the time, but it was Miz Jessop what saved me. Just like that momma bear did when I was jist a baby. God weren’t there, neither.”

“I understand, Trapper, that you haven’t been churched.” Jimmy attempted to explain. “Trust me, Trapper. God has a plan for you, and He had a hand in saving your life by sending you the help that you needed, whether it was in the form of Mrs. Jessop or the momma bear.”

The minister had heard the stories of Trapper John and how he claimed to have been cared for by a mother bear when his widowed father died in the woods with Trapper in a papoose on his back. The Indians who found him with the bear confirmed this story, and Adam had seen the scars on his neck where the bear carried him by the scruff of the neck, as she would her cub.

“That’s some story to live to tell about,” John said.

Trapper nodded. “I hear Mr. Hamilton wants to give your mother’s farm back.”

“That’s why I’m here. I’m trying to figure out why.” Adam looked at his friend for an answer.

“He told folks that he keeps seeing the ghost of your mother. Says she’s come back as a dog and guards what’s left of the home and won’t let nobody near it.”

About that time the yellow momma dog came out from under her hiding place.

William pointed. “You mean her?”

“That’s her. Don’t let her bite me.” Trapper started backing away in fear.

“She won’t hurt you, Trapper.” John reached to give the animal some more venison.

Trapper stopped but continued to eye the dog. “She’s run off everybody that comes here. That ole dog ran me all the way up New Garden Road last time I was here.”

“She was just protecting her pups.” Adam handed Trapper a chunk of venison. “Pitch her a piece of meat, and she’ll be your friend forever.”

Trapper timidly tossed the venison toward the dog.

“Mr. Hamilton thinks this dog is my dead mother?” Adam asked.

“He says that dog told him not to never let anybody disturb the resting place of the brave men that are buried here.”

“Come on. Be serious.” Adam pointed at the canine. “That dog talked to John Hamilton?”

Trapper nodded. “That’s what I heard.” Adam gazed at the pitiful-looking, old dog with its tail between its legs and shook his head. “He thinks my mother has come back as this dog?”

Trapper leaned back, his bushy eyebrows raised toward his balding head, making his dark eyes seem larger than they were. “That’s what they says.”

The men all had a good laugh.

“Well, Mother, if that’s you in that bag of bones, I guess we better start feeding you a little better.”

Adam held a piece of the fresh-cut venison in his palm. The dog approached

with her tail out from between her hind legs.

Trapper took a couple of steps backward. "Careful."

"My mother wouldn't bite the hand that feeds her." Adam let the dog take the morsel and then lick the deer blood from his hand.

The dog wagged her tail as Adam stroked the fur on her back. Everyone watched, expecting her to attack.

"You're welcome, Mother." Adam got closer and caressed the dog with both hands. "Should we call her Mother Mitchell?"

Robert looked from the dog to his father. "You're not going to name that dog, are you?"

"If she's going to share our campfire and food, she should have a name."

"If she is Grandmother Mitchell, she should have a Biblical name," William said.

"Why not call her Lulubelle, after our old, faithful dog?" Adam asked.

"Much more appropriate than naming her for Grandmother." John moved cautiously toward the dog. "Here, Lulubelle." He held out his hand.

The dog sniffed John's hand, and finding nothing to eat, returned to Adam's side.

"I think Adam has a new friend," Jimmy said.

Adam reached down and gingerly patted the dog's head. Lulubelle got up and went under the porch.

Then Adam turned to Trapper, "Tell me what happened after this Jessop woman found you."

"I don't 'member much till I woke up some days later. I heard lots of people talking in a tongue I never heard before. I kept my mouth shut and jist listened 'cause I didn't know if they was friend or foe, and I didn't know where I was, neither."

"That must have been frightening," Adam said. "Where were you?"

"Turns out, I was at the New Garden Meeting House being tended to by a bunch of German Quakers. They was also caring for some wounded Hessian soldiers and talking in that strange tongue, which I found out was German."

"Then what happened?" Adam asked.

"Miz Jessop thought I was touched in the head for I didn't talk to nobody, but she still decided to take me in. She walked me around her nice little place and showed me how to do the chores, and I started helping her around the farm. She's a widow woman. I been staying with her ever since. Miz Jessop treats me real good, and I try to do right by her. I feed her chickens, herd her sheep, and tend to them at night, and I get to sleep out under the stars that way."

Adam laughed as he was reminded of how frightened Trapper John was of

the chickens when he helped him on the farm. “So, Trapper, you’re a shepherd now and no longer afraid of chickens?”

“I still don’t like chickens, but I like herding sheep. Now tell me what you been doing since the battle.”

“Elizabeth and I had six more children—four boys and two girls—after the war. Peggy, the oldest girl, and the reverend here,” Adam nodded at Jimmy, “teach at the Hebron School. She’s learned the piano and plays for our little church there in Knob Creek.”

“Peg is all growed up now and teaching school,” Trapper said, shaking his head. “You got a big family.”

“She’s still not married.” Adam looked at Jimmy as if it were his fault.

Jimmy had heard this before. He knew Adam wanted him to marry his oldest daughter, but having known Peggy since childhood, Jimmy knew that the only way that would happen was if Peggy decided they should marry.

Trapper John ignored the looks exchanged between Adam and Jimmy. He continued, “Knob Creek had the best trapping I ever found on either side of the mountain.”

“Peggy is buying up all the beaver pelts from around Knob Creek, paying top dollar. She has a buyer from Amsterdam who sails into Philadelphia to pick them up,” Adam said.

“Little Peg is a fur trader?” Trapper asked.

“Yes, she is quite a businesswoman, and John is her number one supplier of pelts.”

“It sure is difficult bargaining with your own sister,” John said.

Jimmy smiled. “It’s not easy for anyone to bargain with Peggy.”

“She also takes furs as her teaching stipend or for ministering to the sick.” Adam said.

“Ministering the sick?” Trapper said.

Adam answered, “Peg has become a pretty good healer—she’s delivered most of the babies around Knob Creek.”

The brothers and Jimmy lay back on their bedrolls. Robert and William were sound asleep, and John and Jimmy were about to doze off.

Adam pointed to the others. “Looks like the boys have gone to sleep. You’re welcome to spread your bedroll here. We can talk more in the morning.”

“I’d like that.” Trapper rolled out his bedroll close to the campfire.

“Goodnight, Trapper.”

“Goodnight, Adam.”

Adam was nearly asleep when the dog crawled out from her den. She moved slowly on her belly until she reached the area where her new friends were

sleeping, then she curled up at the foot of Adam's bedroll.

When the sun came up over the tall timbers, Lulubelle woke Adam by licking his face. He thought of the many times as a young boy, back in Pennsylvania, when his mother had awakened him with a good morning kiss.

Trapper smiled as he put more wood on the camp fire. "Looks like Mother Mitchell never left your side last night."

The four pups were frolicking around the camp looking for their mother. The largest one spotted her and tried to get to a nipple, but she resisted.

"She's trying to wean them," Adam said. "They must be about two months old—time they should be eating solid food."

Adam prepared breakfast. The tantalizing smells of biscuits and venison gravy woke William, John, and Jimmy.

"What's cooking?" William asked as he pulled on his buckskin boots.

"Your favorite—biscuits and chopped venison gravy. Will you wake Robert? Daylight is burning. We got business to tend to and people to see."

"Something's wrong with Robert!" Reverend Witherspoon called out as he kneeled beside Robert's bedroll trying to wake him.

Adam handed Trapper John the wooden spoon. "Watch breakfast so it doesn't burn, while I check on Robert. I should have known something was wrong. He wasn't his usual self last night. He was just too quiet."

Trapper moved the large Dutch oven off the hot embers and placed the lid on the simmering gravy. Then he turned his attention to the biscuits in the other Dutch oven, lifting the lid to see if they were ready.

"Robert, can you get up?" Adam felt his son's head.

Robert barely moved his head. In a hoarse voice, he said, "I feel so weak."

"You may have caught a cold during the blizzard on the mountain; you have a fever. I'm going to send for Reverend Caldwell, the best doctor in Guilford County."

Trapper brought a porridge bowl with venison gravy and a biscuit and handed it to Adam. "See if he can take a little breakfast."

Adam managed to feed him a few bites of the gravy-soaked biscuit. The others ate their breakfast as Robert slept.

Adam looked at William. "I know you were only ten when we last lived here. Would you be able to find your way to Dr. Caldwell's home and bring him here?"

"I'm pretty sure I can find him."

"Tell him Robert's in a bad way and to come quickly," Adam said.

Jimmy asked, "Could I go with William?"

"That's a good idea," Adam said. "Be careful."

John volunteered to sit with Robert until the doctor arrived.

Adam and Trapper fed the pups scraps from breakfast, and they ate their first solid meal with relish. The pups' mother sat and watched the men pampering her offspring and seemed relieved that she would no longer be nursing.

Trapper straightened up and rubbed his back. "I need to check on the sheep down in the fields, and then I'll be back."

"That's fine," Adam said. "I need to wash up a bit at the springs before we look up Mr. Hamilton."

Adam could hear sheep's bells ringing and an occasional bleat as he approached the springs that fed the old spring house. Trapper's flock must be nearby. Lulubelle was close behind, following Adam's every move.

Adam opened a small haversack that contained a tiny bar of pine tar soap, a razor, and a small piece of a looking glass. He looked around to make sure no one was there, then looked at Lulubelle. "If you are my mother, then let's have a talk while no one is listening. Talk to me, old girl, as Trapper said you did to John Hamilton."

The dog swished her tail and walked a short distance away to a large tree directly behind and above the crumbling walls of the spring house. The tree had shaded the structure from the sun and hid it from the enemy on the day of the battle. Lulubelle started pawing at the dirt just inches from the trunk of the tree while Adam shaved a week's growth of beard from his face and then washed his body in the cool spring water. As he buttoned up the freshly washed clothes Elizabeth had so neatly packed for him, the dog barked impatiently. Adam realized she wanted him to climb up the creek bank to look at the hole she had dug.

"Well, look here at what you've found." Adam got on his knees to inspect the strange, round object she had uncovered. Coated in red mud, it appeared to be the top of a small human skull. *I can't believe she dug up a soldier's grave.* As he touched it he discovered the round object was metal and much larger than the top that Lulubelle had unearthed. Digging deeper, he dislodged a solid cannon ball about four inches in diameter. *Must have come from one of the British six-pounders during the battle and missed its target, landing so hard it embedded itself in the soft earth of the creek's bank.*

The donkeys began to bray and the horses nickered as Lulubelle ran over the hill to see who was coming.

The rider was not a farmer dressed in clothes of linsey-woolsey, but a distinguished-looking gentleman wearing a powdered white wig, attired in a fine suit of tailored clothes. He was a big man, well over six feet tall, with a ruddy face and a well-groomed, gray moustache and green eyes.

The stranger asked, "Are you Adam Mitchell?"

"Yes, I am. Who might you be?"

"Adam, it's me—your old friend John Hamilton."

Adam shook Hamilton's hand. *I don't remember John Hamilton being my friend.* "I'm sorry I didn't recognize you. It's been so long since I last saw you. Nearly fourteen years."

"We have both changed, perhaps for the better—a little older and wiser." Mr. Hamilton tied his horse to a post.

"I'm sorry I couldn't make it for the May session of the court yesterday. We—"

"Your son William told me about your difficulties on Grandfather Mountain. He also said your son Robert is gravely ill. I gave William and your reverend directions to Dr. Caldwell's. They should be here soon."

Mr. Hamilton saw Lulubelle for the first time. He jumped back, respectfully removed his black tri-cornered hat and made a timid attempt to bow toward her, as if she were a lady.

Adam pretended not to notice this strange encounter and stooped to scratch Lulubelle on the head as she sat patiently by his side.

"I see you've met the protector of Guilford Courthouse," Mr. Hamilton said.

"You mean this old mongrel dog?" Adam knelt beside the panting Lulubelle and continued to stroke her fur.

Mr. Hamilton cleared his throat. "Is there anything I can provide you or your sons in the way of comfort while you are here? I have a guest cottage; you needn't stay outdoors."

"Thank you for your kind offer, but we are quite comfortable in our camp. Let's walk over to the lean-to, and you can meet my other sons." Adam picked up the six-pound cannon ball and carried it to their shelter where he laid it gently on the ground.

John looked at the object on the ground. "What's that?"

"My new doorstep." Adam turned to his son. "How is Robert?"

"He hasn't opened his eyes since you left. He just moans like he is in terrible pain, keeps mumbling something about the dead soldiers he buried in the cornfields." John looked from his father to the visitor and back to his father, waiting for an introduction.

"John, this is Mr. Hamilton, with whom we came to do business."

"Glad to make your acquaintance. I would shake your hand, but I've been tending my sick brother, who is feverish."

"I appreciate your concern for my health." Mr. Hamilton held on to his hat with both hands, being careful not to touch anything or to get too close. "I lost my mother to a cholera epidemic when I was a child so I don't like to take chances."

Adam said, "Why don't we move out under the shade of a tree?"

"Good idea. Does that, err—dog follow you everywhere?" Mr. Hamilton nodded toward Adam's new companion, the yellow dog following along beside him.

"She's been by my side since I found her under the porch with her pups."

"Has she . . ." Mr. Hamilton paused, and his face reddened. "Has she said anything?"

"Just barks when she doesn't like something." *He does think this dog can talk.*

Lulubelle looked over the ridge behind what had been the Mitchell home and started to bark.

"She's saying someone is coming down the lane." Adam looked toward the sound of a wagon and team. "I hope it's Dr. Caldwell."

As the rickety old farm wagon got closer, they could see it was Trapper John and a white-haired, matronly-looking woman dressed as if she were going to a church social, white gloves and all.

"Adam, this is Miz Jessop. She's a pretty good healer. I went and fetched her as I thought she might be some comfort to Robert until Dr. Caldwell could get here."

"Glad to meet you, Mrs. Jessop. This is John Hamilton and my son John."

"I met you many years ago when you came to our farm with your father to buy apple trees. Unfortunately, I know Mr. Hamilton, having dealt with him on the estate of my late husband, but I am glad to meet your son John. Now where is your son that's ailing?" Mrs. Jessop cast a disapproving eye toward Mr. Hamilton, walking past him as if he were a pile of horse dung.

Trapper looked like he wanted to speak to Mr. Hamilton, but instead just nodded respectfully. Adam recognized the animosity that Mrs. Jessop held for the county clerk. *Must have been some difficulty settling her husband's estate. Seems like Trapper knows the situation; I'll ask him what caused such ill will when we are alone.*

"Over here." John led the way to where his brother lay.

"Thank goodness you kept him in the shade. Fetch my basket, Mr. John," Mrs. Jessop told Trapper.

"That's what she calls me. Mr. John—jist like Mother Mitchell." Trapper rolled his eyes at the others.

Lulubelle growled and snapped at Trapper, who moved quickly to the open wagon. Avoiding the dog on the way back, he brought the basket to Robert's side. Mrs. Jessop was feeling his head with her ungloved hand.

"Quite a high fever. This boy is very sick and needs lots of fluids. I brought

some of my chicken soup, which I make every Tuesday. Keeps me and Mr. John well. Hopefully, it will cure what's ailing your son." Mrs. Jessop gently lifted the crock of soup from her basket and began slowly spoon-feeding Robert, allowing the rich broth to trickle down his sore throat.

Robert opened his eyes and smiled at Mrs. Jessop. "Grandmother Mitchell."

"They call me Sister Jessop, but I knew your Grandmother Mitchell well."

"I think Robert likes your soup," John said.

Barking, Lulubelle took off to higher ground to check out who else was coming. The donkeys kicked and brayed, the horses shook their heads and whinnied, letting everyone know they were also aware that riders were coming. This time it was William, Jimmy, and Dr. Caldwell.

Dr. Caldwell dismounted and gave Adam a brotherly hug. "I see you have Robert under the very good care of Sister Jessop." He referred to her as Sister Jessop out of respect for her position as one of the few women preachers in the Quaker community.

Sister Jessop moved over to make room for Dr. Caldwell to examine Robert. "Yes, but he needs a real doctor."

Dr. Caldwell thought back to that cold February day, twenty-seven years ago when he delivered Robert, Adam's firstborn. He remembered how hard he tried to save Robert's mother, Jennett, who died from complications of birth three days later.

After giving Robert a thorough examination, the doctor asked, "Sister Jessop, is that your wagon and team under the tree?"

"Yes, it is."

"Can we use it to take Robert to my place? I want him off the ground and in a good feather bed with no chance of him being rained on."

"Certainly, you may use my wagon."

"Thank you." Dr. Caldwell stood and patted her gently on the shoulder.

It was obvious the two clergy had a deep respect for each other, even though their customs varied greatly.

Dr. Caldwell greeted John, Trapper, and Mr. Hamilton, then turned toward Adam. "Robert is very sick. He will need constant care and rest for at least a week, maybe more. He can get that at my home from Rachel and me. With your permission, I would like to move him there."

"Whatever you think is best, Reverend. You are the learned doctor."

"Adam, you and the boys pick him up slow and easy and move him to Sister Jessop's wagon."

"I'll make him a bed." Sister Jessop grabbed up his bed roll and got to the wagon first to make a comfortable place for the men to lay Robert. Trapper John

held the team steady as Robert was laid into the wagon bed.

“Make the ride easy on him, Trapper. Sister Jessop, will you sit in the back with Robert and keep giving him water from this canteen?” Dr. Caldwell handed the canteen to Sister Jessop. “I’ll be riding behind you, if you need me.”

She climbed up on the wagon, with the assistance of Adam and Jimmy.

“The boys and I will be following you as soon as we pack up and break camp.” Adam said. “We’ll try to catch up with you. If we don’t, we will see you at your place.”

“I assume our business will have to wait?” Mr. Hamilton asked.

“Let us take care of my son, and then I will find you and we can take care of our business when I know Robert is out of danger.” Adam started breaking camp with the help of John, William, and Jimmy.

Adam picked up the cannonball.

“Where did that come from?” William asked.

“Lulubelle dug it up near the big sycamore tree that shades the spring house.” Adam hid it under the rubble of the porch.

William pointed to the tree. “That one?”

“Yes, that one. Why do you ask?”

“How did you know it was there?” William asked.

“The dog uncovered it, apparently fired from one of General Cornwallis’s cannons that missed its target and it lay buried in the mud all these years.”

William stared at the dog. *Could it be possible?* The dog, tilting her head, stared back at William then at Adam.

“That cannonball did not miss its mark—that’s what destroyed our home.” William said.

“Why do you say that?” Adam said.

“Only two people knew where it was buried, Grandmother Mitchell and me.” William glanced at Lulubelle again; she looked at him the same way as before. “Grandmother Mitchell found it inside our house after the battle. It was the mortar that knocked out a big piece of the roof and the front wall. She asked me to bury it under the big sycamore tree behind the spring house. Grandmother said to never tell a soul where it was buried because if the British came back and found it, they could use it to destroy some other patriot’s home. I never told anyone—only she and I knew it was buried there.”

William and Adam looked at the yellow dog. Then John and Jimmy looked at the cannonball, then at Lulubelle, who was smiling. No one said anything. They just finished gathering their camp for the move to the Caldwell farm.