



Kidnapped (The Browns of Butcher's Hill #1)

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Category: Historical

Description: Phillip Brown wakes up one bitter November morning to find a woman near frozen on the stoop of the Baltimore home he shares with his sister and uncle. The unconscious woman eventually awakens, unwilling to share who has terrified her while she makes a recovery in the Brown home. He continues his work at the Wiest Oyster Cannery and pouring beer on occasion at his neighborhood brewery while guarding his family from dangerous criminals' intent of silencing his discoveries about the woman.

Daughter of the Wiest Oyster Cannery owner, Virginia Wiest hears the story of the unconscious woman by chance and is intrigued and determined to help. Deemed sickly as a young girl and cossetted by a widowed father, Virginia is drawn to helping the less fortunate and aiding Brown unravel the mystery surrounding the woman and her missing child.

When Virginia makes an ill-fated attempt to save the child, Phillip finds himself and his heart in danger. The daring rescue from a well-heeled brothel nearly ends him and his dreams.

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The Browns of Butcher Hill

Baltimore, November 1867

Phillip Brown turned his face into the down pillow and pulled the blanket over his broad, bare shoulders. Voices in the hallway were muted, but he could hear his sister, Sarah, attempting a whisper. He was not ready to leave his warm nest.

“What do you mean? On the doorstep? Good Lord!”

He imagined she was talking to their maid of all work about the milk delivery. Better Jenny than he. Sarah was never kind when he'd had more ale than was wise the night prior. A door closed with a slam, and a shuffle of slippers hurried by his room. Ahh. Silence and warmth. Just the necessary setting for him to sleep for several more hours and wake with a reasonably clear head.

On the cusp of slumber, Phillip sat upright at a piercing scream. He tumbled out of bed, pulled on pants and a shirt that smelled like tobacco and spilled ale, and raced down the steps, praying his stomach would not disgrace him before he found out who had shrieked and why.

“What? What is it?” he said as he hurried down the narrow hallway to the front door that stood open, sending a blast of cold air into the house.

“Help me, Jenny! She's near froze!” Sarah looked up. “Thank the Lord. Here is Phillip. Carry her, Phillip. Hurry now.”

He stopped short at the threshold, nearly stepping on the body lying on the stoop. Sarah was kneeling beside a woman; he could see skirts now, stockinged legs and booted feet sticking out from under them.

“Build the fire in the spare room, Jenny, and gather blankets,” Sarah said and looked up at her brother. “Carry her, Phillip. Her skin is like ice.”

“Who is she?” he asked as he tucked his hands under the woman’s back and knees, his bare feet dancing on the cold stone stoop.

“I’ve no idea,” Sarah said, hurrying behind him. “Does it matter?”

It wouldn’t matter a bit to his sister, but he did not want to find himself between an angry husband and his wife. Hopefully, they’d be able to help this woman and send her on her way. He laid her down on the small bed in their spare room upstairs as Jenny lit coals in the fireplace. Sarah hurried in with a stack of blankets in her arms.

“Go on now, Phillip. I mean to get her down to her underclothes.”

He pulled the door shut behind him and wandered back to his room to dress in clean clothes, as there was no way he’d be able to climb back into his bed. He was wide awake. He looked out the window onto Wolfe Street after rubbing away ice curlicues on the glass that reminded him of the fabric on the chair cushions in the dining room. Sarah called it paisley. He saw a curtain twitch on old Mrs. Pappadol’s window across the way. Phillip pulled on his boots, not bothering to lace them, and clattered down the stairs, grabbing his heavy coat from the hook near the door. He waited until a wagon loaded with cut wood went by and darted across the street. He knocked and looked at the side window as a curtain twitched again.

“Mrs. Pappadol? It’s Phillip Brown. Can I come in?”

“Certainly not. I’m just a widowed woman, but I do have my reputation to consider.”

“Mrs. Pappadol. You’ve known me since I was in short pants. It’s freezing out here. Please let me come inside.”

He heard a bar slide and a lock turn. The door cracked open an inch or two. “What do you want?”

“You’re letting your heat out.”

The door opened and Phillip stepped inside, immediately assaulted with the smells he would forever associate with this old woman. Camphor and boiling cabbage. He took a breath through his mouth to settle his stomach.

She waved a hand under her nose. “You stink like the Bond Street Brewery!”

“I work there some nights. It’s no wonder I smell like beer.”

“That ain’t the reason you stink now. I saw you coming home near three in the morning last night.”

“What are you doing looking out your window at three in the morning?”

“None of your business. What do you want?”

“I want to know if you were looking out your window when that woman laid down on our stoop.”

“Laid down? She didn’t lay down. She was dropped there like a sack of taters.”

“Dropped?”

“That’s what I said. Dropped. Two men come along with a wagon, no mule, just one of them pulling it. They look up and down the street, and the one points at your door. The other slings that girl over his shoulder and drops her. She never moved. I thought she might be dead.”

“What time was this?”

She shrugged. “Getting close to daybreak.”

“And you didn’t think to tell someone that a woman was going to freeze to death on a neighbor’s stoop?”

“Don’t you lecture me! You’re nothing but trash. We don’t need no Irish on Wolfe Street! Butcher Hill would be better off without you!” Phillip stared at her until she looked away and muttered, “Get out of my house.”

“Gladly.”

Phillip took a deep breath of frigid air and started across the street to his own home, glad he had not given in to the urge to return her cruelty. Why would anyone look up and down the street, point at his door, and dump an unconscious woman on his steps?

He went into the house and saw his sister hurrying down the stairs. “Is she dead?” he asked.

She pushed past him on the way to the kitchen and yelled over her shoulder. “Not yet. Come carry these buckets of hot water. We’ve got to warm the room. I sent a message to Dr. Prosperi. Hopefully, he will be here soon.”

“Prosperi? He’ll be charging us a week’s wages.”

“Why did you go over to see that hateful woman across the street?” Sarah asked as she handed him buckets of steaming water.

“Her curtain twitched, and I figured if anyone saw what happened it would be her.”

“Here,” Sarah said as she led him into the small room. “Put one by the fireplace and one near the bed.”

“What in the devil?” Uncle Patrick said as he walked into the room. “Who’s that?”

“She was on our doorstep this morning; don’t know how long,” Sarah said.

“Mrs. Pappadol said close to daybreak.”

“That old busybody? I don’t trust her!” Uncle Patrick said.

“Rub her arms, Jenny,” Sarah said. “I’ll rub her legs. We’ve got to get her blood flowing.”

They all looked toward the bed when they heard a faint moan. Sarah hurried to the woman’s side, touching her face with the back of her fingers.

“Miss? Miss? Can you hear me?”

Phillip heard a knock at the front door, and Jenny hurried past him and Uncle to answer it. She was back in a moment, ushering Dr. Prosperi into the room.

Sarah looked up and smiled. “Thank goodness you’re here, Doctor. I wasn’t sure what else to do.”

As usual, Prosperi only had eyes for Phillip’s younger sister which made Phillip want

to break his neck. Sarah shooed him and Uncle Patrick out of the room as the doctor opened his black leather satchel. Phillip stood staring at the bedroom door for a long moment before glancing at his uncle, his father's eldest brother, a permanent resident of 159 Wolfe Street since Phillip was a small child, even before his parents had succumbed to smallpox.

"What do you have against the doctor?" Uncle asked.

Phillip nearly bumped his head on the low ceiling at the stair landing when he looked over his shoulder and started down the steps. "He just wants a nursemaid for his children, and he doesn't care who she is. He walked away from that widow on North Street after stepping out with her for a year or more."

"Whatever you or I think, Sarah is a grown woman—a smart one too. If she needs help, she'll ask, as long as you're not being a hotheaded know-it-all."

Uncle Patrick closed the door on his small room near the kitchen before Phillip could argue. Sarah had tried to convince Uncle to take one of the larger bedrooms on the second floor, but he wasn't interested. He liked his snug room where it was.

Phillip went down the two stone steps to the kitchen, muttering under his breath about found women and old men. He stopped and closed his eyes, reaching out to steady himself against the wall, feeling the heat, smelling something wonderful simmering on the stove, and being reminded of his previous night's adventures by a rolling stomach.

"Drink this," Eliza Waterman said.

He took the mug still bubbling with bicarbonate of soda and drank it down. He grimaced at the taste and handed the mug back to Eliza, who'd been cooking for them for nearly fifteen years. Uncle Patrick had found her walking along the stream where

he often fished in a creek off the Patapsco River. She'd walked from South Carolina, where she'd run the kitchen of a massive plantation, and had miraculously made the trip alive to Baltimore, as there was a bounty on her head as an escaped slave. Maryland was a slave-owning state but did not secede or join the Confederacy. Uncle had brought her home by roundabout back alleys, and she'd been with them since, working for wages and her room and board.

"What is all the ruckus I hear? A froze girl? Buckets of my heated water?"

"Jenny found her on the stoop, so cold her skin was nearly blue. They're trying to get her warm," he said and recounted his conversation with Mrs. Pappadol.

"Somebody tossed that girl at this house on purpose?"

"That's what it sounds like." Phillip shook his head. Who on earth was she? Why was she left for them to find? Who had she made angry enough to let her freeze to death?

Eliza handed him a slice of her homemade bread slathered with honey butter. He ate it and held out his hand for a second. Then a cup of tea.

"I'd rather have coffee," he said.

"But your stomach wouldn't. You ate your bread. Now drink your tea and stop questioning this old woman who's been looking after you for a long time."

He smiled. Eliza was a godsend to their family. Uncle Patrick had raised him and Sarah since their mother and father had died when Phillip was six years old and his sister two years younger than that. It had been a makeshift life, with Patrick working the docks and Phillip left to watch his sister. There'd been a housekeeper of sorts, as miserable a woman as anyone could find, although there at least had been meals on the table, even if they would never compare to Eliza's. They had all been glad to see

her pack her bags and walk out the door.

“I hear Sarah talking to that handsome doctor,” Eliza said, her eyes on the massive amount of dough she was kneading.

Phillip hurried up the stone steps and down the hallway to where his sister and Prosperi were talking and standing far too close.

“What do we owe you, Doctor?” he asked.

Prosperi smiled down at Sarah. “Don’t worry about a bill. I was on my way to see a patient on the next block.”

“I’d prefer to pay whatever is owed.”

Sarah glanced at him. “Phillip?”

“We’ll pay your regular charge, whatever that is.”

Prosperi glanced at Sarah and then to him. “Two bits will more than cover it.”

Phillip reached in his pocket, counted out coins, and handed them to Prosperi. He stepped around his sister and opened the door. “Thank you, Doctor.”

Sarah stared at him as he closed the door on the doctor’s back. “What is the matter with you?”

“How’s the woman?”

His sister just shook her head and turned to the stairs. “She’ll live. He stitched up a nasty bump on the back of her head. May lose a toe or two, but she’ll live. But the

doctor said her arm's been broken before—and her nose too.”

“Who is she?” he asked. But Sarah merely shrugged and turned the corner on the landing, obscuring his view of his stubborn and headstrong sister. The mantel clock chimed nine times, and he hurried up the steps after her. He had to be at the cannery in less than an hour.

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Virginia Wiest glanced at her maid's reflection in the mirror as the young woman pulled the brush through her thick auburn hair. Colleen was humming under her breath while holding several hair pins between her teeth.

"It's going to be a cold one, miss," Colleen said around the pins. "Best stay inside."

"I've dressed warmly. I must get out of this house," she said. "And the sun is shining."

"As you say, miss. But we must be careful so you do not take a chill. You've just recovered!"

Virginia covered the maid's hand with her own. "You are a dear, Colleen. I may have never left that bed behind us without your attention and care. But I swear I'll scream if I don't get outside, even for just a bit, and you know once I'm at the cannery I'll be warm as can be."

"Well, let's just hope Mr. Wiest doesn't come home and send me off for not taking care of you."

Virginia smiled. "He knows better than to interfere between his only child and her personal maid."

"I hope so," Colleen said as she put the last pin in the elaborate roll across the back of Virginia's hair. "I like my work here, miss. There you go. All fixed and pretty."

"Thank you." Virginia looked at herself in the mirror. She was still very thin, even

though she'd been eating well and taking the tonics the doctor prescribed. Her freckles stood out sharply against the very pale skin of her nose and cheeks, and no amount of lemon juice would get rid of them. "I'll meet you at the door in half an hour?"

"I'll be ready, miss."

Virginia would have walked the two blocks in the past, but she acquiesced to Colleen's insistence that she take the family carriage and was glad of it after feeling the bite of the wind against her cheeks as their butler, Smith, opened the double doors and she crossed the drive a few short feet to Mr. Turnbull, who was waiting to help her and Colleen into the carriage.

The carriage pulled through the massive wrought-iron gates of the Wiest Cannery as Virginia gazed out the window at the familiar scene before her. She could see the Chesapeake Bay, cold and restless, past the buildings where the oysters were dumped from thick netting and workers began to sort them by size, the smallest for eating on the half shell, the medium sized for stews and soups, and the largest ones for frying. Soon they had pulled up to the office doors, and her coachman handed her down.

Virginia climbed the stairs, greeting employees as she went. She could feel her cheeks growing hot and her heart beating quickly as she was surrounded by the good people in her family's employ, smiling at her and very glad to see her out after her recent illness. It was not that she did not appreciate their kind words and goodwill, which she knew to be sincere, it was just so very difficult for her to be the center of attention, to try and reply to each person, to be surrounded. Colleen was at her elbow in a moment.

"Pardon us," she said clearly. "Miss Wiest is expected by her father. Pardon us."

Virginia smiled and allowed Colleen to guide her through the crowd of well-wishers.

“Thank you,” she said breathlessly. “I was starting to feel faint.”

“I know, miss. And there is that unpleasant man who is your father’s secretary,” she said as she nodded down the hallway where Everly was going into his and her father’s office.

“Mr. Everly? He’s always so kind to me!”

“Of course he is, miss. He’s hoping to marry you.”

Virginia stopped in her tracks. “Whatever would give you that idea?”

“You’ve only got to watch him when he’s speaking to you or your father and then hear him speak to other employees. Or a lowly maid.”

“Has he been rude to you, Colleen? I will see an end to that.” She turned to her father’s office door.

“Oh no, miss. Please. He will be one hundred times worse if you say anything, and I don’t care what he thinks of me. Please don’t.”

Virginia looked at her maid, at the distressed look on the woman’s face. “I shan’t, then, but you must tell me if he ever, well, you know, bothers you. I won’t have you put upon as if you have no champions.”

Colleen nodded and dropped her eyes as Virginia opened the door.

“Miss Wiest! It is so wonderful that you are feeling better. We’ve all been worried, although your father has been keeping me up-to-date on your health. My mother and I prayed daily for your recovery,” Everly said after hurrying around his desk to greet her. He looked at Colleen. “Take your mistress’s cloak, girl. Pay attention.” He

turned to smile at Virginia.

“Her name is Miss Hughes, Mr. Everly,” she said softly. “I know what a stickler you are for the proprieties, sir. Such an admirable quality.”

“Well, yes.” He nodded, his lips pursed. But that was all he could say as her father burst through the inner door.

“Ginny? Whatever are you doing here? Is everything all right?” he boomed and kissed her cheeks. “My beautiful girl!”

“Everything is fine, Father. I’ve been indoors for so long; I needed to get outside for a bit.”

The outer door opened then, and a man came in, his eyes on the papers in his hands. “Mr. Everly?” He looked up and turned quickly back to the door. “Oh. So sorry. I’ll come back later.”

“What is it, Mr. Brown?” her father asked.

Virginia could feel her face heat and she looked away, her lashes fluttering and her pulse beating wildly. Phillip Brown was the handsomest man she’d ever laid eyes on. Tall and solidly built with dark hair, just a bit overlong. He glanced her way and smiled. Oh dear!

“May I say, Miss Wiest, we were all glad to hear you were making a recovery. Very glad.”

“That’s enough, Brown,” Everly said brusquely, glancing from Brown to her very red cheeks. “I’ll take care of your problems in a moment. Wait in the hall.”

Brown nodded at Mr. Everly and pulled the door closed behind him. She stared at the frosted glass and backward letters of her father's name as if she could still see him. What was it about him that always caught her eye? They'd only spoken a time or two and no more than a greeting and reply. What he said to her today was the most words he'd ever spoken to her! But Everly had not allowed her to reply.

"Oh," she said. "I'm sorry Mr. Everly. I wasn't attending. What were you saying?"

Everly maneuvered himself between her and the door, as if to block out any thoughts of Brown. "Since you are feeling better, can I convince you to join me for luncheon at the new Barnum's City Hotel? Mother would be happy to accompany us and act as chaperone."

"Now, Everly," her father said, his concerned eyes on her. "Not a week ago she was too weak to climb out of her bed. Too soon!"

"It was two weeks ago now, Father. I'm feeling much recovered," she said quietly. She realized then she'd set herself a trap. She didn't want to go to luncheon with Mr. Everly and his mother, but now she could not say she was still feeling poorly and could think of no other excuse. She turned to Everly. "Perhaps one day next week?"

"That would suit me well, but I'll have to check our office schedule in case your father is in need of my help," Everly said with a broad smile.

"Of course," she said. She turned and kissed her father's cheek. "Will we see you for dinner, Father?"

"I believe so, dear. Our negotiations should be completed soon."

"Negotiations?" she asked.

“Nothing to worry yourself about, Miss Wiest,” Everly said. “Nothing for you to worry about at all.”

“I’m not worried, Mr. Everly,” she said as she pulled on her pale blue leather gloves that matched her heavy cape lined with cream-colored fur. She looked up at him with a small smile. “I’ve been involved with our family’s business for years.”

“A credit to the company,” he replied, his eyes shifting to her father.

“Good day to you, Mr. Everly. See you at dinner, Father.” Virginia turned to the door, waiting a moment until Colleen settled her cape around her shoulders. “Let us brave the cold, Miss Hughes.”

Mr. Brown leaned against the wall opposite her father’s office, his legs crossed at the ankles, his eyes studying the papers in his hands. He straightened quickly when she came through the door.

“Good day to you, miss.”

“And to you, sir,” she replied and lowered her eyes.

“I think you may be correct, Colleen,” she said once they were seated in the carriage. “Mr. Everly has an interest in me.”

“He certainly does! He’s interested to have a subdued wife when she inherits the family business.”

Virginia laughed. “It is not hard to discern you have a poor opinion of the man.”

“Oh. Pardon me, miss. My mother says I am altogether too forward with my opinions.”

“I appreciate your candor, and, in this case, I think you are completely correct.”

Virginia was accustomed to men looking to a marriage with her to line their pockets; however, her father had deterred the worst of them when he told them his only daughter and a board of directors would manage the vast Wiest wealth, business, and properties, not a husband, when he had gone to his reward.

She was tired by the time she was in her room. Colleen helped her with her boots and dress, and she was soon lying down with a warm quilt spread over her.

Virginia could not believe she slept three hours. She dressed quickly and headed below stairs to speak to Cook and Mrs. French, their housekeeper. She was never lax in her duties as her father’s hostess and manager of their sprawling home, other than the several weeks when she had been too ill to get out of bed. She made her way to the sitting room to wait for his arrival. She was just accepting a small glass of wine when she heard his booming voice in the hallway, directing Smith to bring his bourbon straightaway.

“Your cheeks are cold!” she said after kissing him and helping him off with his long woolen scarf.

“I was nearly in the carriage when Everly came out to tell me a messenger had arrived and we’d soon receive word from Darvell about the new shell-crushing machine. Our early bid will get us this equipment before any of our competitors. I was hoping to review the contract, but I was too hungry to go back inside and wait!” Alistair Wiest said with a smile. “And I missed my best girl.”

“You could have waited or sent word, and I would have held dinner. Here is Smith with your bourbon. Let us go into the dining room immediately if you are so hungry!”

“I am. Lead on, Ginny!” He chuckled.

A creamy mushroom soup had just been served when Smith came into the dining room and bent close to her father's ear. He looked up quickly and wiped his mouth.

"Yes. Send him in," he said.

The door to the dining room opened before she had a chance to ask her father what Smith had said. Phillip Brown walked in, a leather folder under his arm. He nodded to her and turned to her father.

"Mr. Wiest, I'm sorry to interrupt your dinner, but the papers from Mr. Darvell arrived, and I knew you were anxious to see them. Should I leave them here or have them taken to your office or library?"

"Ah, Brown. Good man. I am anxious to read the contract. Have you looked at it?"

Brown hesitated. "I did, sir. I apologize. It is not within my duties to review contracts, but I admit I'm terribly curious about this new machinery."

"Well, Brown? What did you see in your review?" Father looked at the servant clearing the soup bowls. "Get another place setting for Mr. Brown," he said and turned back. "You must be hungry. Sit, man, sit. What are we having for the main course, Ginny?"

"Oh, I couldn't, sir. I never meant?—"

"I realize that, Brown. Now sit down and tell me what you've read."

Phillip sat down in the chair a servant held for him after removing his coat, which had disappeared into the butler's hands. Silverware—real silver, he imagined—appeared in front of him, along with crystal glassware. Someone put a bowl of wonderful-smelling soup in front of him. He nearly picked up the spoon when the butler opened

a napkin and laid it on his lap. He looked up at the man with thanks. Phillip didn't know all the ins and outs of dining with rich people. Hopefully, he would make it through the meal without disgracing himself.

Mr. Wiest was looking at the contract he'd pulled from the leather pouch, and Miss Wiest blushed every time he glanced at her. The young lady brought out every protective instinct he had with her slight frame, thinner still after her recent illness, and pale skin. But her eyes and her mouth did not make him feel protective—they made him want to carry her to a dark corner and kiss her until neither knew their names. But that would never happen because she was the daughter of his employer and a gently raised young lady besides. He'd learned to put her out of his mind over the years as it was safer—and saner—to not wish for something one could never have.

“Was your outing tiring, Miss Wiest?”

She nodded. “More than I expected. But I'll never fully recover if I don't increase my walking and activities.”

“I hope you rest when you can.”

“I do. Thank you for your concern.”

Phillip filled his plate with every offering shown to him, even occasionally signaling for a larger portion. Mr. Wiest continued to read and asked him a question or two. Phillip glanced at Miss Wiest, and she was smiling at him.

“Miss Wiest?”

“You are a hearty eater, Mr. Brown.”

“That’s the polite description, I imagine. My sister says I have a hollow leg.”

She laughed, a merry sound, and her blue eyes twinkled. After a tasty dessert, Phillip rose from his seat.

“Thank you, Mr. Wiest, for the delicious dinner. I think I ate enough for two.”

“Nothing the matter with enjoying a good dinner and plenty of it,” he said and patted his stomach. “Won’t you stay for a glass of wine or a cordial?”

“Thank you, sir, but I best be getting home. Early this morning, my sister found a woman laying on our front stoop, near frozen and unconscious. We got her inside and my sister sent for the doctor, who said he thought she would likely recover, although she has a cut and a bump on her head. But I want to know if her condition has improved and who she is.”

“Dear Lord, Brown! And you don’t know who the woman is?”

“No, we don’t. I’m hoping she’s awake and feeling better. She wasn’t when I left this morning.”

“But what if she hasn’t woken?” Miss Wiest asked, leaning forward in her chair, concern on her face. “What will become of the poor woman?”

“We won’t put her out on the street. She’ll be taken care of until we know where she lives. I’m just hoping there’s no jealous or violent husband out looking for her.”

“Oh dear!” Miss Wiest said. “Is there anything I can do?”

“Now, Ginny,” her father said.

“I am incredibly privileged. It is my duty to do what I can,” she said and turned her eyes on Phillip. “Can you let me know, in the next day or so, what you have found out?”

“I can, Miss Wiest, but I imagine my concerns for you are the same as your father’s. You are just feeling better. I wouldn’t want you to exert yourself and make yourself ill again.”

“Do not patronize me, Mr. Brown. I’ll expect to hear from you soon. Good night, gentlemen,” she said as she rose and walked out of the room. Her father stood and followed her with his eyes.

“That girl reminds me so much of my dear departed wife. Stubborn,” her father muttered. “I assume you know better than to upset her with any details, Brown.”

“Certainly, sir. Thank you for dinner,” Phillip said and made his way to the massive marble foyer where the butler waited with his coat and hat.

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Two mornings later, Virginia received a folded note, no envelope, just her name scrawled boldly on one side. “Miss Wiest,” she whispered and held the note in her hand, tapping it against her palm, turning it over again to see the reverse side was still blank. She held the note to her nose and closed her eyes. Was she imagining Mr. Brown holding that very paper in his hand just a short time ago?

What a silly goose she was being! It was just a piece of paper, she thought as she unfolded the note.

Miss Wiest,

The young woman I mentioned to you is awake but does not remember much. We will continue to care for her until she recovers. Thank you for your kind concern.

Your servant,

Phillip Brown

The poor woman did not know what happened to her or how she landed at a stranger’s home? How dreadful! Virginia wandered to the window of the sitting room, glancing out at the sharp reflection of sun on the ice-encrusted snow. She was not blind to the children she saw in the streets of Baltimore without sufficient clothing and crippled people begging strangers for their meals.

The Wiest family supported several charities in the city, and either her or her father attended board meetings occasionally to monitor progress and to hear if any circumstances required additional funding for an emergency. In fact, she had

authorized additional deliveries of coal to several churches who were sheltering the homeless during the bitter winter. She was so very fortunate. She pulled the bell and waited for Smith to appear.

“Yes, Miss Wiest?”

“Can you have the carriage brought around, please?”

Smith stared at her, but she did not look away.

“It is bitterly cold, miss. If there is something you need or desire, allow one of the staff to get it for you.”

She smiled because she knew he was only concerned about her. “Thank you. You take such good care of me, but this is an outing I’d like to do myself. With Colleen, of course,” she said. “Oh, and Mr. Turnbull will need the direction to Mr. Phillip Brown’s home, the gentleman who brought father some papers a few evenings ago. I have no idea where he lives.”

“I’m sure Mr. Turnbull knows where Mr. Brown lives, miss.”

“Really? Does he have a prior acquaintance?”

“No, miss. It is common knowledge among working folks that the Browns live on Wolfe Street in the Butcher Hill section of Baltimore. Mr. Turnbull will know the number, I imagine.”

“Common knowledge? He is infamous, then?”

“Famous, rather. He and his uncle have helped families all over Baltimore.”

“Helped families? You must tell me all, Mr. Smith.”

“When a family has trouble with a landlord, or perhaps with someone bothering a daughter, or even if there is a tragedy, like a fire, the Browns have often helped.”

“Rather than the police?”

“Sometimes the police,” he leaned forward to whisper, “are persuaded to look the other way.”

“Bribes?”

“I can’t say with any certainty, miss. But Mr. Brown has been reliable for . . . lesser folks.”

“I see. All the more reason for me to lend any support I can. Our family is not without influence.”

Smith straightened, holding himself stiffly. “I am fortunate to work for such a well-respected and honorable family.”

She smiled as Smith turned briskly and left the room, hopefully to speak to Mr. Turnbull. Virginia found Colleen, and they both dressed warmly for the carriage ride. Her maid was not happy about venturing out in the frigid weather.

“We will not be gone long,” Virginia said once they were seated in the carriage, blankets over their legs and hot bricks on the floor. “I am hoping this woman is soon able to remember what happened to her.”

Mr. Turnbull stopped the horses in front of a neat two-story brick home in a neighborhood of working families, with attic dormers and a brick walkway that

connected with the house next door's walkway and went down the narrow-arched byway between the houses. Mr. Turnbull tapped at the door for her and told her he would be circling the block as the horses should not stand still for long in the cold.

The door was opened by a thin young woman, who determinedly kept her eyes lowered. "May I help you?" she said.

"Is Mr. Brown in?" she asked.

Virginia heard a female voice in the hallway. "Who is it, Jenny?"

"I'm not sure, miss."

The door was opened wide then. "Oh, do come in. It is so bitterly cold. You must be freezing," another young woman said.

Virginia stepped into the hallway, a set of stairs to the left and doors to other rooms on her right. She removed her gloves and smiled. "Hello. I was hoping to speak to Mr. Brown, if he is at home and it's not too much trouble. My name is Virginia Wiest, and this is my maid, Colleen Hughes."

"Miss Wiest? Phillip's employer?" she asked.

"Yes. My family does own Wiest Cannery, but I have not come here on business. Is Mr. Brown at home?"

The young woman smiled with a relieved look about her. "Where are my manners? I'm Phillip's sister, Sarah. Phillip is not here right now but should be home any minute. Can I offer you tea?" She turned to the girl who had opened the door. "Jenny, ask Eliza if there is tea or coffee ready and if the shortbread is out of the oven."

“Is that what smells so divine?” Virginia smiled.

“It is baking day, and the house always smells wonderful,” Miss Brown said. “Let me take your coats. Would your coachman like to wait inside? It is so cold.”

“No. Mr. Turnbull said he wants to keep the horses moving, and he won’t allow the young man with him to take the reins,” she said. “He is possessive of the teams and the carriages, and we won’t be overly long.”

“Alfred Turnbull?” Miss Brown asked.

“You’re acquainted?” Miss Brown led her into a sitting room with a roaring fire. Colleen seated herself in a chair at the edge of the room.

“Our Uncle Patrick helped him once years ago, and I believe they’ve stayed friendly. At least friendly enough for the occasional card game.”

Virginia was itching to ask for details but heard a masculine voice in the hallway. Miss Brown jumped up from her chair and went to the door.

“Phillip? You have a visitor.”

Virginia turned in the comfortable chair she’d been seated in before the fire just as Phillip Brown filled the doorway.

“Miss Wiest?”

“Good afternoon, Mr. Brown.”

He came into the room, followed by the maid, Jenny, with the tea and shortbread. His sister served the tea and made a plate of shortbread for both her and Colleen.

“Is everything all right, Miss Wiest? Has something happened?”

She shook her head and smiled. “No, Mr. Brown. Nothing out of the ordinary has happened. I wanted to inquire about the young woman, the one that was left on your stoop.”

Sarah Brown sat down in the chair next to her. “I’ve taken to calling her Mary as she’s not yet been conscious.”

Mr. Brown stood at the edge of the fireplace, his hands behind his back, his feet spread, as if ready to march with an army. “I would have been more than happy to pass information on about the woman.”

“Mary,” his sister said, and he glanced at her as she did.

“Mary, then. I could have sent you a note about her, as I did once already. There was no need to trouble yourself, especially on a day such as this. Your health is most important.”

Virginia folded her hands in her lap after taking a sip of her tea as the situation she found herself in was repeated often and never failed to anger her. “Mr. Brown, I’m certain my father gave you instructions as to how much you were to tell me. He often does that with people, and in his mind, he is only being a conscientious parent. I find it constricting and manage to find a way around his decrees. Your note said the woman was awake. Your sister says otherwise. Please do not patronize me.”

She shivered involuntarily and flushed, her breath short after her long speech. The frigid air was never good for her lungs, and she’d found that when she was upset, her symptoms were worse.

“Miss Wiest?” Miss Brown said with concern.

Colleen knelt in front of her and grasped her hands. "Breathe slowly, miss. That's right. Look into my eyes. Take your time. You are doing ever so better. Slow breaths."

"Shall I send Phillip out to signal your Mr. Turnbull, Miss Wiest?" his sister asked.

"I'm fine now," she said and continued to focus on Colleen's face.

Colleen rose after a few moments and returned to her seat.

"May I pour you more tea, get a glass of water for you?" Miss Brown asked.

"More tea would be welcome." She glanced up, and her eyes met Mr. Brown's. He was scowling ferociously. She turned her attention back to his sister. "Have you found anything out about . . . Mary?"

She glanced at her brother. "I have not, although I haven't spent much time with her today. Would you like to see her? Perhaps set your mind at ease?"

"I would if it is not inconvenient. I only wish to be of use to her. Her story, what I know of it, has made me interested in this poor woman. I would like to help her in some way. I'm sure you and your family are giving her excellent care. It's just that this woman's troubles have touched me. Perhaps I can help, although I don't know how yet."

Miss Brown stood. "She is in one of the upstairs rooms. Are you up to climbing the steps?"

Virginia stood and smiled. "Yes. I believe I am, and Miss Hughes will help me if necessary."

Virginia walked up the stairs slowly, happy that she was not out of breath or panting when she came to the top. She stopped in the doorway as Sarah Brown went to the bed and gently touched the woman's forehead.

Virginia watched as Miss Brown dribbled some water into the woman's mouth, gently wiping her lips and applying a salve to them. Virginia walked over to the bed and touched the woman's hand, squeezing it gently.

"I think it must be good to touch and talk to her often," Miss Brown said softly. "I hope she knows somehow that she is being cared for and is not afraid."

Colleen came to stand beside her and gasped.

"What? What is it, Miss Hughes?"

"I know her, I think."

Miss Brown turned to the maid hovering in the doorway. "Jenny, get Phillip. Hurry now."

It was only moments until Virginia heard boots on the stairway.

"What has happened?" Mr. Brown asked.

"Nothing has happened to Mary, but Miss Wiest's maid recognizes her."

Sarah and Virginia stepped back and allowed Colleen to get close to the bed and to Mary.

"Colleen?" Virginia whispered.

“I’m thinking, miss. I know her, but I can’t place her in my mind,” she said and leaned forward. “Oh yes! I know now.” She turned to Virginia. “Remember the young lady from Philadelphia? Your mother’s cousin’s daughter? Miss Mistlewaite?”

“Gertrude? This isn’t Gertrude.”

“No. I know, miss, but Miss Mistlewaite had a friend over one afternoon while she visited that week with you. The friend lived in Baltimore. I can’t think of her name.”

“Alice Durmand. Gertrude’s friend was Alice Durmand.”

“It is Miss Durmand’s maid. Greta Adamsen.”

“I don’t recognize her,” Virginia said.

“I doubt if you would. She kept herself to Mrs. French’s sitting room and the kitchen.”

“Do you know where this woman’s employer lives? Durmand, you said?” Phillip asked.

“On the west side of town. I have the address at home,” Virginia said.

Phillip Brown pulled a pocket watch from his vest and opened it. “I’ve got to be at work in a short time, but I can visit the Durmands tomorrow. May I stop by and get the address in the morning?”

“Certainly,” Virginia said and turned to Colleen. “We must be going as well. Poor Mr. Turnbull will be half-frozen.”

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Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 5:35 am

Phillip took the streetcar toward the Wiest mansion, appropriately called Shellington, glad he'd worn his heavy coat and scarf. He jumped off and walked the half block, careful of the ice and snow on the crushed-shell drive, to the double front door painted a glossy black.

"Mr. Brown. Do come in. Miss Wiest said you would be arriving," the butler said. "May I take your coat?"

"No, but thank you, Mr. Smith. I'll not be long."

"Here is Miss Wiest now," the butler said after turning to a rustling on the curved staircase.

"Miss Wiest," Phillip said, noting her heavy coat, buttoned to her throat. "It is an ugly day out there. You should let a servant fetch what is needed."

"Thank you for your concern, Mr. Brown," she said and turned to Smith. "Has the carriage come around yet?"

"He should be pulling up now, Miss Wiest."

"Good, then," she said and looked at Phillip. "Come along, Mr. Brown."

"Come along? Come along where?"

"To the Durmands', sir. Where did you think we were going?"

Phillip shook his head and put out his hand. “No, miss. Just hand me the address.”

She stared at him long enough that he shifted from one foot to the other and her maid, Miss Hughes, coughed delicately. “No,” she said.

“No?”

“No. How will you ever gain admittance to the Durmand household? My impression after meeting the daughter is that they are high sticklers. You’ll need an introduction, which is why I’m going with you.”

Phillip glanced at the butler and lowered his voice. “Just give me the address, miss. I’ll find out what I need to know from the staff more than the family.”

She shook her head and looked up at him from under dark lashes. “No, Mr. Brown. I’m coming with you.”

“No, you’re not,” Phillip said, his voice growing louder with each word, wincing inwardly at the tone he normally used with his sister when she was at cross purposes with him. “This is not your business, Miss Wiest.”

“I detest pettiness, Mr. Brown, but in this case, find the Durmand address on your own, then. Mr. Durmand is a city councilman and a very public figure, as I’m sure you’re aware. You’ll be able to obtain his address from someone.”

“Yes, I will, but I’ll spend the day finding it, and then I work the next five days and won’t be able to travel to the other side of the city after work when the streetcars stop running early in this bitter weather.”

She turned toward the staircase and signaled Miss Hughes to follow. “I’m sorry to hear that. Good day, Mr. Brown.”

My God! This woman is a terror!

Phillip took a deep breath. "Fine. Come along, then. Time is wasting."

She turned neatly and walked past him, head high, without even a glance at him. "I fear the horses are stomping as you've kept them waiting in this weather. Mr. Turnbull will not be pleased."

Phillip followed, fully aware he'd been bested by a slip of a woman, pale and fluttery, not weighing more than a fist full of feathers. He seated himself in the carriage, back to the horses, which rocked forward as soon as he'd closed the door behind him. Miss Wiest and Miss Hughes were covered in a thick fur pelt over their laps and legs. He could feel the hot bricks on the floor even through his heavy leather boots. This was undoubtedly a more comfortable ride than if he'd taken the streetcar, although he'd never admit it to a soul.

The carriage rolled to a stop, and he jumped down and turned to hand down the women. He followed them up several marble steps and through the door, opened by a uniformed servant, to a foyer with two matching fireplaces opposite each other, both blazing.

"May I help you?" another man said as he approached them.

"Yes," she said in her soft voice. "I'm Miss Virginia Wiest, and I was hoping to speak to Miss Durmand. Miss Alice Durmand."

"I'll see if she's in, Miss Wiest," he said as they looked up to the patter of steps.

"Ginny?" a young woman asked.

"Alice! Splendid! Do you have a moment?"

“Of course!” the woman said. She glanced at the butler. “Have refreshments sent to the blue parlor. Miss Wiest’s servants can go below stairs.” She reached an arm through Miss Wiest’s and guided her down the hall.

He was ready to protest that he was not Miss Wiest’s servant when she glanced over her shoulder at him and smiled. He supposed he was going to be doing exactly what he’d intended to do, except he didn’t have to knock at the delivery entrance near the kitchen.

Phillip found himself seated at a long wooden table with benches on either side where servants sipped coffee and talked, some reading a newspaper from the previous week, he noted. Colleen was speaking to a few young women holding brooms and rags and buckets. A cook was directing others in their chopping or slicing when she noticed him. She plopped a steaming cup of coffee in front of him, and the man across from him lowered his paper.

“Where you be from?” he asked.

“Butcher Hill,” Phillip said, surveying the older man’s clothes. “You been here a while?”

“Worked for the family nigh on twenty years. Manage the grounds and stables. Who wants to know?”

“Phillip Brown.”

“Gerald Austraw.” He aimed a calloused thumb to the steps leading to the family’s quarters. “What brings your mistress here?”

“I don’t work for Miss Wiest. She’s a friend of Miss Durmand, and I’m trying to find out about a poor woman who was dumped on my front stoop a week ago, still not

awake. Found out yesterday she worked for Miss Durmand as a personal maid.”

The cook’s eyes widened. “Greta!”

Austraw glanced over his shoulder. “What does she look like?” he asked as others in the kitchen began to gather around.

“She’s got blond hair, thin, probably five foot and some. Never saw her standing up. She’s been in bed since I picked her up off our front porch. Nasty crack on the back of her head.”

The staff erupted into loud chatter, and Phillip was unable to distinguish one conversation from another. Austraw stood up, and the room was quickly silent.

“Back to work,” he said. The staff scattered, and it was soon just him, Miss Hughes, Austraw, and Mrs. Newcomer, the cook.

“I said all along that man she’s been seeing is no good,” the cook said vehemently.

“What man?” Phillip asked.

“He works for Mr. Durmand at City Hall,” a young woman said who’d come to stand beside Miss Hughes. “His name is Matthew Finkle.”

“You think he would hurt her?”

“He already has. Didn’t she always have to cover up the black eyes and busted lips, but it weren’t from her falling or being clumsy. That man done hit her.”

“Don’t be talking like that, missy,” Austraw said. “What if what you said got back to someone upstairs. They won’t like it.”

The girl bit her lip and hurried away.

“So, Ginny, what brings you out in this miserable weather today?”

“The strangest thing, Alice. The tall man who came in with me? He works for the cannery and he told me that a woman had been hurt and left on his porch a week ago. She’s been unconscious, so they had no idea who she was but I visited his home today and my maid recognized her as your personal maid, Greta Adamsen.”

“You visited an employee’s home? That’s rich!” she said with a laugh.

“Are you not concerned that Miss Adamsen has been hurt, Alice?”

The woman shrugged. “I hardly can control what servants do on their days or evenings out.”

Virginia had found little to recommend Alice Durmand when she’d visited her home last summer to meet with her old friend, Virginia’s cousin, but she hadn’t thought the woman this cold and unfeeling.

“Had you reported her missing? It’s been a week at least.”

“To whom would I report her for not showing up for her employment? Myself? I employ her!” Alice said with laugh.

“Surely it would have been worthwhile to call the police or hire a detective of some sort. There’s an obligation to persons in our employ, and Miss Adamsen was a personal servant.”

Alice shrugged. “She was in a relationship with a man far above her reach. Some women get what they deserve.”

Virginia stood, too disgusted to continue even feigning any pleasantries. “No woman deserves violence. I’ll see myself out.” The door to the room had been opened by the butler when Alice spoke again.

“Don’t step in the gutter, Virginia. I wouldn’t want there to be any unsavory talk about your family.”

Virginia paused but did not turn back, well aware of the threat that had been made against her reputation. Thankfully, she saw Mr. Brown and Colleen waiting in the foyer. She was seated in the carriage when she realized how very angry she was. Virginia worked to calm herself, taking slow, even breaths and forcing her fingers to unclench.

“Are you well?” Phillip Brown asked her.

“I am well, just undone by the lack of care exhibited by Miss Durmand for her staff. She was aware that Miss Adamsen did not show up for her duties but did nothing. She felt no obligation to find out what had happened to the woman. That some women get what they deserved because of this man Miss Adamsen was seeing. Unconscionable!”

She saw the glance that passed between Colleen and Phillip Brown. “What? Why are you looking like that at each other? What have I overlooked?”

“It’s not that you overlooked anything, Miss Wiest. You are different, though, than most employers. Most are not as . . . unconcerned as Miss Durmand, but that does not mean they would worry or put themselves out for an employee. Perhaps they would direct a butler or secretary to look into a missing servant, but many would not even do that much,” Colleen said.

Virginia glanced at Phillip Brown, who was looking out the glass window of the

carriage, indicating with his silence that he agreed with Colleen. However, she could not stop herself from asking, “Does your opinion match Miss Hughes’s?”

He turned and looked at her, and she felt the weight of his gaze. “I have no wish to upset you, Miss Wiest.”

“That answer is more upsetting than the truth.”

“I have to agree with Miss Hughes. As a general rule, employers are not usually concerned about their employees’ tragedies or mishaps. I’m fortunate to work for the Wiest family, who has always done right by their staff. Just last year, your father authorized the money to rebuild the Wilkenses’ house when it burned down.”

Was she so unaware of the real world around her? Was she naive? A sickly, motherless child rarely exposed to life’s cruelties by a loving and overprotective father? Yes, she imagined she was. Well, she intended to make some changes in her life beginning this very day.

“Miss Durmand said Miss Adamsen was in a relationship with a man who was far out of her reach,” Virginia said.

“Matthew Finkle is his name,” Brown said. “The staff below stairs say he’d been violent with her. He works at City Hall for Miss Durmand’s father.”

“And nothing’s been done about his violence?” she asked.

“One of the maids said she tried to hide her bruises and claimed she’d been clumsy, but she hadn’t been believed, at least by that maid,” Colleen said.

“How will we talk to this Matthew Finkle?” Virginia asked.

Brown looked at her. “You will not be talking to him. I’ll find out what I can about him from other sources and then confront him. Alone.”

“Mr. Brown, you have no right to instruct me?—”

“We already know Finkle is violent. He may have intended Miss Adamsen to die, which would make him a murderer too. I cannot allow you to speak to him and put yourself in the way of a violent man. I will not be manipulated again as you did today.”

“Well,” she huffed and turned her head away, knowing her cheeks were pink with embarrassment. Mr. Brown certainly was high-handed. She had no intention of allowing him to dictate her behaviors.

He jumped out of the carriage as soon as it rolled to a stop and helped Colleen down the narrow, icy steps. She waited a moment and was irritated enough to refuse his help, but hadn’t her favorite governess always told her to outdo others with kindness, not spite?

She stepped down, the wind blowing against her skirts as she hung on Brown’s steady arm. She glanced up.

“Mr. Turnbull? Are the horses well enough to take Mr. Brown to his home, and are you warm enough?”

“No, thank you, miss. I’ll catch the streetcar on the next block,” Brown said and turned to walk away.

“We’ll be fine to Wolfe Street and back,” Turnbull said. “Get in the carriage, Mr. Brown.”

Phillip turned as a gust of frigid, icy wind hit his cheeks like needles. “Get inside, Miss Wiest. I’ll take your kind offer.”

Once home, he thanked Turnbull, who nodded and put his fingers to his tall hat in a salute. Phillip went inside, thankful for the warmth and the smell of Eliza’s baking, and headed straight for the kitchen. He sat at the stool beside the high table where she was chopping vegetables and dropping them into a large pot on the Troy stove they’d purchased several years ago. Eliza wrapped a towel around a crusty loaf of bread sitting on a long pan on the table near the wall oven. She sat the bread, a knife, and the butter dish in front of him, and he needed no other encouragement.

He wiped his face and hands after several slices of the hot bread, feeling warm from the food and the heat of the fireplace and stove, making his eyes drift shut.

“Best find your bed before you fall asleep in my kitchen,” Eliza said as she slammed a cleaver on a large onion. The halves tumbled away from each other as she wiggled the knife out of the worn wooden table.

“Yes, ma’am.” He stood and stretched and thought about the sofa by the fireplace in the sitting room. “Any change in the patient?”

“You’ll have to ask your sister or the doctor.”

“The doctor? When was he here?”

“Think he’s still here. Haven’t heard the front door other than when you come home.”

Phillip glared at Eliza and hurried up the stone steps, past Uncle’s room and up the stairs after a quick glance in the sitting room and some longing for the sofa and the knit blanket draped over its back. He turned toward the back bedroom and stopped.

Sarah stood against the wall, her hands behind her back, smiling up at Prosperi, who was leaning on his forearm near her head.

“How’s the patient?” he asked, causing Prosperi to back away and pick up the leather case by his feet. How they hadn’t heard his heavy tread on the stairs was unfathomable, but they clearly hadn’t—or didn’t care if he saw them standing so close to each other.

“I believe she’s recovering. I removed the stitches from her head today, and your family’s care of her has been excellent,” Prosperi said.

“Her eyes have been fluttering, and she squeezed my hand this morning. Not tightly, but I could feel the pressure,” Sarah said as she walked toward the stairs. “Speaking of which, it’s time I gave her something to eat.”

Prosperi followed her down the stairs, Phillip watching them as they made their goodbyes at the door. He hurried down and followed her to the kitchen. Sarah pulled a crockery bowl from the shelf and dipped a ladle into a small pot warming on the stove. She cut a piece of bread, ripped off the crust and ate it, and tore the remaining pieces into the broth in the bowl.

“Jenny, can you help me prop Greta up?” Sarah asked.

“I’ll help,” Phillip said to Jenny, who nodded and picked up the paring knife and a potato. He followed his sister to the spare bedroom. “Jenny still won’t look me in the eye. You would think after three years she’d be used to me.”

“She’ll never be ‘used to’ any man, I don’t think,” Sarah said as she opened the bedroom door. “Eliza and I rarely ask her to go to the market. She is terrified to leave the house.”

“What do you think happened to her?”

“A ‘man’ happened to her,” Sarah said and pulled a chair beside Greta’s bed. “Lift her by the shoulders so I can put these pillows behind her.”

Phillip stood there watching his sister dribble spoonfuls of soup into her mouth. He imagined a man had happened to this woman too.

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Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 5:35 am

“Thank you, Mr. Everly,” Virginia said as he helped her into her chair in the elegant dining room of the new Barnum Hotel. She leaned forward as his fingers lingered near her shoulders. She nodded to his mother seated across from her. “Good to see you, Mrs. Everly.”

“Yes, of course,” the woman replied, her hand flitting up in the air, releasing an overwhelming sweet fragrance. “You’re not looking very healthy, although Altimus did say you were feeling sickly a few weeks ago.”

Mrs. Everly was a large-bosomed, stocky woman, draped almost entirely in black silk. There was an inch or two of a white, stiffly starched shirt visible above the neckline of her mutton-sleeved jacket.

“I’m feeling quite recovered. Thank you for asking.”

“You really must take better care of yourself. You’ll need your strength to birth children. The Everlys have large families.”

“Mother!” Everly said and glanced sheepishly at Virginia.

“It’s true, Altimus. I’m sure you have plans for a large family, and Miss Wiest must be healthy. She’s far too thin.”

Virginia looked at Mr. Everly and turned to his mother. “I’m sure Mr. Everly will have this conversation with the woman he marries and that it is a private matter between them, whomever she is.”

Mrs. Everly was about to launch into a speech, Virginia could tell, when the waiter came to their table. Virginia smiled up at him as he handed out their menus and offered to bring drinks. The woman chattered on through the soup course but finally quieted when the chicken croquettes were served.

“I was told, Mr. Everly, that one of our cannery employee’s houses burned down last year and that the company saw to rebuilding for them. Is that something you oversee in your capacity?”

“Miss Wiest! Ladies do not discuss business! We know nothing about it,” Mrs. Everly said, her face reddening.

“I discuss business, Mrs. Everly. Wiest Cannery will be mine when my father passes on.”

“Surely there will be a board of directors to manage the company. And, of course, your husband will oversee everything.”

Virginia smiled at the woman and turned. “Mr. Everly?”

Everly glanced from his mother and back to her. “I have some involvement when an employee is in dire need, but your father handles most of it on his own. He is far too generous, miss, if truth be known. Anyone with a sad story!”

Virginia was well aware that her father was softhearted, but she also knew he was an astute businessman who dealt with legislators and councilmen—not all of them honest or forthright, unscrupulous competitors, transportation issues, and poor harvests to keep Wiest Cannery profitable. He considered his employees to be part of his family, most likely why so many had worked there for years, even decades, even aside from the good wages.

“How does he find out about these sad stories?” she asked.

“Employees who’ve been with the cannery for a long time find no issue walking directly up to him when he’s on the packing floor. It’s unconscionable, really. They have no business speaking to him. Otherwise, there’s a floor manager who sends him particulars, although I don’t know which one it is. All of these requests should filter through me first so I can sort the truly needy from those looking for a quick—and likely false—handout.”

“Miss Wiest, you must learn to trust men to do the right thing,” Mrs. Everly said. “You must trust your father and Altimus to make these sorts of decisions. You really must.”

“I do trust my father,” Virginia said before thinking of the impact of her words. She had no intention of marrying Everly, but he was part of her father’s inner circle, and she would inevitably have to deal with him.

Mrs. Everly placed her fork back on her plate, still holding a rather large piece of dumpling. “Miss Wiest! You must view Altimus in the same way! Women’s brains are not made to deal with numbers and decisions and all the other disagreeable parts of business. We are built to manage a household and raise children, ensuring our menfolk are comfortable.”

Virginia glanced at Everly, who was studying her, and not in a pleasant way. He finally looked away, took a long drink of his wine, and signaled the waiter.

“The ladies may want dessert. I’ll have a bourbon. Then bring the check for me to sign to my account,” he said.

“Nothing more for me,” Virginia said and smiled at the young man. “Everything was so delicious.”

Mrs. Everly declined dessert, and Everly downed his drink in one swallow. Virginia was exceptionally glad she'd had Mr. Turnbull bring her rather than riding in the Everly carriage. She thought she may have finally gotten through to Everly that she was not going to marry him and could avoid an awkward trip home to Shellington.

Phillip had just fixed the one of the chains that lowered the canned oysters into the steam pit and was wiping the grease from his hands when Rufus Manto stopped him.

"Everything all right, Rufus?"

"Come look at this machine, boss," he said in a loud voice.

Phillip followed him, and both squatted in front of a massive iron lever.

"Nothing the matter with the machine," Rufus said as quietly as he could over the sounds of machinery. "Just had to tell you to be careful. There's some that's looking to cause you trouble."

Phillip laid a hand on the lever. "Where did you hear that?"

"Georgia Club. Something to do with that gang who sells the poppy."

Phillip had helped put Enrico Bucciarelli in prison the previous summer. He would likely die in jail, but his lieutenants were still very much in control of gaming halls, prostitution, and opium dens across the city.

Rufus stood up, and Phillip followed. "Must be fixed now, boss!" he said.

Phillip nodded at Rufus and turned away. Bucciarelli was a very dangerous man, and prison had not stopped him from running his Baltimore gang, who engaged in every type of crime, often by the most brutal means imaginable. Phillip had found out by

chance about a meeting Bucciarelli was having with his New York opium supplier, and he and his childhood friend who served on the Baltimore police force, Timothy Sweitzinger, had listened in on the meeting. Tim had had him arrested on the spot by his fellow police officers, who had come to aid them.

Bucciarelli had promised retribution, and Phillip took him seriously. He watched for strangers and insisted Sarah, Eliza, and Jenny always went to the market or wherever they were going with someone, although now that he thought of it, they'd become lax. He would not be surprised if Greta was connected to it all, but he didn't know how. He did know that he held regrets, deep ones, for getting involved with Bucciarelli and his gang. Uncle Patrick had scolded him as if he were a small boy and had barely spoken to him for weeks afterward.

"You put your family, your own flesh and blood, in danger. There was no need for you to go with Tim that night. Not that Bucciarelli isn't a menace, but it wasn't your job to nab him," he'd said. Phillip remembered vividly the shame he'd felt at his uncle's words, especially as he was right.

After work that evening, Phillip found Uncle Patrick in the back garden where the privy stood, a shovel in hand.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Cleaning out the privy. Better now than when it stinks in the summer."

"Except the ground's frozen." Phillip shrugged. "Rufus Manto said someone at the Georgia Club told him that someone is looking to cause me trouble."

"Maybe so," Patrick said. "Maybe that's why there's an unconscious woman on your doorstep."

“He said it was somebody who sells opium.”

Patrick stopped stabbing the icy dirt and looked at him. “Bucciarelli.”

“Maybe.”

His uncle shoveled with more vengeance than necessary. “You better warn the women,” he growled and turned his back.

Phillip found his sister, Jenny, and Eliza in the kitchen. Sarah and Eliza were talking and laughing as they peeled potatoes while Jenny had her head down, eyes on the carrots in front of her.

“Heard there’s someone around looking to cause me trouble. Don’t be going to the grocer alone, or anywhere else for that matter. Or have Uncle Patrick or I go instead.”

Sarah stopped her peeling. “Does it have something to do with Greta?”

“Don’t know yet. You have to be on your guard until I figure this out.”

“Or forever,” Eliza said. “You’ll always be putting yourself out there, you ain’t changing at your age.”

His sister smiled, and Jenny kept her head bowed. “I guess you’re probably right, but I’ll always make sure you’re safe. You too, Jenny,” he said to the top of her head. She nodded without looking up. She laid down her knife and raised her shaking hands to her mouth.

Sarah glanced at him and then Jenny. “Don’t you worry. You don’t have to go anywhere. And you’re safe here.”

Jenny nodded again, swiped a sleeve at her eyes, and picked up the small knife. Phillip wondered again what had happened to this terrified woman and if she would ever recover. He never wanted to see his sister—or any woman—as frightened as Jenny was.

Phillip left the house early the following morning and caught the streetcar that would take him to Peale's Museum on Holiday Street, where the city council met. He'd been told Mr. Finkle worked there, along with a few other councilmen's assistants. He went inside the busy building, thankful for the warmth after the bitter-cold ride across town, unwrapped his woolen scarf from his neck, and took the small-brimmed bowler off his head. He climbed the stairs, busy with men hurrying up and down, after speaking to a young woman seated at desk near the doors.

The door to the office he was directed to stood open to six desks lined up, three on one side and three on the other. He knocked on the door frame and waited until a young man looked up.

"Do you have the packet?" he asked.

Phillip shook his head. "No. I'm not here about a packet. I'm hoping to speak to Mr. Finkle."

A dark-haired man seated at a desk near the windows looked up. "I'm Finkle. What do you need?" he said.

"Can we talk privately?"

Finkle shook his head. "Can't you see I'm buried in work? Just tell me what you need."

Phillip heard some chuckles from around the room and smiled himself. "Certainly,

Mr. Finkle. What can you tell me about a female you're involved with named Greta Adamsen?"

Finkle's cheeks bloomed red. "I don't know any woman named Greta."

"What would Miss Bellweather say about you being involved with another female?" a young man across the room asked to much guffawing and chuckling.

Finkle jumped out of his chair and hurried past Phillip into the teeming hallway. Phillip followed to a small unoccupied office.

"Who are you?" Finkle demanded.

"Greta Adamsen was dropped onto my front stoop before daybreak over a week ago. She was nearly frozen, has a nasty gash on her head, and has yet to wake up. My name is Phillip Brown, and you can thank my family for taking such good care of her."

Finkle whitened. "Will she be all right?"

"The doctor thinks so."

"Did you speak to her employer? What did Miss Durmand say?"

"She was . . . unconcerned."

"Poor Greta," he said and dropped into the wooden chair behind him.

"So you do know her?"

He blew out a breath and nodded. "I've stepped out with her a few times."

“Who is Miss Bellweather?”

“My fiancée.”

“Ah.”

“Don’t look at me like that, Brown,” Finkle said sharply. “I’m not the first man, nor will I be the last, who keeps a piece on the side.”

“I wonder what Miss Bellweather will say about that.”

“Are you threatening me?” He jumped up from his chair and stepped close to Phillip. “You’d best not!”

“I have no intention of telling her anything. I am trying to find out who beat Miss Adamsen and dumped her on my doorstep. Stands to reason you may want to make sure she’s quiet. Others have said you weren’t afraid to use your fists on her in the past. Maybe she threatened to talk to Miss Bellweather.”

Finkle stared at him blankly. “I never hit Greta. Never. And she would have no chance to speak to Mary. Greta’s just a servant.”

Phillip stared at the man, and waited until he looked away. “You stepped out with Miss Adamsen while affianced to another woman. Did Miss Adamsen know you had plans to marry another?”

“She could have hardly imagined I’d marry her, could she?”

“I don’t know. She’s unconscious and can’t answer my questions.”

“She should have realized,” he whispered.

“Had your relationship with Miss Adamsen gone any further than stepping out?”

Finkle shrugged. “No.”

“Not yet is what you should have said. Am I right?”

“Why is this any of your business?” Finkle blustered.

“Do you have any sisters, Mr. Finkle? Girl cousins? Nieces? If you do, you already know the answer to that question. I hate to see a woman being taken advantage of, but more than that, I want to know who hurt her and why. I have a sister. I’d hope if she was hurt that someone would keep her from freezing to death.”

“I didn’t do anything to Greta. In truth, I like her very well. But circumstances are . . . complicated.”

“Miss Bellweather’s family can provide you with means?”

“Her family is wealthy and well connected.”

“And Miss Adamsen is a maid.”

“Yes. But I would have never hurt her. I didn’t hurt her. I can’t imagine who did.” He looked at Phillip. “I’m telling the truth.”

Phillip wrapped his scarf around his neck and put on his hat. He stared hard at Finkle. “I’ll find who did this. No need to worry about Miss Adamsen.”

Virginia opened the plain envelope just delivered to her from Wolfe Street. She was eating her luncheon alone in the small dining room, reading her correspondence and the morning’s Baltimore Sun .

Miss Wiest,

Our patient is awake and beginning to recover. I thought you would like to know.

Sarah Brown

It was not long until Virginia was seated in the coach, Colleen beside her, with hot bricks at her feet. Her arrival was noted as the door on Wolfe Street opened even before Mr. Turnbull had a chance to rap.

“Come in,” Sarah Brown said. “Another bitter-cold day.”

The shy young servant took coats and gloves, and Sarah escorted them up the stairs to the small bedroom at the back of the hallway.

“Has she spoken much to you?” Virginia asked.

“Very little other than confirming her name is Greta Adamsen.”

“She’s not asked to send a message to a relative that she is safe?”

Sarah shook her head. “No. I find it strange, but then I think she is too terrified to say much. Maybe you will have better luck with her than I did.”

Miss Brown knocked softly on the door to the room and opened it a few inches.

“Miss Adamsen? Are you up for some company?”

There was no reply, but Sarah opened the door wider, and Virginia followed her inside. Greta Adamsen was an attractive woman, although very thin, with golden-blond hair and large dark eyes. She was propped against a mound of pillows in a long sleeve, high-necked nightgown. Her fingertips were wrapped around the edges of the

blankets covering her, as if they were her shield.

“Hello, Miss Adamsen,” Virginia said. “How are you feeling?”

“My head hurts, but not terribly.”

“That’s good. You took quite a blow according to Dr. Prosperi,” Miss Brown said.

“Dr. Prosperi? Who is that?” Miss Adamsen asked, glancing from Miss Brown to Virginia. “Does he know who I am?”

“He does,” she said. “He’s been our family’s doctor for years, and his father before him. He’s completely trustworthy.”

“I don’t want to bring trouble to this house,” she whispered.

“Trouble? What trouble?” Virginia asked.

“Why don’t you sit for a chat?” Miss Brown said and moved a ladder-back chair close to the bed. “I’ve got to check on our noonday meal.”

Miss Adamsen watched her go and glanced at Virginia. “Who are you? Why are you here?”

“Miss Brown’s brother told me how they’d found you on their stoop and that they had no idea who you were,” Virginia said. “I felt terrible for you, with no one knowing who you were. I wanted to help. That is all. And then when we visited here, my maid recognized you as Miss Durmand’s maid.”

Miss Adamsen’s face whitened. “Miss Durmand knows I’m here?”

“She does, although she was . . . not concerned.”

Miss Adamsen covered her mouth with shaking fingers and took a shuttering breath. She looked at Virginia. “Can you help me get out of here? I need to leave here as soon as possible. The Browns have been very kind, and I have no wish to put them in danger.”

Virginia stared at her. There was real terror in her eyes. Something, or more likely, someone was threatening her.

“I’m not sure you’re strong enough to leave. And where would you go?”

“If I could get to the train station, I have an aunt who lives in Philadelphia. She would take me in.”

Virginia looked long at Miss Adamsen. There was no doubt that the fear on her face was real, that there was some reasoning behind her panic. “Who is threatening you?”

Miss Adamsen faced her quickly, tears gathering in her eyes. “It’s best you don’t know. For your own safety.”

Miss Brown came back in the room at that moment. “Miss Adamsen wants to leave as soon as possible, Miss Brown. She wants to get to the train station so she can get to a relative.”

“Miss Adamsen, you are not well enough to travel. We will not let anyone bother you. Especially my brother. He and my uncle will keep us safe.”

The woman just shook her head, tears tumbling down her cheeks. “No one can keep us safe.”

“Us? From whom, Miss Adamsen? Please tell us so we can help you,” Virginia said.

“Mr. Finkle?” Miss Brown asked. “Phillip went to see him. He said he had stepped out with you and that he hoped you were going to be well. Did you know he is engaged to be married?”

She nodded. “Yes. Yes, I knew. Matthew was never going to marry the likes of me, nor would I have been interested in marrying him.”

Virginia glanced at Miss Brown, who wore an astonished look that matched how Virginia felt. She had assumed this mésalliance was only a benefit to Mr. Finkle, while Miss Adamsen’s heart had been engaged. She was quickly understanding that whatever Mr. Finkle’s interest was, Miss Adamsen was never taken in. She knew she was not marriageable for someone like Matthew Finkle. She knew. Why would she continue to see him?

“Just looking for an evening out? Some supper? Maybe a dance hall?” Miss Brown asked.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” she said.

“I’m sorry, but I think you should talk about it. You were dumped on our doorstep, not on any of our neighbors’, hurt and unconscious.”

A sob tore from Miss Adamsen’s throat, and she shook her head. “It will only make it worse. You have no idea how brutal he can be.”

“Who is ‘he’? Phillip cannot guard you or us if he does not know who he is up against.”

She pounded the mattress with clenched fists. “Bucciarelli! It’s Bucciarelli, and he

has my son! My baby! May God guard my poor baby! He'll kill him!"

Virginia sat back in her chair, as if she moved away, she could separate herself from this mother's hysteria. Greta Adamsen had curled herself into a tight ball, her sobs and wails bringing tears to Virginia's eyes. This poor woman!

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“What? Bucciarelli?” Phillip was certain the women had not heard him come up the stairs or realized he’d heard much of their conversation as he walked down the hallway to the bedroom. Greta Adamsen was curled in a ball, crying, while Sarah and Miss Wiest looked on aghast. “What was she saying about her son?”

“Bucciarelli has her son. She told us she had no interest in Finkle,” Sarah said.

Phillip watched Miss Wiest attempt to comfort Miss Adamsen and tried to make sense of what his sister had just said. They coaxed her to take a sip of water, which he’d seen Miss Wiest put a drop of laudanum in. It was probably for the best, although he’d like to get more details from her, but he doubted she’d be able to answer him in her current state. Sarah closed the curtains and doused the lamp on the bedside table before leaving the room with Miss Wiest. He followed the women to the sitting room.

“What do you think, Phillip?” Sarah asked once Jenny had brought tea and butter cake, warm from the oven.

“If Bucciarelli’s involved, then we know why Miss Adamsen was dumped on our porch stoop and not on our neighbors’.”

“I thought the same,” Sarah said.

“Who is this Bucciarelli person? Not a friend, I’m guessing,” Miss Wiest asked.

“He’s a criminal. He sells opium, runs the gambling halls and the bro—pardon me, miss,” Phillip said. He shouldn’t be talking around Miss Wiest in the same way he

talked in front of Sarah and Eliza.

“I know what a brothel is, Mr. Brown,” Miss Wiest said, her cheeks pink. “What is your relationship with this person?”

“I helped get him arrested and convicted last summer.”

“You are a policeman? Or a constable?”

He shook his head. “No. Neither of those things.”

“Oh,” she said and picked up her teacup, staring into it as if the answers to her questions were there.

“Phillip overheard Bucciarelli’s plot to murder his rival and start a gang war while he was speaking to the persons who deliver the opium he sells. He would come out the victor, of course, and control more of Baltimore. Phillip reported it to a friend on the police force, and they were able to catch him in the act. He’ll be in jail for a very long time, but he still manages to run his gang from inside the prison walls,” Sarah said.

“This is the type of man who would take a child to force the mother to do his bidding?” Miss Wiest asked.

“It’s unlikely the child is still alive,” he said.

“Dear Lord!” she said. “How dreadful! Is there nothing to be done to confirm that or recover him?”

“I’ve got to get Miss Adamsen to talk to me about what she was supposed to be doing in exchange for her son. If it has something to do with her working in the home of a city councilman. I’ll have to unravel that first.”

“What should we do?” Miss Wiest asked.

Phillip looked at her. “What do you mean ‘do’?”

“I mean I intend to help this poor woman somehow.”

“Are you insane?” he asked. “These men are ruthless! They’d kill you and toss your body in the bay. You must keep yourself far away from all of this.”

Miss Wiest glanced up at him with a haughty look he didn’t care for, especially from someone as delicate and fragile as she was. She’d never have a chance against one of Bucciarelli’s toughs.

“Your sister is just as vulnerable if not more. They obviously know where you live and must know your family is taking care of Miss Adamsen.”

“You don’t think I know that, Miss Wiest?” he growled in a whisper. “You don’t think that those nightmares keep me awake until all hours? They do. I can’t worry about you too.”

Miss Wiest straightened up, not that she had far to go. Her posture, her manners were all well controlled and perfectly ladylike. But he thought she might be angry now.

“I have no expectations that you will worry about me, Mr. Brown. It is not your place to do so, nor would I welcome it,” she said as she stood. “I mustn’t keep Mr. Turnbull out in this weather any longer. Thank you for your note, Miss Brown, and for the delightful tea and cake.”

He jumped from his seat as she headed to the door. Sarah helped her with her coat as her maid came from the kitchens. She left without even a glance at him after a warm goodbye to his sister. Sarah closed the front door and leaned back against it, smiling.

“Miss Wiest certainly knows how to put you in your place,” she said with a laugh. “I haven’t enjoyed myself that much in a long, long time.”

“You must discourage her. She would never stand a chance against those men.”

“Discourage her?” Sarah walked past him toward the kitchen, Phillip following. “I hardly know her, and we’re certainly not going to meet at the church sewing circle. Her society is very different than mine.”

“Yet you’ve entertained her here twice.”

“She came to see Greta and you,” Sarah said. “She likes to look at you, I think.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’m a floor manager. I drink my brew at a tavern, and my clothes come from Martin’s Emporium.”

“None of that matters to a woman who is interested,” she said as she picked up a knife and cut an onion into quarters. She dropped them in the large pot on the stove. Eliza was shelling oysters beside her at the long wooden table.

“Well, it’s all nonsense because I’m not interested in her, not in the least,” Phillip said.

“She is a sickly looking woman from what I could see. All drawn in the cheeks and so pale. It’s like she don’t have any blood,” Eliza said.

“And she has no meat on her. Her wrists are just two bones rubbing against each other.” Sarah shivered.

Phillip knew what was happening. Both women were trying to get him to make lavish compliments about Virginia Wiest. He wouldn’t satisfy them. Every time he was

introduced to a woman, especially an attractive one, Sarah and Eliza tried the same trick, hoping he would marry, raise a brood, and stay away from criminals.

“I don’t care that she’s peaked, only in as much that she’s Mr. Wiest’s daughter and I don’t wish that heartache on anyone. Let the poor woman alone,” he said.

“I don’t intend to call on her, but I doubt we’ve seen the last of her. She seems determined to help.”

And that was exactly what concerned Phillip.

Phillip napped for an hour, knowing that his shift at the brewery would be a late one and he had to be at the cannery early the next morning. He walked the three blocks, his hands deep in his pockets against the weather, even with his thick gloves on. He rounded the side of the brick building and walked down the narrow passage toward the alley that ran along the back of the building where the drays pulled up to load barrels of Bond beer to be distributed to taverns across the city.

He tripped over something in the dark passageway, nearly landing in the mud, his hand going instantly to the knife in his boot. The something turned out to be old Sam Grayman after Phillip heard a groan. He glanced behind him to the street and saw a couple of men hurry away, as if they’d been following him.

“Sam? Sam? Is that you? Are you hurt?”

Sam let out a soft snore, and Phillip hurried to the alley and the door to the brewery, near the silos holding the hops and other grains.

“Hey! Somebody come help me. Sam Grayman is asleep in the walkway. He’ll freeze to death,” Phillip shouted.

Billy Bond turned from what he was doing. "Sleeping? The damned fool! Shorty! Get the little wagon. We'll have to cart him home most likely."

It was only a minute or two until they dragged Sam out of the passageway and lifted him into the cart. Shorty started down the alley pulling the cart, Billy and Phillip watching it go.

"Did ya see the two at the end of the walkway just now?" Billy whispered.

"I did. Don't think they're customers."

"Come on, then," Billy said in his booming voice, an arm around Phillip's shoulder. "Let's sell some beer."

Phillip went through the cold room, where the barrels were stacked around blocks of ice, to the front of the building, pulling on an apron as he went. He went through the swinging doors, bringing him behind the polished oak bar where Emil Schmidt stood pouring beer into heavy mugs for the large crowd of mostly neighborhood working men, with a few women with their husbands and some women looking for company. Emil was as tall as Phillip, bald, and thick-bodied with massive forearms, his starched white shirt buttoned to the neck, covered by an embroidered vest and an apron.

"Emil," Phillip said. "Any trouble?"

"Nay."

"Any strangers?"

Emil glanced at him as he made change for three mugs of Bond lager. "I did, ya. They're gone now. Friends?"

Phillip shook his head. "Doubtful. Let me know if you see them again."

The evening went by quickly as he and Emil did not have a minute to spare between pouring brew, wheeling in new barrels, and wiping down tables. It was long after midnight when they got the last patron out the front door, locking it behind them. Another few minutes of cleaning up and they were both donning their coats.

"Not looking forward to this walk home," Phillip said as he pulled his flat cap down over his ears. The two men went out the back door together, and Emil led the way down the narrow passageway where Sam Grayman had been sleeping. They came out on the street, quiet and still, not a person or wagon in sight. Snow was falling in large flakes, covering the dirty, crusted slush that edged the side of the path in front of the houses. Phillip looked up at the sky, dark blue and threatening to drop more snow, the smoke from hundreds of fireplaces and stoves rising against it.

Emil turned left, and Phillip turned right toward Wolfe Street and home. He had gone no more than half a block when two men materialized in front of him. Without turning, he knew there was one behind him too, the man's heavy breathing giving him away. Three against one. Not great odds considering these men looked like they knew a thing or two about fighting, although the one man, tall and thin with massive ears, looked smug and pleased with himself. Phillip decided to act first while they congratulated themselves on finding him alone.

He lifted his foot up to the side, swinging himself around until his boot caught the breather square in the chest. The man dropped to the ground, gasping. Phillip felt someone at his back who caught hold of his arms, swinging him around to face the other man, a mountain of a brute who commenced punching him in the face and stomach until his vision blurred. He was not down yet, he thought to himself, kicking up and landing the toe of his boot in the brute's groin, eliciting a cry from him like a dog howling. The brute was getting himself upright when he was toppled over in the snow by a man running full tilt. Emil took him down to the ground and swung his

meaty fists time and again at the brute's face.

Phillip wrenched himself from the arms that held him and swung his fist as he turned, connecting with the chin of the man with the oversized ears. He reached for his knife in his boot and bent his knees into a fighter's stance.

"Come on," he said. "Get a little closer, you coward."

Steam was coming from the man's mouth and nose and from the top of his hatless head in the cold night air. He held a wicked-looking knife in his right hand. He tossed the knife from one hand to the other, never taking his eyes from Phillip's face.

"You should be minding your own business, Brown," Ears said.

"I am, you big lout. Just walking home when you idiots jumped me," Phillip said, not taking his eyes from the knife in the other man's hand.

"Give us the woman. We'll let your sister alone."

"Touch my sister and you're a dead man."

"Give us the woman. She's ours."

"She's yours because you kidnapped her son," Phillip said as the two men slowly moved circled each other.

"Ha! Her son! Ask her who the father is," the man said.

Phillip lunged forward, knife out, but Ears jumped to the side. "I don't care who the father is. You don't dump an injured woman in the snow to freeze to death."

“We didn’t dump her, but some women need a lesson or two, just like you.” The man whipped his knife forward, Phillip turning at the last possible moment, taking the tip in his shoulder rather than his chest. His arm burned like the very devil when he yanked it out. When Phillip looked up, all three men were gone, running into the cold night and darkness.

Phillip bent over, hands on his knees, and took a few short breaths. “Thanks for the help, Emil. How did you know?”

“Waited a moment at the corner on the next block down and saw them come at you. The one came out of the walkway beside the brewery. Must have been back there when we locked up.”

“We both better get home,” Phillip said and then staggered a bit. He must have lost more blood than he thought. Emil had him by the waist and was nearly carrying him by the time they got to his door. Phillip pulled his key out of his pants pocket with a shaking and blood-covered hand. The door opened before he could turn the lock. Uncle Patrick was there, pulling him inside and thanking Emil for getting him home. Phillip’s knees gave out, and the two men got him to the kitchen. Emil said good night, and Patrick peeled his coat from his shoulder, Phillip wincing with every inch.

“What in the hell happened?”

“I got stabbed.”

“Don’t be smart. You ain’t equipped for it.”

“Three men. They wanted the woman, Greta Adamsen. Threatened Sarah if we didn’t hand her over.”

“Hope you got in some licks.”

“I did. Would have been worse if Emil hadn’t shown up.”

“The German’s a good one in a fight with those fists, I imagine.”

Phillip hissed in pain as Patrick wiped the stab wound with hot water and then pressed it again until it bled. He put a salve on it and then wrapped a bandage around his arm.

“Would have been worse if you hadn’t been wearing your heavy coat.”

Phillip pulled his shirt on and climbed the steps. He washed his face with cold water, his jaw and cheek bone tender to the touch. The brute had gotten in some good punches. He closed his eyes as soon as his head hit the pillow.

The sun was shining brightly, and the temperature had warmed enough to melt the ice and snow on the drive.

“Are you sure you’re up to this, Miss Wiest?” Colleen asked for the third time.

“Yes, I am sure. In any case, it is only two blocks. I have been walking the hallways and stairs here, building my strength, and it is time I put it to the test. If I am unable to make it, you can hurry back here for help,” Virginia said and slipped her hands into her fur-lined muff.

She was very much looking forward to getting out of Shellington, even for a short time, and under her own power. Mr. Smith opened the door for her, and Virginia stepped outside, taking a deep breath, happy to smell the bay.

Virginia walked slowly, hoping to have the energy to get the whole way to the cannery without the embarrassment of having to send Colleen for one of the staff to rescue her. She did not tire until she reached the gates and stopped to catch her

breath.

“Are you all right, miss?”

She nodded. “Just give me a moment,” she said, calming her breathing.

They continued through the gates and to the offices. Virginia sat down on the bench in the open area near the stairs for a few minutes and then stood, ready to climb the steps. Just then, Phillip Brown emerged from the hallway that led to the cannery itself.

“Mr. Brown! What has happened to your face?”

“Good to see you too, Miss Wiest,” he said.

“It’s not as though I can act as if there is nothing wrong with seeing a man with a blackened eye and a swollen split lip.”

“I tripped and fell. Going up the steps.”

“I doubt that, Mr. Brown. Someone hit you, I think. Multiple times. A step wouldn’t bruise your face on every side, would it?”

“Excuse me, Miss Wiest. I’ve got to deliver these papers to Mr. Everly.”

Colleen stood beside Virginia. “He is a handsome man even after a pummeling.”

“He is. I’m thinking he was waylaid by someone connected to Greta Adamsen.”

Colleen nodded. “Would not surprise me at all. Are you ready to climb the steps, miss?”

“I am.”

Virginia climbed slowly, glad that she was not panting for her breath. Everyone she passed nodded or said a cheery hello and were so happy she was feeling better. She heard loud voices as she came to the door to her father’s office. She stood staring through the glass at Mr. Everly, who was shouting and pointing at Mr. Brown.

She would have barged in immediately if Colleen hadn’t touched her arm. It would do no good for her to favor one employee over another, even if Everly was being rude. She did not believe the way to build loyalty among employees was to embarrass them, and she was certain Mr. Brown would be embarrassed as everyone could hear Mr. Everly’s shouts up and down the hallway. Clerks and secretaries were silent as they hurried past, not meeting her eyes.

She rapped her knuckles on the glass hard enough that both men looked her way. Colleen opened the door for her and closed it behind her.

“Gentlemen, your voices are carrying outside of this office.”

Everly’s face was already red with anger; if possible, he reddened further and glanced away. Mr. Brown looked as though he was holding on to his temper by a thread.

“What can I help you with, Miss Wiest?” Everly asked and turned to Brown. “We’re done here.”

Virginia walked between the two men to her father’s office. “I am here to visit with my father. Please continue with your business at a lower volume, Mr. Everly.”

She did not wait for a reply from him, just opened the door, stepped inside, and shut the door behind her. She took several deep, steadying breaths as she found herself furious with Everly, with some sympathy for Brown even if he did tend to be

dismissive of her. Her father came through the door just then.

“My darling girl! What brings you out today? I didn’t see Turnbull and the coach. Did you send him away?” he asked.

She kissed his cheek. “No, Father. We walked. Colleen and I.”

“Walked?”

“With both feet!” she said with a laugh.

“Ginny, darling, I have worked all of my life, your dear mother too, to make sure you did not have to walk anywhere!”

Virginia laughed again. “How silly you are being. Shellington is just down the way, and the sun has melted the snow on the walkway. It’s lovely out. I took my time and am actually very proud of myself. My exercises at home have helped me grow stronger.”

“You are my courageous girl! I’m so proud of you, but I will always worry about you.” He wrapped his big hands around her shoulders. “I feared we’d lost you just a few weeks ago. I don’t know how I would have gone on.”

“Father. Don’t be morose. I’m here, well, and getting stronger every day.”

“I know you are.”

Her father sat down behind his desk, and Virginia seated herself on one of the soft leather chairs in front of it. “I know you’re very busy, but I was wondering if you knew anything about a man named Bucciarelli? Apparently, he’s in jail.”

“He’s a criminal and a dangerous one. Where did you hear of him?”

“Do you remember when Mr. Brown dined with us and told us about the injured woman who’d been left at their door?”

He nodded. “She wasn’t conscious when he told us about her. I wonder if she’s woken since.”

“She has. I visited Mr. Brown’s sister, Miss Sarah Brown, who’s been caring for her, and she woke just a few days ago.”

“What does this woman have to do with this Bucciarelli person?”

“She says this Bucciarelli person has her son. I’m not sure why, but I think he was blackmailing her to do something.”

“Good Lord!” her father said. “I thought you said he was in jail.”

“That’s what I was told, but someone must be running his organization now.”

“We’ve had some problems over the years with troublemakers associated with him. Dangerous men.” He glared at her.

Virginia looked at her father solemnly. “I would like to see this woman reunited with her child.”

“Virginia,” her father said softly. “You must have nothing to do with any of that. I feel sorry for the woman as much as you do, but you must not involve yourself.”

“How can I not involve myself? A woman’s child has been kidnapped.”

“This is for the police. Don’t allow your sympathy for this woman to override your good judgment.” He picked up his glasses and a paper lying on his desk. “I won’t allow you to endanger yourself.”

Virginia knew what her father intended. He would recruit the staff to let him know where she was going. She must be on her guard. For now, she must reassure him. “Of course not, Father! I would not dream of it.”

She stood, her father following, and went around his desk to kiss his cheek. “Roast beef this evening.”

“No stew?”

“Of course we’ll have oyster stew first,” she said with a laugh.

Virginia found Colleen and began their walk home. She was a little tired, but not overly so, and she had enjoyed the sunshine even with the cold air. They were just a few steps on their way when they heard someone calling her. She turned around to see Mr. Brown walking toward them.

He nodded to both of them, and Colleen stepped back as if giving them privacy, even though she was only a few feet away. It had been ages since she’d been alone, or nearly so, with a young man.

“I won’t keep you, miss. It’s too cold to be standing still for long,” he said.

“I’m fine for a few moments. What has my father sent you to tell me?”

His mouth opened in surprise for just a moment, quickly covered with a small smile. “Why would you say that, Miss Wiest?”

“Because I know my father, sir. He would wrap me in blankets and lock me in my room these last twenty-six years if he could!”

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“That’s a bit dramatic, isn’t it?” Phillip said. She was twenty-six years old? She didn’t look more than eighteen, with her pale skin, wide blue eyes, and slight frame. She was delicate, that was the word. Where his sister was sturdy, although he’d never say that to Sarah, Miss Wiest was delicate, fragile. No wonder her father was in a panic about her interest in Greta Adamsen.

She merely raised her dark brows at him.

“Your father is worried that you will somehow involve yourself in this. Bucciarelli and his gang are dangerous, let alone if they ever had their hands on you, they’d demand ransom money from your father.”

“I am not unaware of the dangers. Miss Adamsen is proof of how dangerous they are, but someone must help her. Her child must be rescued.” She looked away as if considering her next words carefully. “But don’t worry. I’ll not be involved. More’s the pity.”

“It’s getting chilly, miss,” her maid said.

“Yes. We should be getting home. Good day, Mr. Brown,” she said and turned away, her maid falling in beside her.

Phillip wasn’t sure what to make of Miss Virginia Wiest. He had a strange feeling she’d just answered him in a way meant to satisfy him but that was not remotely connected to the truth or what she intended to do. He watched her move down the street away from him, her long red wool coat swinging as she walked, the pheasant feather in her felt bonnet moving to and fro with her gait.

How would he ever control this woman's movements, as Mr. Wiest had asked him to do? When he'd left Wiest's office after agreeing to the man's plan, Everly had followed him out and closed the door behind him.

"Don't think you'll be turning Miss Wiest's head toward the gutter. You're a servant, is all. Do as you're told and keep your filthy hands to yourself," he'd said.

Phillip had barely been able to hold his tongue. Everly had already made his work life difficult, shifting men around on the plant floor until all the worst workers were under Phillip's leadership. It had been a rocky few months, but he was finally getting them to work together, which meant Everly would undoubtedly send him more troublemakers soon. His tirade this morning, witnessed by Miss Wiest and no doubt heard by every employee in the building, was enough to make him consider quitting his job, just blurting out that he was done with the Wiest Cannery Company.

Thankfully, he'd allowed himself time to let his anger cool off, as he had rarely done in the past, without leaving a position that paid well and where employees were treated with dignity, other than from Everly. Although Everly wasn't bad with other employees or supervisors. Just him. Mr. Wiest offered his managers small shares in the cannery too. If business was good, he could count on several hundred dollars for his savings. He worked hard to make sure the cannery produced a quality product that sold well. Leaving his job would not be good for him or his family.

He went back inside, avoiding the second floor, occupied by Mr. Wiest and his unreasonable requests and Mr. Everly's degrading words. Near quitting time, he was in the small office, a cupboard really, with two desks where he entered the days production figures in a tall, leather-bound book with faint lines for the rows and columns of numbers. He was nearly done doing a tally on scrap paper, checking his calculations before he would carefully enter the numbers in the book. He shared the office with Josiah Steinman, who hurried into the office at that moment.

“There is a boy at the gate asking for you,” Steinman said and pushed his wire-frame glasses up his rather large nose. “The watchman has told him to leave, but he won’t.”

“A boy? What would that be about?”

“Don’t know. He just said his mother sent him to fetch you.”

Phillip stood, scratched his head, looking longingly at the nearly finished papers that would release him for the day when done. “His mother?” he said, wondering if one of his employees was ill and unable to come in for the evening shift.

“Little colored boy. Darius, I think the watchman said his name was.”

“Darius Shoeman?” A shiver trailed down his back, someone walking across his grave, Eliza would say. “Josiah, I’m nearly done with my numbers. There they are on that strip of paper. Would you enter them for me? I have to get home.”

Steinman picked up the slip and nodded. “I’ll take care of them.”

“Thank you. I’ll pay you back when we’re next on the same shift,” he said and pulled his scarf around his neck.

“Not necessary. Hurry home now.”

Phillip skidded to a stop on the icy walkway outside the cannery gates, searching left and right for young Darius. The boy stepped out of the shadows, his crutch clinking on the crushed shells.

“Mr. Brown. Hurry!”

“What? What is it, Darius? Why did your mother send for me?”

“Saw some men near your house. Said they looked like bad ’uns. Told me to hurry here and get you.”

“Give me your crutch, Darius. Climb on my back.”

The boy did as he was told, and Phillip started off at a lope down the street, crossing between wagons and carriages, nearly sliding to his knees in the slush and mud. He told himself not to panic, not to give into terror and the poor decisions those feelings brought. A carriage swerved beside him to a halt.

“Mr. Brown! Whatever is the matter?” Virginia Wiest said through the open window.

“Don’t have time to explain. Good day to you, miss!” he shouted and turned down the next street. He heard Alfred Turnbull hawing at his team and turning the coach to follow him.

“Mr. Brown! Get in this carriage! That boy looks nearly frozen.”

Phillip bent at the knees to catch his breath, Darius still clinging to his back. “I don’t know what is going on, but a neighbor thinks there’s trouble. I’ll not put you . . . put you in danger.”

“Mr. Turnbull will drop you one street away. Now hurry and get in. Time is wasting if there is trouble.”

Phillip knew he could be home faster and not out of breath and near frozen if he accepted the offer. He walked to the carriage, where Turnbull was shouting at others to come around him and opened the door.

“No, Mr. Brown. No. I’ll walk. Just give me my crutch, sir,” Darius said as he scrambled down from his back.

“Come in the carriage, please. You look so cold,” Miss Wiest said.

Darius was taking small steps away, moving his crutch back a few inches at a time. “My mama told me never git in a carriage with white folk. That I’ll never see her agin iffen I do.”

“Come along, Darius. I’ll not let anything happen to you. Your mother trusts me, or she wouldn’t have sent you to me.” Phillip bent over, picked up the boy, gave Turnbull some instructions, and got in the carriage. Miss Wiest threw a thick, warm quilt over them both and sat back in her seat, staring at the boy. It must have been unsettling to hear what Darius had said. Unsettling and yet very true.

“I have no intention of keeping you from your mother. Mr. Brown works at the cannery for my father, and I saw he could use some help. I have no ill will toward you. What is your name?” she asked.

Darius was sitting on Phillip’s lap and peeped over the edge of the blanket. “Darius, miss. Darius Shoeman.”

“It is nice to meet you, Darius. I’m Miss Wiest.”

“I told the coachman to stop at the top of the alley behind your house,” Phillip said and looked at Darius. “Make sure to thank your mother for sending you to me, and tell her to keep all of you in the house until we know what is happening.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Here we are,” Phillip said as the coach slowed down. He jumped down and reached for the boy, handing him his crutch. “Will you make it from here?”

“Yes, sir. I’ll stay out of the ruts. There is my mother!”

Darius hurried to her, and she sent him on to their house.

“Mr. Brown, you’d best get home right away. I think some men got in the house, or are trying to, and your uncle won’t be home yet. I’ll send Willis once he is home.”

“I don’t want your husband begging trouble at my door,” Phillip said. “Do you know how many men?”

“Three, I think. My oldest girl was doing the mending by the window in the front room. She saw two go around the back of the house, and one knocked at the front. She said he pushed in when Jenny opened the door.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Shoeman,” he said and turned back to the carriage.

“Be careful now, sir.”

He raised a hand as he trotted away, thinking about what he was going to do. Miss Wiest opened the carriage door when he was close. “What is going on, Mr. Brown?”

Phillip looked up at Turnbull. “Get her to safety, Alfred. If you can, get word to Timothy Sweitzinger at Station Five. I may need some help.” He closed the door on Miss Wiest, and Turnbull started turning the team on the narrow street.

Phillip walked behind the houses on the cross street until he came to the alley that went behind his house. He wasn’t carrying his gun and only had two knives on his person. The sun was setting behind the houses, leaving long shadows in the snow. He wove between houses until he had to cross Pratt Street, which would leave him exposed to anyone watching. He heard a wagon rolling along behind him, its driver singing an off-key tune and hawing to his mule. Phillip waited until the wagon passed and followed behind it, crouching out of sight as he went.

Once on his block, he stepped into the shadow of his neighbor's outbuilding, moving carefully in the snow toward his yard. He saw a movement at the edge of his property when a man's head turned, following the sound of the wagon going down the alleyway. He waited until the man faced forward again, stepped up behind him, and tapped him on the shoulder. The man turned quickly and directly into Phillip's fist. No one came to the man's rescue or called to him, so Phillip dragged him into the outbuilding on his neighbor's property. Old Jed McDuffy would stand guard himself, but it would take Phillip ten minutes and considerable shouting into an ear trumpet to get him to understand what he needed the man to do. Phillip dropped the iron bar on the shed door.

He went to where the man had been hiding and found a satchel with two guns, rope, and a long-handled knife. He put one gun in his pocket and one in the back of his pants.

"Chester?" he heard from the direction of his house. "Are you there?"

Phillip deepened his voice. "Yeah."

"Think something's happening in there. Get ready."

Phillip stomped his feet as if in response to the other man. The racket coming from inside increased, and the man, his back to Phillip, had his eyes on the house. The door burst open, and a man shuffled outside, a crying and struggling Greta Adamsen in his arms with Sarah latched on to his back, screaming and scratching at his face and eyes. Phillip charged forward, taking the outside man down to the ground with his weight and a pummeling of fists and elbows.

The man holding Greta sloughed off Sarah, who fell in a heap into the muddy yard, and turned to Phillip.

“Back away, Brown, or I’ll slit her throat from ear to ear.”

Phillip stood, his eyes never wavering. “You won’t get far. Why don’t you leave before you’re caught in a raid? Let the woman go. She’s done you no harm.”

The man laughed, his lips and mouth a bloody mess. “Not letting her go. Get out of the way.”

“No.”

The man pricked the knife in the woman’s neck, pulling it away and pointing it at Phillip. “See that drop of?—”

There was a great clang as a cast-iron skillet came down on the man’s skull. The knife dropped from his hand, and Greta Adamsen fell away, caught in Phillip’s arms. The poor woman shook with terror, barely able to get her breath. Eliza stood over the man, weapon in hand still, prepared to do more injury.

Sarah jumped up from the mud and took the skillet from Eliza’s hand. “Hurry and get in the house. I hear the police wagon.”

Phillip turned, Adamsen still clinging to him, and saw Timothy Sweitzinger, pistol drawn, hurry into the yard, several uniformed policemen following him. “Is everyone all right?” he shouted.

“There’s two on the ground here that could use some doctoring and a jail cell, and one in McDuffy’s shed.”

“What’s going on, Phillip?” Timothy asked as his men swarmed the criminals. “Who’s this you’re holding?”

Phillip put the woman on her feet gently, holding on to her as she trembled, unable to stand unassisted. “Greta Adamsen. Miss Adamsen, this is Captain Sweitzinger of the Baltimore Police. A detective.”

The woman’s eyes rolled back in her head, and Sarah hurried to her side, Eliza with her. “We’ve got to get her back in bed. She’s freezing, terrified, and probably in shock.”

Timothy and Phillip watched them lead Miss Adamsen away, the woman barefoot and stumbling with nearly every step.

“Who is she?”

Phillip thought briefly about making up some mad story and just as quickly decided against it. “Found her on our front stoop near three weeks ago, near froze, bad gash on her head, unconscious. Two weeks went by until she woke up. Someone recognized her as servant to the Durmand family.”

“Durmand who’s a city councilman?”

Phillip nodded. “She’s been seeing a man who works for Durmand. He says he never hurt her, and I believe him.” He turned to Timothy. “She said Bucciarelli has her son. He’s using her in some way, but I don’t know what.”

“Should have told me about this when it happened.”

“Maybe.”

Timothy looked around the yard, hands on his hips, as if the answers to all the issues Bucciarelli presented, all the danger he promised, would be revealed as they stood there side by side. They heard shouting in the alley and a policeman trying to stop

Uncle Patrick.

“Let him through, Petey,” Timothy said.

“I live here, damn it anyhow,” Patrick said as he hurried into the yard. “Are the womenfolk safe?”

Phillip nodded. “Yes. They’ve had a scare, though, and I don’t know what the house looks like inside; they put up a hell of a fight.”

“Course they did. I’ll see what help they need.”

Phillip turned at a soft voice.

“Mr. Brown? Mr. Brown? Is everyone safe? I could not wait another minute to hear what happened and if you need assistance.”

“What are you doing here? Alfred? What were you thinking?” he shouted at the man holding Miss Wiest’s elbow and doing his best not to look Phillip in the eye.

“Oh, fiddle. Mr. Turnbull advised me often and with fervor to retreat. He bears no blame. If you must shout and be unpleasant, do so with me. He will be busy walking the team. I will find out what happened from the women,” she said and walked past him.

He could hear her struggling for breath and was unsure if it was due to exertion or anger. “Miss Wiest? Please do sit down.”

She kept walking and closed the kitchen door behind her.

Timothy stood, hands on his hips, looking from the door to Phillip, a smirk on his

lips. “She doesn’t mind you a bit, does she?”

“Damn it to hell. Her father will kill me after if he ever hears of this.”

“Who’s her father?”

“Alistair Wiest.”

“Your boss? The owner of the Cannery?” Timothy asked with barely concealed mirth. “Miss Virginia Wiest, heiress, beautiful beyond belief? That’s who just gave you what for?”

Timothy could no longer hold back his laughter.

“She’s got an unnatural interest in Miss Adamsen and doesn’t understand the danger that Bucciarelli presents. Her father has discouraged her and tasked me with keeping her safely away,” Phillip said and shook his head. “She doesn’t pay a bit of attention to what I tell her, and when she does, she’s already figured out a way to ignore my warnings.”

Timothy wiped his eyes on his sleeve. “My God. I never thought I’d see the day.”

“What day?”

“The day a woman, a little slip of one too, had you so caught in her snare. I’ll enjoy watching this progress, but in the meantime, I’m going to the station house and claim these arrests. Always looks good in my file.”

Phillip watched Timothy walk out of his yard, still laughing and waving a goodbye. They’d known each other since they were six years old and had been best friends, confidants, for all that time. He didn’t know what Timothy thought about he and

Virginia Wiest, but there was nothing pleasurable about being caught between the company owner and a woman who would never do as she was told. Beautiful, Timothy had said. Was she? He was being ridiculous. Of course she was beautiful. Her blue eyes alone rendered him speechless on occasion. God. What a coil.

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Virginia took slow breaths once she was inside and out of the cold, taking a seat at a tall stool near a massive cutting board. Something smelled wonderful on the stove, and she could hear Miss Brown calling for the housemaid, Jenny.

“Oh, Miss Wiest. I didn’t know you were here. Does my brother know?” Miss Brown asked as she hurried into the kitchen.

“I just saw him outside, and I can’t deny he makes me unduly angry,” she said, huffing for her breath.

Miss Brown hurried to her and held her hands. “Take small breaths, Miss Wiest, until you are rested. Would you like a glass of water?”

Virginia shook her head. “Just give me a moment,” she whispered. Virginia watched Miss Brown pick up a massive paddle and stir the bubbling pot that was giving off such appetizing aromas. She could hear crying from the floor above and furniture scraping on the floor. Her hands were finally still, and her knees had stopped their trembling.

“What happened?” she asked.

“A man knocked and pushed through the door when poor Jenny opened it. He went straight upstairs, banging open bedroom doors until he found Miss Adamsen. He pulled her out of bed, and she was shrieking and crying.” Miss Brown shivered where she stood and turned to Virginia. “I was shouting at him to put her down, and he barreled past me down the stairs. I jumped on his back and clawed at his face, but he got the back door open, and I fell off him. Eliza, she’s our cook, hit him over the head

with a frying pan.”

Virginia wondered if she'd have the wherewithal to do what these women did to defend themselves and Miss Adamsen. She must continue to do more each day and regain some of the strength she'd lost when she'd been ill.

“How very brave you were. You and your cook. I can still hear Miss Adamsen crying, I think.”

Miss Brown nodded. “Eliza is trying to get her to take some laudanum, and I don't know where Jenny is. I'd better go upstairs and help Eliza. If Jenny appears, tell her everything is fine now and to come upstairs and help us straighten the mess in Miss Adamsen's room. I'm sorry to leave you sitting alone but . . .”

“Never think of it. Your home is at sixes and sevens.”

Miss Brown hurried from the room, and Virginia sat quietly for a few more minutes. She stood then, taking her time to breathe deeply, when she heard a noise coming from a curtained doorway in the corner of the kitchen. She peaked around the edge of the drape. A shoe disappeared behind a large tin of flour.

“Jenny?” she whispered. “The man is gone, Jenny.”

A whimper came from the back. She slipped inside the room, floor-to-ceiling shelves of bins of potatoes and onions, spices and canned and jarred peaches and pears and beans stacked neatly. She sat down on the floor near the flour bin.

“Jenny? Is that you?”

The top of the girl's head came into view as she crawled from her hiding space. “Yes, miss. It's me.”

“Mr. Brown and the police have hauled away those bad men. Won’t you come and sit beside me?”

Jenny inched close enough that Virginia could reach her trembling hand and hold it. “There now. That was frightening but it is over. Miss Brown is worried about you. Take deep breaths. That is what I do when I am overwhelmed.”

Jenny slowly quieted until they heard men’s voices. Jenny buried her face in Virginia’s shoulder, and she pulled the girl into an embrace.

“Miss Wiest? Mr. Turnbull is here to take you home,” Mr. Brown said.

“In the pantry, Mr. Brown. We are getting over our fright,” she said.

The curtain pulled back, revealing the tall, broad figure of Phillip Brown. He dropped down to his haunches.

“Did they hurt you, Jenny?”

Jenny shook her head.

“Just scared, I think,” Virginia said.

“Let me help you up, Miss Wiest,” he said.

She turned to the girl in her arms. “Are we ready to venture out, Jenny?”

“Yes, miss. Thank you,” she whispered. The girl clamored to her feet, ignoring Mr. Brown’s outstretched hand. He stepped back as she squeezed by to the kitchen. Virginia accepted his help.

“Thank you, Mr. Brown.”

“Thank you, Miss Wiest, for being so kind to Jenny. I don’t know why she’s terrified, but she is, and I just do my best not to stand too close or get angry in her hearing.”

“That must be a trial for you,” she said and looked up at him. “The not getting angry, I mean.”

Brown smiled, making himself handsomer than usual—if that was even possible.

“Are you making fun of me, Miss Wiest?”

“Never. I would never,” she said and smiled back at him, feeling in charity with the exasperating man for once. “What will you do about Miss Adamsen?”

“She’ll be guarded until I can find her son.”

His resolute statement rung in her ears. There was no bragging or falseness in what he said; in fact, it made her want to march with him into whatever battle or danger he faced. He was the very definition of a leader, making a bold claim that she had no doubt he would fulfill.

“What can I do to help?” she asked.

“Miss Wiest, this is not your battle. You must keep yourself safe.”

“It is not your battle either, but you intend to win it. What can I do to help?”

“Let me think on it.”

“Don’t wait too long, Mr. Brown,” she said and swept past him. “I may just take

circumstances into my own hands.”

He grumbled, and she smiled as she opened the door and saw Mr. Turnbull waiting.

Phillip watched Miss Wiest leave through the back door. Her stubbornness was both admirable and terrifying. It was not really his job to keep her safe, but he still felt responsible, even without her father’s edict. He climbed the steps and turned to Greta Adamsen’s room as his sister came out of it, closing the door behind her.

“Is she awake?” he asked.

Sarah shrugged and pinched her nose between her eyes. “We finally got some laudanum in her. She was completely hysterical.”

“Are you all right? Did he hurt you?”

“No. Just a bruised backside from landing on the ground.”

“One of the Shoeman girls saw him push past Jenny into the house. Mrs. Shoeman sent Darius to get me at the cannery.”

“Thank God you got here in time. He would have hauled her off or killed her if you hadn’t stopped him.”

“She has to tell me the whole story, or we may not be able to stop him the next time.”

“I know. Not tonight, though. Maybe tomorrow,” she said. “Have you seen Jenny?”

“She was hiding in the pantry. Miss Wiest was sitting with her when I found them. She coaxed her out.”

“Did she?”

He nodded. “I’m going to get a bar set up on both the front and back doors. Don’t let anyone in until I can figure out what to do about Miss Adamsen.”

“You have to be careful too. Uncle told me you had trouble the other night on the way home from Bond’s. That’s where the bruises on your face and that cut came from.”

“I’ll be as careful as I can, but I’ll not let the fact that a man barged into our home and terrified my family go by the wayside. I’ll find the men responsible and deal with them.”

“I know. That’s what worries me.”

Phillip held her shoulders and kissed the top of her head. “I love you and Uncle, and Jenny and Eliza too. I’m not going to let anyone threaten you or hurt you. You’re going to have to trust me.”

Sarah stepped away and wiped her eyes with her sleeve. “I do trust you, but that doesn’t mean I don’t worry.”

Sarah and Phillip went to the kitchen, Eliza following them.

“Did she finally get to sleep?”

Eliza nodded. “I sat with her until she was quiet. That girl is skittish and nearly scared to death.”

“I’m going to talk to her tomorrow. She’s going to have to tell me everything,” he said.

Phillip waited until Sarah came downstairs the following morning after helping Greta dress and eat her breakfast. He knocked on her door.

“Come,” he heard.

“Hello, Miss Adamsen. Are you up to some conversation?”

“Would it matter if I’m not?” she asked.

“No.”

“You’d best call me Greta. Your sister does.” She glanced at him. “Sit on the chair. I’ll sit on the bed.”

“Well then, Greta. I think it’s time you tell me what has happened.”

“The less I say, the safer you are.”

He shook his head. “We’re past that. Men broke into my house—my home—yesterday. I can’t protect my family, or you, if you don’t tell me exactly what happened and how you ended up on my doorstep.”

“What do you want to know?” she whispered.

“What were you doing at the Durmands’?”

“Papers. There were papers in his office that I was to steal or copy.”

“Bucciarelli asked you to copy them?”

She shook her head. “No.”

“I thought you said Bucciarelli has your son.”

“He does,” she said and looked away. “But he did not ask me to copy those papers.”

“Who sent you there?”

“No one sent me to work there. I’d been working there for months. It was just a job.”
She took a long breath. “I was hiding from my husband.”

“Who is your husband? Why were you hiding from him?”

She shrugged. “You wouldn’t know him.”

“Why does Bucciarelli have your son then? Who is he to the boy?”

She glanced out the window and Phillip was sure there was more to the story, but it seemed she wasn’t going to speak about it, for now, at least.

“But someone asked you to copy documents that were found in the office,” Phillip asked.

She nodded. “I don’t know his name. He told me if I got the papers he wanted, he would get my son for me.”

“And you believed him?”

“I’m a mother, and I’m desperate,” she said, staring at him. “I had to believe, otherwise it was too horrible to think about.”

“Then who do the men who tried to carry you off yesterday work for? Bucciarelli or the mystery man?”

“I don’t know. I think Bucciarelli wanted the same papers that this other man wanted. I was told that Bucciarelli would never find out what I was doing, but I know that is not true. He has spies everywhere.”

“Did you find any of the papers your mystery man wanted?”

She nodded. “A few, yes. I was able to copy over the originals and put them back in Mr. Durmand’s study. I can read and write.”

“What did you do with them once you copied them?” Greta was silent, looking at her hands and twisting the bed quilt in her fingers. “Greta?”

“There’s a groom I gave them to. Orville is his name. I don’t know his last name, and I’m not even sure what he looks like. I put the copied papers in a leather packet and left it on a bench in the garden. When I went back a few hours later, the packet was empty. I think he’s dark-haired and rather short; at least a man who looked like that followed me with his eyes. He made me nervous.”

“Can you remember what you copied?”

“Some of it. Much of it was legal that I did not understand. I think it was a deed to land that was being bought by someone from Mr. Durmand.”

“Durmand owns property he is selling and the mystery man wants to know about the sale, or maybe just who the property is being sold to?”

She nodded. “I don’t know for certain, but that is possible. I just copied it and put my copies in the packet for Orville.”

“Dr. Prosperi said you had a healed broken arm and nose in addition to the gash on your head he stitched up. Who’s hitting you? Is it Finkle?”

“Matthew?” she said. “No. Matthew never hit me. He isn’t the type.”

“The type? What type is he?”

“A man who will be miserable all of his life with a woman he doesn’t love or even like. He has accepted that, I think. He’s not violent.”

“Then who was violent with you?”

She shrugged. “The healed injuries are in the past. There is no use discussing them.”

“Then what about your current injuries?”

“I don’t know,” she said and began to cry. “I was out picking up something for Miss Durmand. The one put his arm around my shoulder and guided me to a space between buildings before I even realized what was happening. They put a rag over my nose, and I don’t remember anything other than fighting them. But I wasn’t strong enough. I couldn’t get away from them.”

Had Miss Durmand told someone, this Orville person, perhaps, where she was sending Greta? If so, Miss Durmand was involved. “Do you remember what day of the week that was?”

“Yes. It was a Thursday. In the evening.”

“We found you on our doorstep on Saturday morning. Do you have any idea where you were before they brought you here?”

“Not really, although I have some strange dreams of being near animals.”

“Animals? Like dogs and cats?”

“No. Horses, I think, but I don’t really know.”

“Do you have any idea where they would have taken your son or why?”

She shook her head slowly. “Bucciarelli has so many people who owe him. That’s what he does, you see. He does a favor, and then sometime, even years later, he will tell you he needs something done and that you must do it.”

“Is that how you became acquainted with him? Had he done you a favor?”

“Not me,” she whispered. “My father.”

Phillip stared at her, and she stared steadily back. Suddenly, he was quite certain what Bucciarelli had asked for in return for whatever favor was given to Mr. Adamsen. How much he hated witnessing or even knowing about how some parents used their children for their gain or comfort. How would this woman trust anyone, ever, after having been betrayed by her own father?

“That’s enough questions for today. If you remember anything else, even the smallest detail, it may help me track down the men who did this, and therefore your son. Get some rest. If you hear pounding, it’s me or Uncle Patrick putting up bars across the front and kitchen doors.”

He wasn’t sure she heard what he said, as she was staring at the wall as if in a trance, and he realized she’d never answered why her son had been taken. He closed the door to the room and hurried down the steps, eager to get the bars installed.

“Colleen? How would one go about finding out where Miss Adamsen’s son is?”

Her maid stopped for a moment while threading a ribbon through her hair and then began again. “I’m not really sure, but if the little mite is young, he must have been

put with a family, or at the least a woman, as a man would never tolerate a child's demands."

"True. I don't know how old he is, but I'll find out. In fact, I'll write a note to Miss Brown and find out."

"What are you thinking, miss?"

"I'm thinking that often working-class families live in close proximity to others, and someone may have heard about a little boy suddenly appearing with Mrs. Whomever. But the city is so large. There are thousands of Mrs. Whomevers. What do you think?"

"Do we know for certain the child is with a working-class family?"

"No, we don't, but nor can I see a wealthy family taking in a child for a dangerous criminal. Maybe there is some payment to a desperate family for watching the child that would induce them."

"My eldest sister's friend lives in the neighborhood where this Bucciarelli person was arrested, but that is no guarantee that the child is there. I can ask her if she's heard of a young child suddenly appearing in the neighborhood, although with this bitter weather, families are not out as much."

Virginia glanced at her in the mirror. "Would you, Colleen? I think about that poor child taken from his mother and it makes me very sad. But you must tell your sister to be careful what she says. We don't want her friend to be in any danger."

"No. Of course not. I will see her on Sunday at my parents'. There, miss," Colleen said as she pinned the last curl in place. "I think we should do your hair just like this for the ball next week."

“Agreed, Colleen. It’s good you’ve practiced. I think it looks perfect.”

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Phillip walked straight past Everly's glare and knocked on the inner door of the office. "Mr. Wiest? What can I do for you, sir?"

"Brown? Come in," Wiest said and shuffled papers on his desk until he had his hand on a square card with fancy inked writing. He handed it to Phillip.

Brown glanced at the card, an invitation to a ball at the home of someone named Reginald Waters who lived on Federal Hill. Must be a rich one, then, Phillip thought. He glanced up at Wiest.

"What do you have in the way of dress clothes, Brown?"

"Dress clothes?"

"Yes. What do you wear when you're invited out?"

"I'm not often, or ever, invited out, but I did buy a good wool jacket at the secondhand store to wear to church last fall."

"That won't do. Here." He handed Phillip an envelope. "Take this to Rosenblatt's tailor shop on Exeter Street. I've instructions inside for what you will need."

Phillip felt a pit open up in his stomach. "Why do I need to go to a tailor's?" he said and added, "sir."

"I'd like you to attend the Waters' ball and keep an eye on my daughter. There will be several men there I need to speak to and hopefully close deals that are already in

the works. I'm worried Ginny will overdo, and she would never interrupt me to say she needed rest or to go home."

"A ball? I've never been to anything so fancy. I wouldn't want to embarrass you or Miss Wiest."

"You ate at our table, Mr. Brown. You didn't lick your fingers and managed to know which piece of silverware to use. You'll be fine."

"I'm sure there's someone more suited to helping Miss Wiest than I am, sir."

Wiest eyed him. "I'm also certain you'd guard her from any trouble, Brown. Especially as she seems so caught up in this poor woman who was left on your doorstep. Mr. Turnbull has known her since she was a wee girl and isn't always able to tell her plainly what she should do. Or not do."

Phillip looked down at his shoes as he did not want his employer to see a blush bloom on his cheeks. He cursed himself for ever mentioning Greta Adamsen that night. Had he not, he would not have to choose between pleasing the company's owner and perhaps forever being in his black books. But there really was no choice, was there? He needed the job, liked the work—other than Everly, and certainly needed the pay. And hints had been dropped over the years that he would have chances for promotions. Perhaps he should look at this duty as just that. An opportunity.

"I would be happy to make sure that Miss Wiest is safe and comfortable. I'd rather pay for my own clothes, though."

"Don't be stubborn over a coat and pair of pants, Brown. You wouldn't in your normal course be attending this event, but as your employer, I'm asking you to be there. If I were to send you out of town on company business, you would be reimbursed for your lodging. Consider this in the same way."

“Thank you, sir.”

Phillip tucked the envelope and invitation in his coat pocket and closed Wiest’s door behind him. He was met by an agitated Everly.

“Who do you think you are?” Everly whispered.

“Eavesdropping doesn’t become you, Mr. Everly. Excuse me. I’m due to cover a shift change.” Phillip squeezed past Everly, who was acting as if he could stop him in a physical confrontation. He would admit he’d enjoy pummeling Everly to the ground, even if the consequences were unpleasant.

Turnbull arrived promptly at seven on the evening of the Waters’ ball to take him to Shellington to pick up the Wiests. Miss Wiest was handed in by her father. Her eyes widened when she saw him sitting with his back to the horses.

“Mr. Brown. Whatever are you doing here?”

“I was asked—” he began.

Mr. Wiest plopped in his seat beside her and interrupted. “I thought it was time Brown met some of our colleagues and business associates.”

“Really, Father. Are you sure you did not ask him in order to have someone keep an eye on me?”

“And why would I do that, Ginny? You’re a woman grown and well able to take care of yourself.”

Brown glanced at Wiest. There was no dissembling in his words. If Phillip didn’t know exactly the opposite, he would have never suspected the man of lying, or at

least bending the truth. From the look on Miss Wiest's face, she was accustomed to her father's manipulations and did not believe him for a minute. She cast her eyes at him. Virginia Wiest was not happy.

The carriage rolled to a stop in a line of carriages all waiting to discharge their passengers. Phillip was not looking forward to the evening, although Sarah had told him to enjoy it, as how often would he get invited to a fancy party and get a brand-new suit to wear to it?

She'd insisted he go to a real barber, not just let Eliza hack off his curls. Haircut and a shave and then a bath in the big tub in the back room near the kitchen. Then a new bright white shirt, gray pants with a tight crease down the front of the legs, a dark gray-and-red-plaid double-breasted vest with red lapels—the tailor called it a waistcoat, as he was originally from London—all topped with a black coat of the finest wool he'd ever seen. His tie was dark red, as was the silk scarf that hung around his neck. He felt a little ridiculous. And his new low leather boots pinched his toes.

A servant handed Miss Wiest out of the carriage after finally stopping at a carpet laid down over the cobblestone street that had been cleared of snow, extending to the portico of a massive home, lights shining from every window. Her father climbed down, and Phillip jumped down, ignoring the hand of the coachman. Mr. Wiest took his daughter's arm as they followed the line of women in sparkling gowns with feathers and jewels in their hair. The men looked much as he did, although they mostly wore top hats, which he had adamantly refused, even though it was on the detailed list Mr. Wiest had had him deliver to Rosenblatt, the tailor. Once inside, Miss Wiest was helped from her icy-blue satin cloak, revealing a form-fitting shimmering gown in the same color. Her hair was held up with combs twinkling with diamonds. He couldn't help but stare as he followed her and her father. She was slight but shapely in all the right places, shown to advantage in her costume, especially the low-cut bosom.

“Mr. Wiest! Ah, yes! Just the gentleman we’ve been waiting for,” a tall man exclaimed as soon as they walked to the top step leading down into the massive room where hundreds of guests talked in small groups or strolled, nodding to acquaintances.

Phillip could not stop himself from looking around in awe, his mouth hanging open until he realized what he must look like, standing with the Wiests, appearing as if he was raised in a cow pasture. The room was lit with gaslights and decorated with towering plants and flowers in pots and wrapped around columns; he could only imagine how expensive they had been to procure in January. To his relief, no one pointed at him and stared, and he had to admit that Mr. Wiest was likely right to insist he had a new rig. The men surrounding Mr. Wiest nodded and greeted Miss Wiest as they slowly surrounded her father and led him away.

Phillip held out his arm as she was poised to begin down the marble steps to the main floor. “Allow me,” he said.

She glanced up at him. “My father’s plan has worked beautifully. He is with his cronies, and yet I still have an escort.”

“I am honored to be that escort.”

“Oh, please. You look as though this is the very last place on earth that you wish to be. Have you spoken anymore to Miss Adamsen?”

He nodded. “She told me someone pulled her into an alleyway two days before she arrived on Wolfe Street, covering her nose with a rag that was doused in something that made her fall asleep. She said she was told to copy papers in Mr. Durmand’s study and leave them for a groom. They told her they would get her son from Bucciarelli if she did as she was told.”

“Did she have any idea who the person was?”

“None that she said.”

He glanced down at her, doing his best to not let his eyes stray to the edge of her gown, where a large sapphire lay between her breasts. “I’m not accustomed to this,” he said and looked out over the crowd of fancy guests.

“You shouldn’t worry, Mr. Brown. You look very well this evening.”

He grinned at her as they came to the bottom of the steps. “Do I look well?”

“Of course you do, and you are quite aware of it. I’m sure your sister told you the same.”

“She did say I looked huge in this coat and vest, and handsome too.”

Virginia looked around the room. “She was not wrong, I suppose.”

“Why, Miss Wiest! Do you think I look handsome rather than just well?”

“I was thinking more of her comment that you looked huge.”

Brown tipped his head back and laughed out loud. Heads turned, but he was unaware of how out of place it was in this crowd to show any real emotion or attitude. Except he was uncommonly handsome—yes, she would admit it—and undoubtedly the young women here would soon be surrounding him.

She saw her friends discreetly waving to her and headed their direction, Mr. Brown following. She turned to him just before she came to Mary and Gertrude. “You do not have to stand here with me while I chat with my friends. I’m sure I’ll be quite safe.”

“Virginia!” Mary Hernsdown said, smiling and glancing at Brown. “We’ve been wondering when you’d get here.”

She kissed Mary’s cheek. “You look so beautiful tonight! Will Mr. Akins be here this evening? Maybe I’ll finally have a chance to meet him.”

“She hopes so,” Gertrude Miller said. “But we haven’t seen him yet. As usual, you put us all to shame in that beautiful pale blue. While my mother insisted I wear pink, and we all know it doesn’t do anything for me.”

“You will be independent very soon, Gertrude, and then you can wear any color you’d like,” Virginia said. Both of her friends were glancing at Brown in all his “huge” glory. She would admit that he looked wickedly handsome with his hair trimmed and a new suit that emphasized the breadth of his shoulders. There was no way she could not introduce him. “Mary, Gertrude, this is Mr. Phillip Brown. Mr. Brown, my friends Miss Hernsdown and Miss Miller. Mr. Brown works . . . with my father.”

He looked at both women and smiled. “It’s a pleasure, ladies.”

There was a little hum of satisfaction from both women and then several hellos and waves from acquaintances, all with glances at Brown. Soon they were swarming around him, asking him about his family and where he spent his days. She heard him say he was a floor manager at the cannery and poured beer at a brewery on the occasional night. At least he hadn’t made up any ridiculous story about himself, although the women circling him were giggling, clearly disbelieving that he worked in a brewery.

“But where is your estate, Mr. Brown?” Edwina Hopsfelter asked as Virginia slowly moved to the back of the crowd surrounding him.

She slipped away, allowing Brown to drown in the accolades of the young women with a new handsome stranger to flirt with. There was a man she wished to speak to, but her father would have an apoplexy, and Brown would bluster and make a great show of being as big as a draft horse. She laughed to herself, thinking about the ridiculous comparison. She stopped and turned slowly and spotted her prey at the refreshments.

“Oh, Geoffrey,” she said to the man accepting a glass of champagne from a servant. “It’s been an age.”

Geoffrey Morehead turned to her with a practiced, and not flattering, eye. “Virginia? I was told to never speak to you again by your father, with your approval. Should I expect a scolding from Mr. Wiest?”

“Oh, Geoffrey. Do be serious. I’m not a child, and I can speak to whomever I choose.”

“And you very clearly did not choose me.”

Geoffrey had escorted her to several functions some years ago, making himself useful as a reliable arm to hold or as a partner in charades or other parlor games. She’d never felt more than a liking for him, although she’d often felt guilty for accepting his escort, knowing he was hoping it would be more, and she knowing it never would be. Some unflattering information about Geoffrey had come to her father, prompting him to take a hard look at his finances and background. What was discovered did not show her escort in a positive light. He was prone to have friends and associates that were not only on the fringe of society but were also known to consort with Baltimore citizens who were less than upright—criminal in some cases—and shysters all. His finances hinged on the latest scheme he was involved in.

Alistair Wiest had a pointed conversation with Geoffrey after having discussed the

situation with his daughter. She'd made no objection to her father's conclusions and encouraged him to be clear to her would-be suitor that she was not interested in him as a life partner. She'd only seen him a few times since then, when they both acted with brief and perfect courtesy.

"I did not, Geoffrey, but that does not mean we cannot speak as friends to each other," she said and accepted a glass of champagne. She glanced at him then, not an unattractive man, of average height and looks, but beginning to show signs of the drinking and gambling that dominated his life according to her father's investigator. "I need some information, and you are the only person of my acquaintance who may know or be able to find out."

Geoffrey turned to her quickly, a hard mask on his face. "Ah. I am good enough now that you want something. Did anyone ever tell you that you can be a spoiled brat on occasion?"

"More times than I can count. Sometimes it is true. But not this time."

"What do you want, Miss Wiest?"

"I want to know where a man named Bucciarelli would hold a child away from his mother in order to make the mother do his bidding."

Morehead took her by the arm and led her none too gently to a deserted alcove, smiling and laughing to anyone they passed. When alone, he turned to her, his eyes glittering. "Do you want to get one of us killed? Do not mention that name in front of others. There are men here, and a few women, who owe him a favor or two, and would think nothing of mentioning what they overheard." He glanced around her shoulder and gave a tight smile to whomever he'd noticed looking their way.

Virginia saw real fear in his eyes. He was not being dramatic or trying to impress her

with his insight. He was frightened. “I’m sorry, Geoffrey. That was clumsy of me. I never meant?—”

“Of course you didn’t. You live a very secluded life, free from the drama and danger. But that is not the real world.” He paused to take a deep breath. “My apologies. I have no business speaking to you in that manner.”

“I deserve a shaking once in a while, but there are very few people who are willing to be honest with me. Do not apologize for being truthful.”

He took a deep breath, his eyes closed. When he opened them, he smiled, patted her hand, and turned them to the rest of the guests as if they were having a friendly chat. “Smile, Virginia. And then tell me what you need.”

“There is a woman, Greta Adamsen, who was left to freeze to death on a friend’s front stoop. She is terrified and doing the bidding of a man, who she cannot identify, and who has told her he will get her son back from Bucciarelli if she does as he says.”

“Laugh,” he said and smiled broadly at her as if he’d just told the grandest joke. Virginia laughed then, bringing her gloved hand to her mouth to cover her mirth.

“The man she doesn’t know, who I am guessing is a rival of Bucciarelli, is most likely Edward Campbell. He is ruthless, newly arrived from Scotland, with plenty of gold and clansmen. He’s looking to plant his flag in Baltimore, and there’s a prime piece of harbor property for sale he wants to buy, but Bucciarelli wants it too, and the seller has been secretive in the extreme about the purchaser who supposedly has already signed agreements.”

“Why the secret? Won’t it be public knowledge eventually?”

“It will, but I imagine the buyer wants to give himself enough time to get out of

Baltimore.”

“Why?”

He stared at her for a few long moments.

“Does this person anticipate threats from Bucciarelli or Campbell?” she asked and waited again for a response. “How do we get this child back to his mother?”

“I’ll see what I can find out, but it may not be much. I don’t want to ask too many questions,” he said and nodded to Brown, who was making his way toward them. “Who is this massive plowman staring daggers at you?”

“He works for the cannery.” She watched him pardon himself several times, never taking his eyes from her face, only glancing once at Geoffrey. There was something annoying about his proprietary gaze, but . . . there was also something elementally satisfying. He looked as if would throw her over his shoulder and push his way through the crowd. It was an odd feeling conjured in her stomach, one she was not familiar with.

“Mr. Brown, where are your admirers?”

“I managed a getaway without any help from you, Miss Wiest,” he said and looked at Geoffrey. “Won’t you introduce me?”

“I’ve known Mr. Morehead for years. We’re just catching up,” she said. “This is Mr. Brown. He works for the cannery and is here at my father’s behest.”

“Mr. Brown.”

“Mr. Morehead.”

Geoffrey glanced at Brown and then at her. "I've got to be going, dear. We can continue this rousing conversation later."

Virginia watched Geoffrey walk away and turned to Brown. "Well, let's see what the Waters' buffet includes."

Brown stared at her and didn't move. "I don't know anything about that man other than that he is trouble."

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Phillip's shifts at the cannery were particularly challenging that week, as Everly, true to expectations, assigned three new employees and two others that were not well liked by the rest of the staff to his shift. He kept his head up, having known something like this would happen after his trip to the Waters' ball with the Wiests. He'd said nothing to anyone, although his sister had plagued him until he told her everything he could remember about the gowns and the flowers and the food. He did not have any trouble remembering the food. He'd sampled everything on offer, including the desserts and at least two dozen tiny sandwiches which did not fill him up and could have been considerably better if made on Eliza's bread.

He had gotten some information about the men who stormed his house from Timothy when they met after his shift that week. They all worked for a man named Alfred Carbone, who in turn worked for Bucciarelli and was, in fact, one of his oldest and most trusted confidants.

"We know it was Carbone who sent the men, but other than that, the three of them have clammed up. Don't have a plan in place for Carbone yet, but we will. One less criminal working for Bucciarelli on the outside is the goal," Timothy said and nodded to the barmaid to bring them both another beer.

"At least you know it was definitely Carbone. Let me know when you get him."

Timothy shrugged. "It's going to be a while, sadly. The chief at Station Two is dragging his feet. Not sure why."

"Station Two?"

“That’s where Carbone’s bolt-hole is.”

“So who’s in charge of getting him?”

Timothy took a long slug of beer and wiped his mouth with his sleeve. “I’m hoping it’s me.”

Phillip knew he wouldn’t wait for some higher-up to decide to arrest Carbone. Or not arrest him. “Do they know where in Station Two the bolt-hole is?”

“Somewhere on Lancaster Street, close to the docks. Probably a warehouse.”

“Lot of ground to cover for your officers, fifteen blocks or more on Lancaster, or whoever’s officers will be doing the arrest.”

Timothy nodded. “Might be around the middle of the two-hundred block, but then that could just be rumor.” He looked Phillip square on and spoke loud enough for patrons at nearby tables to look up. “But just remember, civilians cannot take the law into their own hands.”

“You’re absolutely right. If I hear anything, I’ll be sure to let you know.”

Timothy stood. “I’ve got to get back to the station house. Tell your sister I said hello.”

“Sarah? Tell her yourself the next time you wheedle a dinner invitation.”

“Thought the doctor was getting invited more often these days.”

“He’s around.”

Timothy pulled on his coat. “Maybe I should be too.”

Phillip sat alone, finished his beer, more than a little surprised that his best and oldest friend had some interest in Sarah. Those thoughts slipped from his mind with little additional consideration. At the forefront was formulating a plan to find out what was going on in the middle of the two-hundred block of Lancaster Street and run Carbone to ground. What he would do with him when he caught him, he wasn't sure.

Phillip worked long hours for the next four days, with barely time to sleep and eat. There had been some labor unrest, a few troublemakers refusing the new shifts or slowing down their work, which forced other workers to pick up their speed in order to get the day's catch cleaned and canned. Everyone was exhausted from the pace and the tension in the canning room, including Phillip. He was finally home from a shift that had begun in the middle of the previous night. Eliza had fed him after he'd washed and changed clothes, followed by an hour nap, which all had revived him significantly.

“Do you have a spare loaf or two?” he asked Eliza. “I have to stop at the Shoemans'.”

“They can always use an extra loaf, I imagine, with what, nine children? Good Lord. Better take them some of this soup I just made too.”

Phillip gathered the two loaves of bread she handed him, wrapped in a linen towel, and a glass jar filled with soup in a cloth bag. He arrived at the Shoemans' just as Willis was getting home.

“Can we step outside for a moment?” he said quietly to Willis after handing the food to Mrs. Shoeman. The man nodded and led him out the kitchen door to a small muddy yard.

“What do you need, sir?”

“You don’t need to call me sir,” Phillip said and looked down at the short, wiry man.

“Yes, I do. You and your uncle saved me from prison or worse. What do you need, sir?”

Phillip hated involving Willis Shoeman, especially as he had a large family to provide for, but Willis had helped him before on occasion and shown himself to be clever and brave when necessary. Uncle would jump at the chance to get a few licks in, but Phillip did not want to leave the women unguarded. Phillip wondered how long until Patrick forgave him for leaving him home. “I need a lookout.”

“I’m your man.”

“Could be dangerous, Willis. Maybe you should talk to Mavis.”

“Only an unmarried man would say that.”

Phillip smiled. “I’m going to find the man who sent the men who pushed their way into my house last week. Likely, I’ll be committing a crime of some nature. If the police arrive, hightail it away.”

“Where we going, and when?”

“I’d like to go tonight around nine. We can be on Lancaster an hour later or less.”

“The docks. That’s an easy walk going to, but it could be bad coming back depending on what might happen.”

“True.” A door slammed, and Phillip glanced over several fences to Mrs. Pappadol’s yard. The last thing he needed was the neighborhood gossip to start asking questions. “Best avoid her windows if you can.”

Willis nodded. "I'll be there."

Willis was waiting in the shadows of McDuffy's shed at nine. He fell in step with Phillip as they made their silent way to the alley west of Broadway, which would take them to the rail yard and only another block or so to Lancaster. It wasn't a terribly cold night, as the wind had blown away the clouds to let the moon shine. After crossing the tracks, Phillip handed Willis a pistol.

"It's loaded. If we're caught, drop it wherever you are."

"Don't want to drop a fine-looking weapon like this just any old place," Willis said.

"You know the police will throw a Negro in jail for having a gun. I don't want to tell Mavis you're in a cell."

"True. Then we won't get caught."

They walked single file, hugging the side of buildings until they were directly across Lancaster from the middle warehouse on the south side of that street, watching as several men went in and out of the four-story building past two guards. Phillip and Willis went several blocks to the west, toward the Patapsco, finally crossing Lancaster to shimmy between two buildings to get to the dilapidated dock on the other side. Carbone's building was directly ahead.

"What's the plan?" Willis whispered.

"Won't know until I'm inside. Two whistles if there's trouble."

Phillip inched along in the shadow of the buildings until he was at Carbone's lair. He tested a wooden door and found it locked and barred. He squeezed in the narrow space between the building and its neighbor and began inching up the brick wall, his

feet on one building, his back against the other. It was slow work, and he did not want to think about whatever was tearing at the back of his coat as he moved steadily up the wall to a second-floor window. The frame was rotting, he could see in the dim moonlight. He pulled his knife from his boot and pushed it under the window sash, inching it open a bit at a time. He could see nothing through the filthy glass, but he heard no movement or voices as the window opened. As his eyes adjusted, he could see it was a storage room of some kind, dust thick on the floor, disturbed only by the scurry of rats.

Phillip pulled himself over the windowsill and found a piece of board that would hold up the window and keep it from crashing and alerting whoever might be in the building. The floor was rotting in places, and he had a sudden vision of falling through the boards and landing on top of Carbone. What a sight that would be, and what a fix he would be in. He cracked open the door opposite the window, where a set of rickety steps led down to the open warehouse area. One more inch allowed him to see stacks of barrels along one wall. None of the gaslights were lit, and he could not hear any voices, although he was not foolish enough to believe the building was empty or unguarded.

He squeezed through the door, its hinges giving a squeak. Phillip stood very still for several minutes, waiting to see if he'd alerted any of the criminals to his presence. He gently placed his foot on the first step, as far from the middle as he could. He was down four steps when he heard a movement from below. A man came out of a door directly below him and walked quickly to the front of the building. Phillip held his breath until the man was gone and he heard the slam of the door. He waited another five minutes, barely breathing, realizing as his mind reviewed what he had just seen that a lamp was burning in the room directly below the stairs he stood on. And then he heard a woman's laughter.

Phillip continued down the stairs, hoping whatever a man's voice rumbled in response would occupy them both. There was no window to the room where the

sounds came from, just a line of light from under the door and more laughter from the woman. He moved slowly toward a line of barrels near him, opposite the barrels on the other side of the otherwise empty warehouse. Printed clearly on the barrel was “Olive Oil, product of Italy.”

He crept to the barrel farthest away from him and the office door and found the wooden cap screwed into the barrel head. He unscrewed it slowly until oil began to spill out with rapid glugs and went to the next barrel. The floor was soon thick with it, the smell delicious. He stayed out of the oil as much as he could and made his way back to the door, inching closer with slow steps.

Phillip gasped when he heard something crash to the floor in the closed office, his heart pounding in his ears, but then he heard the woman’s cry and grunting from the man over the sound of furniture moving against a wooden floor. Now was his time, he thought as he slowly turned the knob.

“What a white ass you have, Mr. Carbone,” Phillip said as he stepped into the room, his gun pointed at the man’s head. The woman glanced up from where she lay on the desk in panic, trying to pull her dress together over her breasts. Carbone was silent, his trousers around his ankles.

“Move your hand one inch closer to that letter opener and we’ll be picking your brains off the wall,” Phillip said.

“Don’t shoot me, please, mister,” the woman said.

“No reason to shoot you. A threat to you would mean nothing to him.”

“You’re a dead man,” Carbone said. “Get the hell out of here.”

“Keep your boys away from Wolfe Street.” He heard two faint whistles and began to

back away from the desk toward the door. Then shouting and a door slamming open. Carbone must have pressed a button or pulled an alarm somehow that alerted his men. Phillip turned his pistol in his hand and smacked Carbone's head with the butt. The man fell flat on the woman and began to slide down her body. She was screaming and pushing Carbone off when Phillip threw open the office door.

Phillip heard shouts and gunfire coming his direction from the other side of the warehouse. He hurried the few feet to an outside door, threw the bar, and glanced back at the mob coming for him, just as they began to slip and slide on the olive oil-covered floor. He would have laughed if a bullet hadn't hit the door frame inches from his head, the wood exploding, and spraying his cheek and chin with shards of wood. He tripped out onto the dock and into the arms of Willis, who grabbed him around the waist and propelled him to the next gap between buildings.

"Follow me," Willis whispered and pulled Phillip's hand to his shoulder to guide him in the dark.

Phillip stumbled along, holding tight to Willis's coat, unable to see much of anything in the darkness and starting to feel pain in his face and neck. He touched his forehead with his free hand and felt blood, could smell blood, and hoped that he did not have a piece of wood wedged in his eye. He heard footsteps following and shouting from behind them. Willis stopped abruptly.

"There's one at this end ahead of us too," Willis whispered. "We're going to have to fight our way out."

"Let's get it done, then," Phillip said even as he felt himself weakening.

Willis charged forward, Phillip following, running on the narrow, slick bricks, both of them sliding and struggling to stay upright. Phillip could see the gun in Willis's hand glinting in the sliver of moonlight darting through the darkness. He fumbled in his

jacket pocket until he found his own weapon, only to drop to the cobblestones on his knees.

That's when he heard his uncle's voice. "Hurry now. They're coming! Get across Lancaster!"

Willis burst through the opening at the end of the walkway, running full speed. Phillip could hear shots fired and saw Willis go down on one knee, stand up, and fire down the street as Patrick pulled Phillip to his feet.

"Come on now, Phillip. You've got to move faster," Patrick shouted and shot at the men charging them. He pushed Phillip into the walkway between the buildings on the north side of Lancaster and told them to get themselves to a wagon in the alley.

Patrick turned and shot at the men racing after them and dropped two in the opening between the buildings. He followed Phillip and Willis, jumped onto the bench of the wagon, and hawed the nervous horse. Phillip grabbed the side of the wagon and the back of Willis's coat as he started to slide out. Patrick had them flying north on Broadway and beyond the reach of Carbone's bullets soon after.

"The women," Phillip shouted to Patrick.

"McDuffy's on the stoop with a shotgun in his hands."

Phillip closed his eyes and gave in to the pain.

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Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 5:35 am

“Miss, do you have a moment?” Colleen asked as she walked up to Virginia midmorning.

“Of course I do,” Virginia said with a smile. “Does it have anything to do with the new groom working for Mr. Turner?”

Colleen blushed and grinned but shook her head. “No, miss.” She glanced down the hallway leading to the dining room. “I think it would be best to speak privately.”

“Certainly. Let’s go to the small parlor past the breakfast room. Mrs. French’s staff will be done cleaning there.”

“Now, what is it?” Virginia said after the door was closed to the small, sunny room. “Come sit down.”

“I wanted to tell you that I spoke to my sister last week about what we talked about, a new child in the neighborhood where this Bucciarelli person was arrested. She spoke to her friend at church who lives near there, and she said she saw a little boy run out of a house down the street from her when she was walking to the grocer’s. He was crying and screaming for his mother.”

“How did the woman know the child didn’t belong at that house?”

“She said she knows the woman and her family. All of her children are older, two married. She said the woman who chased after the boy seemed panicked, looking up and down the street, grabbing the boy and carrying him back in the house. She said she could still hear the boy crying even after the door had slammed.”

Virginia reached for Colleen's hand and squeezed. "Maybe you've discovered Miss Adamsen's child! Your help is appreciated. Please make sure you thank you sister and her friend, but I would warn them to mention it to no one else."

Virginia pulled the bell, and a maid opened the door a moment later. "Yes, miss?"

"Please ask Cook to prepare two food baskets like she does over Christmas with jellies and bread and a ham. Miss Hughes will be delivering them," she said to the maid and turned to Colleen. "After you and I visit Sarah Brown, have Mr. Turnbull take you to your sister's and deliver the baskets. She can see that her friend receives one of them."

"Oh, that's not necessary, Miss."

"It is absolutely necessary, and who doesn't like a ham dinner in this cold weather?"

Shortly after, Virginia and Colleen were under wraps, making their way to Wolfe Street. Mr. Turnbull handed them down, and she told him to keep the horses moving, that she and Colleen would be fine knocking on the door themselves. They were hurried into the warm foyer by the young maid.

"Hello, Jenny," Virginia said. "I'm hoping to speak to Mr. Brown. Is he at home?"

"He's in his room," she whispered.

"Oh. Well, we don't want to bother his rest. He probably worked a late shift. Perhaps I can speak to Miss Brown," Virginia said and looked up when she heard footsteps on the stairs ahead of her. "Miss Brown, I was hoping to speak to your brother, but perhaps you can give him a message."

"Hello, Miss Wiest. You're welcome to speak to him yourself," she said and turned

to climb the steps again, signaling that Virginia should follow.

“I could not intrude in a sleeping room, Miss Brown.”

“No intrusion. We’ve been in and out of his room all night since Uncle Patrick brought him and Mr. Shoeman home. Dr. Prosperi has just left.”

“The doctor was here for Mr. Brown?”

She was feeling quite out of her depths. She’d only been in her father’s private sitting room, never the room where he slept, and he was her father . But as much as her sensibilities and Colleen’s stiffening behind her told her it was improper, wrong even, to venture to the second floor of this house, she was compelled to see him with her own eyes and assure herself that he was well and hearty.

She climbed the steps slowly, holding the banister rail and hearing voices, angry and impatient, coming from one end of the hallway in the direction Sarah Brown was heading.

“Pull your blankets up, brother,” she said as she entered the room. “You have a visitor.”

“Who in the hell are you dragging up here now?” Mr. Brown asked.

Virginia stopped at the corner of the open doorway. “Mr. Brown? May I come in?”

“Miss Wiest? Good Lord! No, you may not come in! Sarah! Get her downstairs right this damn minute!”

What a stubborn and proud man Phillip Brown was even when his voice was garbled, as if he had a handkerchief stuffed in his mouth. Brown was still shouting at his sister

and working himself into a real tizzy. She'd end it now. If he was sick in bed, he would not have the energy to get up and throw her out, she thought. She stepped into the room and turned to the bed.

"Mr. Brown," she whispered when she saw him and hurried forward to his bedside. "What has happened?"

The parts of his face that were not bandaged were bright red. "You should not be in here, Miss Wiest." He said her name as Mith Wieth .

"I am not leaving until you tell me what has happened." She pulled a chair close to the bed. "Don't strain your voice with shouting. I'm right here."

She realized his uncle and his sister had slipped from the room, although she heard Miss Brown speaking to Colleen in the hallway. She could see angry and jagged cuts on Mr. Brown's neck and imagined the same would be under the bandages that covered the right side of his face.

"Are you in much pain? What a silly question," she said quickly. "Of course you are. What can I get for you?"

He shook his head slowly and closed his eyes. "Please leave."

"I won't, Mr. Brown. I want to know how this happened and what the doctor said."

"This is nothing for you to worry about. I'll be fine," he said.

She picked up his hand lying on the blanket and held it. He flinched but didn't pull away when she looked up at him, his eyes dark and intense. "I find I am worried. I will find out from someone what has happened, but I'd prefer to hear it from you. Can you not indulge me?"

He took a deep breath, which must have pulled at several of the stitches on his neck and shoulder, from what she could see past the open collar of his nightshirt, and grimaced. And then he told her of his climb to the second floor, the olive oil, finding the man, Carbone, in his office talking to a woman, and his and Shoeman's narrow escape with the help of his uncle.

"You haven't said what happened to cause these injuries. Were you shot?"

"Shot at. The bullet hit the wooden frame of the door I was escaping through."

"Dear Lord," she said as she surveyed his face. "And all of these cuts are from when the wood was hit? It is a miracle you were not blinded."

"It was." He pulled his hand away as he looked away from her toward the winter-frosted window.

"Have you let anyone know at the cannery that you've been injured?"

"I sent word."

"You must rest and take as long as necessary to recover."

"Except he can't quite do that," Sarah Brown said from behind her.

"Shush," he said to his sister. "This is nobody's business."

"What?" Virginia asked. "Why can't he do that?"

Mr. Brown was blustering, but his sister raised her voice. "Mr. Everly replied that if he was not at work tomorrow, he'd be fired."

Virginia turned to him, eyes wide. “He said you’d be fired?”

“It doesn’t matter what he said, I’m going to work tomorrow.”

Virginia knew better than to argue with this stubborn man. “I have two pieces of information for you, which is why I came here in the first place. If you remember, I was speaking to Mr. Morehead at the Waters’ ball. He told me that the person who told Miss Adamsen he would retrieve her son is most likely Edward Campbell, who has arrived recently from Scotland and who Mr. Morehead claims has plenty of gold and clansmen with him. He believes Campbell is trying to buy the same piece of property that Bucciarelli is trying to buy.”

“Campbell? Never heard that name.”

“Neither had I until Mr. Morehead told me. Also, Miss Hughes’s sister has a close friend who lives in the neighborhood where this Bucciarelli was arrested. The friend said that she saw a young child with a woman on the street she lives on and is certain all the woman’s children are fully grown.”

He looked at her with surprise—and perhaps admiration. “That is very helpful. Very helpful. How on earth . . . ?”

She held up a hand. “Mr. Brown, do not patronize me. I’m fully capable of thought and reasoning even if my physical health has been less than satisfactory. I’ll be speaking to Mr. Everly about your shifts?—”

“Absolutely not!” he roared. “I am not some pitiful unfortunate who needs to be rescued. I am a man who will take care of his own problems!”

If Mr. Brown thought she would cower under his tirade, he was wrong, but she could see that he would be insulted if she did anything to try and rectify the situation. He

was proud and accustomed to being the one who directed others, not the one who relied on an outside voice. She raised her eyebrows.

“There is no need to shout, Mr. Brown,” she said and stopped speaking until he ceased yelling. “I will not interfere. Are you satisfied?”

He glared at her. “Not really. I don’t trust you.”

She looked at him for several long moments. “Well,” she said and could not stop her lip from trembling just a bit. She waited until she could swallow the lump in her throat. “I’m sorry to hear that, as I trust you. Good day, Mr. Brown. I hope you are feeling better soon.”

She stood and turned to the door, hearing him calling her name and saying he was sorry in his raspy, muffled voice, but she kept walking. Once in the hallway, Colleen fell into step behind her. She was not certain why his comment hurt as much as it did. But she could not get his words out of her head.

“I hope you’re proud of yourself!” Sarah said as she pulled his blanket up and sat a tray on his lap with some force. She plopped a bowl of stew on the tray and dropped a piece of bread beside it. “There’s a glass of water on your bedside table.”

Phillip watched his sister walk out of the room, shoulders rigid, mumbling to herself. He’d been an ass, but how was he to react when Miss Wiest was going to speak to Everly on his behalf? He’d never be able to look at himself in the mirror if he allowed her to get between him and his boss, let alone that there would be even more resentment between him and Everly. And what kind of a man would he be? But had he let his famous temper make her lip tremble? He had.

He picked up the spoon beside the bowl of stew and mashed the pieces of potatoes and carrots so that he could eat without tearing stitches. He’d never be able to chew

the roast beef that was tempting him and instead dribbled mush into his mouth. What a fool he was! Virginia Wiest was the owner's daughter! And according to rumor would be running Wiest Cannery when her father retired with the help of a board. What a foolish thing to say he didn't trust her.

But her position at Wiest Cannery was not the reason he was feeling foolish and disgusted with himself. He'd best admit it. He was embarrassed for her to see him injured in his bed. He liked it that she thought he looked handsome at the Waters' ball. And here he was in his flannel nightshirt, with cuts all over his face, not even able to speak properly. Uncle Patrick had said many times his temper would keep him from achieving what was possible for a young, strong, smart man in a quickly changing world.

He would admit that he admired Virginia Wiest. Maybe more than admired. He liked her.

The following two days were miserable. He got himself to work and forced himself to ignore the pain and the pinching of the stitches and get his work done. Josiah Steinman was on the same shifts and covered much of his work on the floor, allowing him to sit more than usual in his office. Late in the afternoon, a messenger told him that Mr. Everly wanted to see him in his office. He straightened his clothes and glanced at himself in the glass of his office door. The swelling was mostly down, but he still looked and felt like a monster.

He knocked on the glass of Everly's office and turned the knob. "You wanted to see me, Mr. Everly?"

"It's been reported to me that Steinman has been doing much of your work," Everly said.

"He has been watching my section of the floor for me, and in turn, I've been working

on his paperwork.”

“That’s not how supervisors are expected to manage their areas. Employees see you sitting around doing nothing all day and wonder why they can’t do the same.”

Phillip took a deep breath, remembering to curb his temper as he knew Everly was baiting him, looking for a way to fire him. He heard the door open behind him, and Everly jumped to his feet.

“Mr. Wiest! I thought you’d gone for the day,” he said and glanced at Phillip. “You’re dismissed.”

Phillip turned to the door and heard Mr. Wiest gasp. “Good God, man! What has happened to you? Shouldn’t you be in bed?”

“Yes, I’m sure we can do just fine without you. You may leave early,” Everly said.

Phillip looked at Everly. “I don’t want to jeopardize my position here.”

“Nonsense,” Wiest said. “Come into my office and tell me what happened.”

Phillip followed Wiest, never glancing at Everly. Wiest told him to sit and poured him a glass of water from a crystal decanter. He told Wiest what he’d done at the warehouse and why.

“I’m sure you see, sir, I cannot allow people into my home where my sister lives, and our cook and a maid. They were terrified, along with the woman we’ve been tending since she was dumped on our stoop. The men who did it had to be told clearly that forcing their way into my home would not be tolerated.”

Wiest nodded. “I’m guessing this Bucciarelli person that Ginny mentioned had

something to do with this.”

“His lieutenant, Carbone, was the one who sent the men; I’m sure at Bucciarelli’s request.”

“Ginny is quite concerned about this young child separated from his mother.”

“She is.”

“You must keep her out of it, Mr. Brown,” he said and glanced up from under his bushy eyebrows. “She does not understand the dangers.”

Phillip agreed but felt an odd obligation to defend her to her father. She was not a helpless creature. She was bright and resourceful. “She is hard to convince.”

“I know! She’s just like her dear, sainted mother. But Ginny’s frail; she’s been sickly for years. Weak lungs, you know. But she’s my only family and must be protected.”

“I’ll do my best.”

Wiest stood, and Phillip followed. “Now it is time for you to go home, and I don’t want to see you for three days or more if necessary.”

Phillip took a breath and glanced behind him toward the door to Everly’s office.

“I will take care of Mr. Everly,” Wiest said.

“Yes, sir. Thank you.”

Phillip made his way home and collapsed in his bed after telling his sister he would not be going to work for three days and to let him sleep all day if he wanted. Uncle

Patrick had already told Billy Bond that Phillip would not be working for a week or more, and Phillip intended to do as little as possible.

He woke late the following day, feeling better than he had since his trip to the warehouse. Dr. Prosperi stopped by and removed some of the stitches and cleaned the others with something that burned like the dickens, which he suspected the doctor enjoyed. Eliza filled the tub with hot water, and he took a leisurely bath, soaking away his sore muscles.

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“Y ou mustn’t worry so,” Virginia said to Colleen. “I’m sure this ball will be like any other ball I’ve attended over the last eight years or so.”

“I’m not sure of that, miss, and with Mr. Turnbull with Mr. Wiest, well, I just worry. And Mr. Crimlock is very new. I’d rather come along.”

“You must stay out of this weather this evening. Betsy will be fine and can stay in the carriage since she hasn’t been fitted for a uniform or have a dress appropriate for something like this. I’ll go in, speak to Mr. Morehead, and leave, hopefully not more than fifteen minutes or so.”

“Yes, miss,” Colleen said and blew her nose.

“Did you take whatever concoction Cook sent up?”

Colleen nodded. “Yes. It was foul.”

“Those are the only ones that work, I’m afraid. Don’t wait up for me. Betsy can help me once we’re home,” Virginia said as she closed the door on Colleen’s room on the servants’ floor.

Betsy was waiting for Virginia in the foyer standing with Smith, who opened the door for her. “Have a pleasant evening, Miss Wiest.”

“Thank you, Smith. I doubt I’ll be gone more than an hour or so. You did get word that Mr. Wiest will be staying as a guest of the client he was visiting as some of the roads home are blocked?”

“Yes, Miss Wiest. Hopefully, everything will be cleared by morning.”

Mr. Crimlock opened the carriage door and helped her and Betsy inside. They spread heated quilts over their legs while the carriage rocked as the driver climbed aboard. Virginia leaned back, enjoying the warmth and wondering what Mr. Morehead had to tell her. His note just said to meet him at the ball given by Mrs. Gwendolyn Bernard. She didn't know Mrs. Bernard but couldn't imagine how very different it would be from any other ball. The only strange thing about the missive was that he called her “his darling.” His sense of humor was not endearing. He had included an invitation for her to present and an address, which she had given to her driver.

The carriage slowed as they waited their turn in a line of carriages on a huge circular drive. Virginia looked at Betsy, who had said nothing at all during the ride even as Virginia asked her gentle questions about her background. “I should not be long at all. Will you be warm enough?”

“Yes, miss,” she whispered.

Virginia climbed down with help from Mr. Crimlock. “I will be back shortly. It is not terribly cold, but if you need to walk the horses, please stay on this street so I can find you.”

“Yes, miss. I'll just go to the top of the block and back a few times.”

Virginia followed the swept bricked walk to the three-story mansion, every window lit, and as the door opened and closed on other guests entering, she could hear laughter and music. She'd never met or even heard of Mrs. Bernard, nor had she ever been on this particular street before. The door opened as she approached, and she pulled her invitation out of her bag.

“Good evening,” a young and handsome man said as he took her cape. “Welcome.

Mrs. Bernard wishes that all of her guests enjoy themselves.” Another servant handed her a glass of champagne. There did not seem to be any receiving line, which suited Virginia as she did not know her hostess and did not have an escort.

Virginia wandered through the crowd in the hallway, not recognizing anyone but certainly noticing that the women were wearing dresses that were more revealing than she’d ever seen at any other social function since she began attending them. The men seemed much more forward than she was accustomed to as well. Several had taken their time perusing her from head to toe, and a few had winked! She sipped her champagne and followed the crowd going to the second floor, where she could tell the music was coming from. She took a deep breath before climbing the rather long staircase. She’d been feeling much better for a week or more, but she was still careful to not let herself become winded, especially as Colleen or her father were not with her.

“Hello,” a man said suddenly at her side. “Allow me to escort you.”

“No, thank you,” she said and turned away from the arm he offered.

“Oh, come now,” he said and hurried up to a step ahead of her. “I’ll be the envy of every man here to walk in with a beauty such as yourself on my arm.”

“You will be disappointed, then,” she said, reached the top step, and turned to the open double doors where guests were filtering in and out. She passed a woman whose dress was cut so low that there was a real danger she would fall out of the bodice. Virginia’s face turned bright red.

“You’re blushing, miss. I suppose that is because Annalee Andrews’s spectacular breasts are nearly out of her dress!”

Virginia stopped and looked at him, feeling a tremor of unease. “I do not appreciate

such crass conversation. Do not follow me any longer.”

He held his hands up as if in surrender. “My apologies,” he said and wandered away.

Virginia stepped into the crowded room, looking left and right for Mr. Morehead, but she could not see over all those taller than her. She hoped he’d seen her enter and would make his way to her. It was difficult getting through the crowded room as other guests were clustered together in groups. She apologized and pardoned herself multiple times and fended off a few men who were entirely too close.

Eventually, she came to a room with fewer guests and a little space to move around to the scattered chairs and sofas. A man greeted her. “Hello! Welcome. Let us get you fixed up with something cool to drink.”

Virginia readily agreed as the temperature in the ballroom was high and rather overwhelming with perfumes and the scents of pomade. Her breathing was not as steady as she’d like, but she knew the worst thing she could do was panic. She needed to find a window and take slow, deep breaths. She did exactly that, sitting down where the air was cooler and smiling as the man carried her a crystal glass with shaved ice. She took a deep drink of the cool, tangy lemonade, and the man put his hand on her arm as she brought the glass to her lips for another sip.

“Maybe not so fast,” he said and tilted his head at her. “Is this your first time here?”

She nodded and took another sip. “This is delicious!”

“And potent.” He smiled as he slid into the seat beside her. “What’s your name?”

“Virginia,” she said slowly, vowel by vowel, as her tongue seemed too thick to say it otherwise. “Virginia,” she said again.

“Well, Virginia, it is a sincere pleasure to meet you. I’m Tom, in case you’re wondering.”

“Tom,” she said and giggled. The room was tilting in the strangest way, and she leaned to straighten it. “Oh. I’ve spilled my drink,” she said, or thought she said. Her gloves were sticky and yellow, she saw as she held her hand in front of her eyes.

The man beside her laughed. She noticed he was sitting very close, close enough that her skirts were caught under his leg. She tugged at them and nearly fell off of the couch.

“You’re going to hurt yourself, my dear Virginia. Let me keep you safe,” he said and wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

But it did not feel safe. She could feel a growing panic, but it did not seem overwhelming. She sought to examine why she felt alarmed and queasy but could not remember why she cared. Perhaps it would be clear if she rested a moment. Her eyes were so heavy, and she could not understand why a man’s hand was so near her breast. Her eyes slipped closed.

Phillip answered his door after telling Sarah to get in the kitchen. Uncle Patrick was behind him, probably holding the long wooden paddle Eliza used to stir soup. It was nearly ten in the evening, and they’d all been disturbed in the sitting room, Sarah stitching a shirt, Uncle Patrick snoozing and snoring, and Phillip attempting to read his book.

He moved the bar and cracked the door a few inches.

“Mr. Brown?”

“Yes?”

“Hello. Miss Hughes sent me. She’s Miss Wiest’s maid. She’s concerned . . .” the man said as he twisted his hat in his hand.

Phillip reached outside and pulled the man in by his jacket. “You have a message from Miss Hughes?”

He nodded and glanced at the others in the small foyer. “I drove Miss Wiest to a ball . . .”

“Where’s Turnbull?”

“He had to drive Mr. Wiest to a customer, and then he couldn’t come home ’cause of some problem with the road.”

“Where did you take Miss Wiest?”

“That’s the thing . . .”

“What? Tell me,” Phillip raised his voice.

“Let the man talk,” Uncle Patrick said from behind him. “Go ahead, son. Where did you take her?”

The young man reached in his pocket. Phillip’s hand stopped the movement when he grabbed his wrist. “Slow now.”

The driver’s eyes were wide as he pulled a card with the name of Mrs. Gwendolyn Bernard’s and an address, all written in Miss Wiest’s hand.

“When did you take her?”

“That’s the thing,” he said. “We got there to this fancy party, Betsy and me, with Miss Wiest about seven o’clock. She told us she would be back to the carriage in fifteen minutes and that I was to walk the horses up and down the street, which I did.”

“Who is Betsy?”

“A new maid who rode along with the miss as Miss Hughes is sick in bed.”

“Where is Miss Wiest now?” Phillip asked.

“I don’t know,” he said, agitated now and white as a ghost. “We waited an hour, and then I went to the servants’ entrance, but they wouldn’t let me upstairs to the party. We waited another half hour, and then I hurried back to Shellington. I didn’t know what else to do. Mr. Smith took me to Miss Hughes, and she told me to come here to you straightaway.”

Phillip was already pulling on his coat and sat on the steps to lace his boots. “How fast can you get me there?”

“Phillip, go upstairs and put on your new suit. You’ll never get inside in what you’re wearing,” Sarah said.

He hated to waste the time, but she was right. He ran up the steps, Patrick following. His uncle was pulling his new suit from the cupboard as he tore off his clothes. He was re-dressed and hurrying down the stairs a few minutes later, the pistol and knife his uncle had handed him in his pockets.

The driver got him to the correct address as quickly as the slushy roads allowed. He jumped down before the horses were stopped and hurried up the brick walkway of the mansion. He opened the front door rather than knock, hoping to carry off that he was already a guest and had stepped outside for a breath of air, but the ruse wasn’t

necessary. There were no servants at the door, just a foyer filled with guests, loud music, and a hum of mischief in the air. The women were in extremely low-cut costumes, many with men's arms draped over their shoulders.

Phillip followed the crowd up a set of steps, looking left and right for a sign of Miss Wiest and wished he'd asked the driver what color dress she was wearing. He made his way around the perimeter of the room, noticing a few alcoves with couples embracing and kissing. What kind of ball was this, and why had she decided to come on her own? He walked through the crowd of dancers and finally came to a large room that was less crowded. He stepped through the wide double doors and was greeted by a woman in a red satin dress that left little to his imagination. She offered him a glass of yellow liquid with a giggle, glancing up at him from under her lashes.

"Well, aren't you a big boy," she said.

He turned back to the ballroom when he heard a commotion and saw two men dragging another man toward the door.

"Morehead," Phillip shouted and pushed his way through gawkers. The man's head came up, revealing a swollen eye and a bleeding mouth.

"Brown?"

"Where is she?"

"Don't know," he said as one of the men twisted his arm behind him, making Morehead howl. "Try the drink room," he shouted and received a punch that made his head drop.

Phillip turned back to the room where the woman had offered him the glass of punch or whatever it was. He noticed immediately that there was a crowd of men around a

sofa. He locked the door behind him.

“What is going on over there?”

“Don’t worry about her, honey,” the red dress said. “We can have some fun together.”

Phillip walked to the crowd of men, who parted as he shouldered his way through. She was stretched out on the couch before him, her eyes fluttering and her delicate hand above her head on the pillow. She made an erotic picture, which the men surrounding her were clearly enjoying.

“She’s mine if she ever wakes up!” one said to laughter from the others, and some cries of “no” from others.

He could smell cannabis in the air now and prayed that was the only thing she’d ingested. He knelt down beside the couch and picked up her hand. “Miss. Miss. Can you hear me? Virginia?” he whispered as he leaned close to her.

Men were crowding around him and making lewd comments. He stood up and faced them. “Get the hell away from her! There mustn’t be a gentleman in the crowd to leer at an unconscious woman in this way. What is wrong with you?”

Several men slunk away, but a few remained.

“Who are you?” one asked. “Who in the hell are you to say we’re not gentlemen, you overgrown lumberjack?”

The other men laughed until Phillip stepped close to the one speaking. He grabbed the man’s jacket lapels and lifted him a foot off the ground. “You don’t want to know,” he said and tossed the man several feet. He turned back to Virginia, but not

before one of the men jumped on his back, and another came at him swinging. Phillip caught the fist in his hand and twisted the man's arm behind his back until he screamed and fell to the floor.

Phillip reached behind him, grabbed the man on his back by the scruff of the neck, bringing him to his feet in front of him. The man raised his fists.

Someone in the crowd hollered, "You're in trouble now, lumberjack!"

Phillip smiled at the speaker and threw a roundhouse punch, hitting the man in front of him squarely on the chin. He dropped to the floor. "Anyone else?" Phillip asked as he took off his jacket. He eyed a sheepish-looking young man at the back of the crowd and pointed at him.

"You. Come here," he said. "I'm going to sit her up and you're going to put this jacket on her."

The man hurried to the couch and took Phillip's jacket from his hands. Phillip put his arm around her shoulders and sat her up while the other man put her arms in the sleeves. Her head lolled to the side, and her eyes blinked open.

"Mr. Brown?"

"I'm here," he said softly as he picked her up in his arms. "Don't worry about a thing."

She laid her head on his shoulder and sighed. "I'm not worried. You're here."

Phillip straightened, feeling as if he were the strongest, the tallest, and the best man on earth, which reality said he wasn't, but there was something about her confidence in him that went to his heart. He nodded to the man who'd put his jacket on her.

“Can you get the door?”

The man hurried across the room, opening the double doors wide and making a path through the rowdy crowd to the stairs and finally to the outer door.

“Thank you,” he said to the man.

“I’m sure nothing untoward happened to her. Miss Wiest, isn’t it?”

Phillip stared at him. “I wouldn’t know,” he said.

The man nodded quickly. “Of course. Never saw her before in my life.”

Phillip went down the walk to the carriage, where Crimlock held the door, tears gathering in his eyes.

“Is she dead, sir?”

“No. Just very tired. Let’s get her home to Shellington,” he said as he maneuvered his way into the carriage, Virginia in his arms.

Smith was at the door as soon as the carriage stopped, Colleen Hughes behind him.

“She is sleeping,” he said. “Where is her room?”

Miss Hughes signaled him to follow her up the marble steps, the tap of his shoes sounding like cannon fire in the quiet of the entranceway. The room was warm and lit with several lamps, and feminine paraphernalia lay everywhere, all organized on tabletops and dressers. He laid her down on her bed but was hesitant to leave.

Miss Hughes began unbuckling her mistress’s shoes. She glanced at Phillip, still

staring at Miss Wiest laid back against a mound of pillows. “Thank you, Mr. Brown, for bringing her home. I’m going to get her changed now.”

He nodded and picked up Miss Wiest’s hand. “I believe they gave her some of the poppy. She will hopefully be fine in the morning.”

Miss Wiest’s eyes fluttered. “Mr. Brown?”

He dropped to one knee beside the bed. “Miss Wiest. You’ve given us quite a scare. How are you feeling?”

“Sleepy. So very sleepy.”

“Then you should rest. Miss Hughes will help you.”

She nodded. “I went to a ball, Mr. Brown.”

“I know.”

“Will you be here when I wake?”

“No. I’ll be at the cannery. But perhaps Miss Hughes can get word to me about how you are feeling.”

She stared up at him, a small smile playing at her lips. “I’m sure everything will be fine. You’re here.”

Her eyes fluttered closed, and he gently laid her hand on the silky sheet, having no idea when her fingers had closed so tightly around his.

Phillip hurried home and to his bed. His shift at the cannery started at four in the

morning.

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A listair Wiest was pounding his fist on his desk and shouting at the staff standing in front of him. Virginia had woken late in the morning, had some toast and tea, and dropped back to sleep for another hour. It was near noon now and she had risen, wondering where Colleen was, dressed herself, brushed her hair, and was on the staircase when she heard her father's bellows. She opened the office door and stepped inside, no one in the room noticing her, and she understood why considering the volume of her father's voice.

"When I tell you I do not want Miss Wiest leaving this house unless she is going to the cannery, the dressmaker, or the cobbler, I mean it. No where else. She is to go nowhere else, and even then she will be attended by Miss Hughes, Mr. Turnbull, and Jones. Is that clear?"

"Miss Hughes?" Virginia said. Mr. Smith, Jones, Colleen, Mr. Turnbull, and Mrs. French turned in unison, and her father straightened.

"Ginny! You should be in bed," he blustered.

"Miss Hughes?" she repeated.

"Yes, miss."

"Please have my trunks brought down from the attic. We will depart in two days. Is that enough time for you to visit your family?"

"Depart? Depart? Ginny! You've not even recovered! I don't know if a holiday?—"

“Not a holiday, Father. I’m going to move to New York and live with Aunt Essie. She has always made it known I was welcome there for a visit or an extended stay. Or even a permanent one.”

“Now, Ginny...” her father said.

“Pack everything, Miss Hughes, and have Betsy help you pack your own things. We will be gone for some time.”

Virginia went out the door, and the rest of the staff followed her, although none would meet her eye. She could hear her father telling her to come back to his office, but she kept walking, climbing the stairs, until she was in her room. She sat down at her desk, prepared to write to her widowed Aunt Essie, who would undoubtedly take her in, happy for the company and to have family in her household. But the tears in her eyes kept her from writing one word.

How utterly foolish she’d been! No wonder her father meant to keep her a prisoner. She’d received a note and an invitation to meet at a ball, not even certain it was Geoffrey’s handwriting and knowing that he often dabbled in gray areas concerning the law, at a home she’d never been to by a hostess she’d never met. And she went alone. Without Colleen, who always gave wise counsel, or Mr. Turnbull. Someone had lured her there with that note she believed was from Geoffrey, most likely over something that was overheard at the Waters ball, exactly as he had predicted.

Virginia recognized that much worse could have happened to her other than falling asleep on a couch, and it made her stomach roll over, imagining drastic and horrible outcomes.

But worst of all, the absolute most embarrassing result was that Phillip Brown had to rescue her. He’d seen the foolishness of her actions. She was not sure she could face him after all the warnings he’d given her. She remembered arriving at the ball,

wandering around, and little after that until she woke and found him kneeling by her bed, his face earnest and serious, and maybe frightened. She could never admit to him that all of her worries and fright and confusion melted away when she saw his face. She would have to send him a note, thanking him for her rescue and letting him know she'd no longer be a dangerous burden to him. Was she committing another rash act to assuage her guilt? Perhaps. But she could not be hedged in with nursemaids, as her father intended. She'd told herself she was going to be more outgoing, more involved, and she intended to do just that whether in Baltimore or New York City.

Colleen tapped at her door. "Miss Wiest. Mr. Wiest is asking you to please meet him in the parlor. He is very upset, miss."

She supposed this was inevitable, and she did not want to leave on unhappy terms with her father, but she would not be restricted to the locations he listed. "I'll go down in a moment, Colleen. I just need to rinse my face."

She stepped into the parlor a few moments later. Her father jumped to his feet.

"Ginny!"

"Father," she said and sat down.

"What of this nonsense about moving to Essie's?"

"It is not nonsense. I fully admit I made poor choices?—"

"Poor choices? You could have been murdered!"

"I admit I did not think this through," she said and held up a hand when he began to interrupt again. "But I will not be a prisoner. I am twenty-six years old."

“I’m your father, Ginny. It’s my job to keep you safe. I can’t do that if you are off wandering around Baltimore!”

She stood. “Very well. You are relieved of your duties. I’ll be leaving in two days.”

He was shouting behind her as she left the room and left a piece of her heart as well. She loved her father. Adored and respected him. But this was too far, and she had warned him several times before. The limitations on her movements she could not tolerate, nor should she have to. She wrote the letters she had to write and packed her trunks with Colleen’s help.

Phillip received a note from Miss Wiest in the morning at the cannery that she was well, thanks to him, and leaving Baltimore. She was moving away from Shellington, from her father, and from him, even if he had no claim on her. Just a few minutes later, Mr. Wiest sent for him, and he was mightily glad Mr. Everly was out of the office at the time.

“Yes, sir. What can I help you with?” he said as soon as he heard Mr. Wiest’s voice call him to enter. He was shocked when he walked up to his desk. Phillip had never seen the owner look so unhappy, nearly defeated. His eyes were red, as if he’d not had enough sleep, and his shoulders were slumped as he leaned on his desk.

“Sit down, Brown,” he said.

Phillip waited silently as the man shuffled papers on his desk and alternately stared out the window. He felt much like his employer looked, trying to process why Virginia Wiest was leaving town and why it mattered so very much to him.

“Ginny did something stupid and dangerous, and I in turn did something stupid,” he said without looking up at Phillip.

“Her note to me said she was feeling fine, sir. Is she well?”

Wiest nodded. “She says she’s moving to New York, and I mean to stop her,” he said. “Somehow.”

“She said as much in the note to me, sir. I’m . . . I’m very sorry to hear that.”

Finally, Wiest looked up at him. “Well, you’re my last hope, Brown. Do you think you can convince her to stay? She’ll barely speak to me.”

He could not imagine her leaving her beloved father on a whim. Something must have happened. “Did the two of you have an argument, sir?”

Wiest shrugged. “I don’t see how that makes much of a difference.”

“I can hardly go and try and convince her to stay if I don’t know everything that led up to her making this decision. I hardly have any influence regardless. I’m not a family member or a longtime friend.”

“She likes you. She trusts you.”

Phillip’s face turned red, thinking of her reaction to him saying he didn’t trust her. He wasn’t worthy of her friendship, but there was no doubt he would miss her greatly. “I can stop at Shellington after my shift, sir. I owe her an apology anyway.”

“An apology? Why?”

“When I was hurt last week, Miss Wiest came to see me to tell me she’d found something out about where Miss Adamsen’s son was being held. My sister told her that I needed to be at work the following day as Mr. Everly had said in a note. Miss Wiest was going to speak to him on my behalf and I . . . well, I was rude to her and

told her not to, and then she said she wouldn't, but I couldn't keep my mouth shut and told her I didn't trust her not to."

Wiest looked up at him with raised brows. "So we were both angry fools. Angry and frightened."

"She just seems so fragile, sir. She isn't. She's clever and persistent. But the idea that one of these monsters would get their hands on her... I can't think straight..." He trailed off, staring aimlessly toward the bay through the large window at Mr. Wiest's back.

"Will you talk to her?"

He nodded. "I owe her that apology before she goes—unless I can talk her out of leaving me," he said and looked up quickly. "Leaving you, sir."

"Do your best and go now, please."

"Mr. Everly will not be happy with me, and I'm not in his good graces at the moment."

Wiest shook his head. "I'm well aware of Altimus's behavior toward you. It will not be any worse than you are able to handle, Mr. Brown. Businessmen must be able to handle all sorts of people and situations. Do your best, and you will be fine."

"Thank you, sir."

Phillip knocked on the door at Shellington after cleaning up some paperwork and speaking to his assistant, Clyde Spellman. Smith was cordial, but it was clear the house was in turmoil.

“Is Miss Wiest in, Mr. Smith?”

“She is,” he said hesitantly.

Phillip glanced at the marble staircase he had recently climbed with her in his arms. “I’m hoping she’ll have a moment to speak to me.”

“Yes, sir. Let me check.”

Phillip waited fifteen minutes or more, if his watch was accurate. Finally, Mr. Smith came back to the vaulted foyer, his cheeks red. “I’m so sorry, Mr. Brown. Miss Wiest is very busy and?—”

He climbed the steps two at a time, past the butler’s protests. At the top, he looked left and right, not quite remembering which direction he’d carried her that night and saw servants carrying trunks from a room near the end of the hallway. He went swiftly that direction, past servants who were staring at him, turning their heads to follow his path. He saw Miss Hughes and stopped.

“Is she in there?”

“Mr. Brown! These are the private family rooms.”

And then there she was in the doorway of her rooms, looking cross, her hair untidy and her hands full of some lacy garments that he did not want to think about.

“Mr. Brown. Did Smith not tell you I was busy?”

“He did. But I’ve got something to say to you, and I won’t be put off, especially as you’re leaving town, maybe permanently.”

“I’m not sure how long we’ll be in New York, but it may well be an extended time.”

Phillip was aware that even though the servants surrounding them acted as if they were not paying any attention, he wasn’t going to say what he had to say in front of an audience. “Is there somewhere we can speak privately?”

She turned away, and for a moment he thought she may refuse to speak to him at all, but shortly after, several maids left the room.

“I’ll just be a few moments, Colleen,” she said and signaled him to follow her into her rooms.

He walked past Miss Hughes, who stared at him as if he were the lowliest human in the state of Maryland, to find himself in a sitting room decorated in pink and cream. He must have walked through here when he carried her home, but he remembered little of it; he’d been so concentrated on laying her down on her own bed with her own people. Thinking about all of those gawking men made him sick with anger.

She closed the door behind him and faced him. “What do you have to say, Mr. Brown? As you can see, I’m very busy.”

He was only a few feet away from her, but it felt as if there were miles between them. “I wanted to apologize to you. That’s why I had to see you.”

“Apologize? For what, Mr. Brown?”

“You visited me after I was banged up at Carbone’s warehouse.” He took a deep breath, knowing this confession was difficult for him and wondering why. “I . . . I was embarrassed for you to see me. To see me weak and helpless. I couldn’t bear the idea that you would speak to Mr. Everly about me. I should have never said I didn’t trust you. I did trust you to keep your word and to be on the right side of right. I’m

sorry. I should have never said it.”

He took a deep breath, feeling lighter, knowing he owed her that and that he had delivered, and knowing that at many other times in his life he had been unable to admit he’d made a mistake and tell who he’d offended that he was sorry. He looked up at her and saw her eyes filled with tears.

“I don’t quite know why, but those words made me terribly sad and hurt,” she said and turned away to wipe her eyes. “Although you aren’t the only one who has hurt me recently.”

“Your father asked me to come talk to you.”

“Is that why you’re here? Because your employer asked it of you?”

“No. I planned on apologizing but had put it off. Your decision to leave made me realize I could not let you leave without telling you how very sorry I was. I owed you that at the least.”

“You don’t owe me anything, Mr. Brown. Let us end as friends in any case.”

He stared at her until she looked his way. Her lip was trembling, and her eyes filled again. “Just friends, Miss Wiest?”

Phillip walked slowly to her, hoping she did not scurry away. He stopped and took her hands from her waist, holding them with his own. “I don’t like the idea that you will be far away, Miss Wiest.”

“Why?” she said with a bit of her normal spirit. “Why does it matter to you?”

“You are aggravating and stubborn,” he said and smiled at her grimace. “You’re also

so bright, so kind, and so very, very beautiful. I will miss you. That is why.”

He leaned his head down, kissed her cheek, and slowly moved to her lips. He would give her enough time to back away, slap his face, or tell him to get out and never return. But she did none of those things. Her eyes closed on a soft breath as she returned his kiss with the lightest pressure. He could feel his heart pounding, and he imagined she could as well as he held her hands to his chest. Their kiss lasted only a few moments, far too short, but the air had changed, maybe his life had changed, he thought. It was a whimsically ridiculous idea, but he could not deny it.

He stepped away from her then, giving them both a chance to calm their breathing. “Do I owe you another apology?”

She shook her head. “You do not.”

“Your father is devastated that you are leaving. I imagine something happened between the two of you, but he would not tell me what.”

She turned and wandered to the windows overlooking the bay. “He told the staff that I am not allowed to go anywhere other than the dressmaker, the cannery, or the cobbler without his permission and that I must have escorts above Colleen at all times.”

Phillip blew out a breath. No wonder she planned to move to her aunt’s. She turned then, looking resolute.

“I find I owe you an apology as well. You were roused from your home to rescue me from my foolishness. I am mortified to admit that I was completely taken in, that I was reckless and gullible. And that I caused people to worry about me.”

“There’s not a one of us who has not been foolish about something at some time. You

only need to ask my Uncle Patrick if you want to hear a long list of my misjudgments.”

“Even so, I cannot spend my life as a prisoner.”

“You shouldn’t. I think you should talk to your father again. Maybe a compromise could be found. He wants you to stay at Shellington, or at the least in Baltimore.”

She glanced up at him. “And what do you want, Mr. Brown?”

She looked so vulnerable at that moment he would have gathered her in his arms if he hadn’t vastly overstepped by kissing her. “I would like you to stay in Baltimore and help me figure out how to help Greta Adamsen. Beyond that, I wouldn’t presume to say.”

“You are just saying that to please my father.”

“That is not true. I hate to see Mr. Wiest so miserable, but I’m thinking more of myself than anyone else. I need your help. You think about things differently and have access to people who would never give me the time of day.”

“I’m struggling to believe you as you’ve not . . . welcomed my opinions or help.”

“My sister says I can be stubborn.” He smiled. “You have a different perspective, which I am learning to appreciate.”

She looked up at him shyly. “Truly?”

He nodded. “Truly.”

Virginia wandered to the window of the room and stood staring out for several

minutes. She glanced over her shoulder to him. “If you really need my help, I can hardly refuse. If I can convince my father he must not act as if I’m just a child.”

“I think your father will be open to a compromise.”

He smiled at her—couldn’t stop himself, in truth. She walked past him and opened the door to her rooms. “Colleen, I won’t be leaving Shellington at this time. I’m sorry for all of the work you’ve already done. Can you instruct the staff and give them my apologies? Maybe you could ask Cook to make something special for dessert for everyone.”

“Yes, miss,” she said and turned to everyone working. Phillip followed Miss Wiest to the front door.

“When everything is settled here, perhaps we can meet and discuss what we know, Mr. Brown,” she said.

He glanced around the foyer. “I think you could call me Phillip, miss.”

She blushed. “I suppose you should call me Virginia, then.”

“Only if you’re comfortable.”

“You’d be the only person, other than my father, to do so . . . Phillip.”

“Then it is an honor.”

She smiled that rare smile again, and he was glad he’d swallowed his pride and just as glad she was staying in Baltimore. Not that he would ever be in her circle of friends. Good Lord, he thought to himself, he had kissed her! He felt suddenly awkward, tipped his hat, and hurried to the door and the freezing weather.

Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 5:35 am

“Miss Adamsen said she remembered smelling a barnyard when Campbell’s men took her off the street that Thursday before she was left on our stoop,” Phillip said.

Virginia sipped her tea. “This Orville person who she gave the copied documents to worked as a groom at the Durmands’. Could he have hidden her at their stables?”

“But if Campbell is the man responsible for her copying the papers, then Orville works for Campbell, not Bucciarelli,” Sarah said. “I assumed Bucciarelli was behind all of this, otherwise why did he take her son?” Sarah stood and went to the parlor door, calling for Jenny to ask Miss Adamsen to join them.

“Miss Adamsen,” Virginia said as the woman glanced around warily. “You’re looking well.”

“Sit here, near the fire,” Phillip said as he stood. “Would you like some tea?”

Greta Adamsen shook her head and seated herself at the edge of the sofa, staring down at her hands as she did.

“Greta?” Sarah said. “Would you mind answering a few of our questions that might help Phillip find your son?”

“I’m not sure what I can tell you,” she said.

“You say you have no idea who asked you to copy the papers in Durmand’s study. I find that hard to believe,” Phillip said. “I think you have a good idea who approached you in the beginning.”

She shook her head and looked away.

“Miss Adamsen,” Virginia said softly and waited until the woman faced her. “We realize there are things you are not telling us. And that you are frightened. But we cannot help you if you do not tell us the truth.”

Adamsen stared at Virginia before whispering. “He stopped me one day on my afternoon out.”

“Who stopped you?” Virginia asked.

“A man I’d never met before or seen. He was tall, large, and very handsome. His hair was pulled back with a ribbon and his vest was red-and-black plaid. I’d dropped one of my purchases, and he bent to pick it up. He smiled at me.”

“What did he say to you?”

“Nothing. Nothing at all. But then I saw him again. He was seated on the trolley I was taking back to the Durmands’. He stood up and gave me his seat.” She looked up. “No one had ever done that for me before.”

“Did he speak to you then?”

“No. But then a few weeks later, he walked into the coffee shop I sometimes stop at. There were no tables open, and when I glanced up at him, he smiled and walked to me. He asked if he could share my table. He sat down, his back to the crowded room, and I thought . . . oh, I thought, maybe, just maybe here was a nice man.”

Virginia had some experience with men letting her down. Not her father, other than his ridiculous attempts to wrap her up until she was old and gray, but other men whom she’d be friendly with or formed some relationship with. She’d been so very

disappointed by them—or bored by them, which was worse. That, and the fact that she was independently wealthy, was why she was twenty-six and unmarried. She glanced at Phillip Brown. He hadn't been a disappointment. Yet. But that kiss. That was definitely not a disappointment, other than how brief it was.

Greta looked up clear-eyed and glanced at each one of them. “Then he said, ‘I know where your little William is, and I know where your Auntie lives.’ I was so shocked he knew my son’s name and about my mother’s sister, who had raised me, I just sat and stared at him. I finally asked him where William was. He laughed, as if my son’s life was a joke, and said I wouldn’t get something for nothing.

“He said it all with a charming smile and a Scottish accent. I asked him what he knew about William. He said he would get my boy back for me if I would just write down a few things I’d find in Mr. Durmand’s study,” she said as tears streamed down her face. “I’m a fool and always have been. I believed him.”

Sarah Brown stood up, sat down beside Greta, and put her arm around the sobbing woman. “Oh, Greta. Men can be dreadful, but there are a few good ones. Such trouble finding one, though.”

Virginia looked at Phillip. “Very true, Miss Brown. But there are a few good ones around.”

“I think I need to have a conversation with Orville,” Phillip said. “I do have one more question, though, Miss Adamsen. If you were doing what Campbell told you to do, why did he dump you on our stoop to freeze to death?”

“I told him. I’m such a fool,” she said and shook her head. “I wrote him a note with the last set of papers I’d copied. I told him I’d copied all the papers I could find and that I wanted to know how he was going to get William back.”

“And when you said you’d finished what he’d asked you to do, you were no longer any use to him,” Virginia said.

Greta nodded as her shoulders shook and tears flowed to her chin. “My baby wouldn’t be any use either. Who would sing him ‘Over in the Meadow in the Stream So Blue’?”

“But Bucciarelli has your child, not Campbell. Maybe Bucciarelli doesn’t know anything about this. Maybe he’s keeping William for another reason,” Virginia said.

Greta looked away. “Perhaps.”

“What would that reason be?” Phillip asked.

“He did not care for me seeing Matthew Finkle.”

“I thought he didn’t mean anything to you. That’s what you told us,” Sarah said.

“Matthew? He doesn’t. But he didn’t mind showing a girl a fun time at a dancehall or dinner out.”

“Why would Bucciarelli care? What aren’t you telling us?”

Greta shrugged. “It’s personal.”

“Are you in a relationship with Mr. Bucciarelli, Greta?” Virginia asked.

“I was.”

Phillip set out on the following morning to speak to this Orville person after arguing with Virginia. She did not want to hear that it would be too dangerous, which it could

be, depending on how the conversation went and whether Phillip's fists needed to make themselves known. But he'd finally convinced her to get a description or a drawing of Greta's son. They would need to know what the boy looked like if he had to be rescued by force.

Phillip found a path that led to the stables behind the Durmand mansion and spotted Gerald Austraw coming from the back of the house, a steaming mug in his hand. Austraw saw him and stopped.

"Is your mistress here to see Miss Durmand again?" he asked.

Phillip shook Austraw's hand. "No. I was hoping to speak to one of your stable men. Orville. Don't know his last name."

"Biggs. That's his last name," Austraw said and ran a hand over his jaw. "What in the world do you want with him?"

Sometimes the truth was the best way forward, and he had a feeling Austraw was a straight and narrow man. Although Phillip had been fooled a time or two. "Greta Adamsen was spying on your boss because someone is holding her son. She put what she found in a leather satchel on a bench in the garden and thought Orville was the one who picked it up."

Austraw turned to the elaborate stone-and-timber stable and stared for a minute before heading to the door. Phillip followed him through the door, the earthy smell of horses and hay hitting him through the warm air. They walked down the center, horses to either side studying him or nickering at Austraw, to a group of men talking and drinking from enameled cups until they saw Austraw coming their way. Before they could scatter, he called out.

"Biggs. Get over here."

A dark-haired man scowled over his shoulder and returned to Austraw, many of the other men loitering nearby, surely hoping to hear what was said.

“You have anything to do with Greta going missing?”

“No.”

“I know you didn’t like her. Complained about her.”

“She’s an uppity bitch.”

“Turned you down, huh?” Austraw said to some sniggers from the other men.

“Yeah, but I didn’t know nothing about her leaving. Glad she was gone.”

“So you don’t know anything about a pouch on a garden bench?” Phillip asked. As he spoke, movement among the men gathered caught his eye, and he looked up to see a younger man hurrying through a door at the far end of the stable. Phillip followed him, pushing his way through the other men and out the same door.

“Jackman!” Austraw shouted and followed.

Phillip skidded past a steaming pile of manure, losing sight of his quarry for a moment until he saw the man pulling himself over a tall fence. Phillip followed up and over the fence, seeing Austraw veer off to a door nearly hidden by shrubbery. He spied Jackman racing down the alleyway, and Phillip took off in pursuit, making some headway but not enough until a man on horseback came out of a property at a trot, nearly colliding with Jackman and causing him to slip in the mud and snow. The man pulled his skittish horse to a halt as Jackman jumped up started off again, but not quickly enough as Phillip had caught up and flew into him, taking him to the stones and gravel and slush.

“Give it up, Jackman,” Austraw shouted.

Phillip pulled the man to his feet and caught a well-aimed blow to the chin for his trouble. Before he could recover, Jackman turned to flee.

“Stop where you are, Jackman and put your hands where I can see them,” Austraw said.

Jackman slowly raised his arms to the side while Austraw kept his gun steady on the man’s chest.

“Why are you pointing a gun at me? I didn’t do anything wrong,” Jackman said.

“What do you know about a leather pouch on a garden bench?” Phillip asked.

Jackman continued to stare at Austraw.

“What do you know about Adamsen’s son?” Phillip asked.

“I don’t know anything,” Jackman growled. “I don’t even know what you’re talking about.”

Phillip twisted his arm around his back and pushed him toward the Durmand property. “Can you keep him until I can get to one of the police stations or find an officer?”

“There’s likely to be one walking the street up ahead at this time of day,” Austraw said. “I’ll get this one tied up.”

Phillip walked quickly to the street ahead, rubbing his jaw, sorry he hadn’t gotten a slug in himself, and passed a man, not really paying any attention to him while

wondering what information he could get out of Jackman without killing him or going to jail. He stopped abruptly and looked back at the man's hands, one holding a knife.

"Austraw!" he shouted. But not in time.

Jackman was folding to the ground, Austraw still holding his arm, probably wondering what had happened. Phillip looked up in time to see the stranger turn the corner onto the busy main street at the other end of the alley. Phillip dropped to his knees, surveying Jackman and the thin blade handle sticking out of the man's chest, his eyes wild and searching.

Phillip picked up Jackman's hand and held it tight. "Who? Who did this? Where is Greta's son?"

"Me wife and me bairn," he whispered.

"We'll guard them," Austraw said. "I know where you live."

Jackman was fading quickly, his eyes cloudy and distant now. Phillip squeezed his hand. "We'll guard them. Where's Greta's boy?"

A breath went out of Jackman's lungs, and Phillip thought it was his last, but he whispered instead, "The flour bi . . ."

"What? Flour? Hang on, Jackman!" Phillip shouted, but he knew the man was gone. Austraw ran a hand over his eyes to close them and looked up at Phillip.

"Daylight. In a well-used alleyway, with riders and workers coming and going, and they stabbed him to death right in front of us. My God," Austraw said and crossed himself.

“We’ve got to get to his wife before they do,” Phillip said. “How did they even know I was asking questions?”

“Let me get in my papers and find his address,” Austraw said and hurried through the hidden gate.

Phillip remained where he was, crouched on one knee, holding the hand of a dead man.

Phillip tried his best to appear as if he knew what he was about on the back of a horse, although he was certain Austraw was aware that he was a novice. He kept his horse pointed toward the one Austraw rode and was glad there were too many carriages, wagons, and other horses to go very fast. They turned a corner onto a narrow street filled with tall buildings and laundry hanging from lines that went from a building on one side of the street to a building on the other side even in the bitter weather. He focused ahead when he heard a woman screaming and saw Austraw haw his horse through a crowd, sending women and children apart. Phillip slid down the side of his mount, thinking he could run faster than he’d be able to navigate among the people gathered.

A man was holding a woman around the waist as she screamed and reached toward another man holding a crying baby. A large woman climbed on the back of the man holding the baby, clutching at his face, and another was trying to wrench the child free of his arms. Bowls and pans came flying through a window on a lower floor. Austraw flew at the man holding the woman, taking them both to the ground.

Phillip charged past them, up the steep stone steps to the door of the building where it stood open. The door to his left was open too, and a man sat on the floor leaning against the wall, holding his head where he was bleeding.

“Get out,” Phillip said softly. “Crawl if you have to. When I give you the signal, say

‘The police are coming.’”

The man nodded and pulled himself up and through to the building entranceway.

Phillip went through a room with a sofa and a chair that was missing a leg and was propped on a piece of wood. The walls were papered and faded but clean other than what the men in the room ahead of him had destroyed. The three men were busy pulling everything out of the drawers and turning the kitchen table over and did not notice Phillip. He stopped shy of the doorway, out of sight, and pointed at the man in the hallway, sagging against a wall.

“The police are coming.”

“Jimmy? Go shut that arse up. Ain’t no police coming here.”

Jimmy came through the door at a good pace, a young man, lean but wiry. Phillip had him around the neck before the boy realized what had happened. “I’m going to break your neck,” Phillip whispered as Jimmy struggled, panicked, and began turning white. Phillip was tempted to twist the boy’s neck and break it, so very tempted, hearing the baby cry and the mother scream through the broken window, where the snow and cold air blew in.

It was difficult, Phillip had long admitted, to control his temper once it got away from him. To suppress the hunger to hurt someone or destroy something. To manage his temper and act in a way his father and mother would be proud of. But sometimes the red heat in his gut threatened his reason. This was one of those moments. He pulled on the boy’s chin to wrench his neck from his spine and saw a tear tumble down the young man’s cheek.

“Get out of here,” Phillip growled instead, pushing him toward the door as Jimmy held his throat with both hands. “Go, or I’ll kill you.”

“Jimmy!” someone screamed from the kitchen. “You dumb arse! What are you doing? Get the hell in here!”

Phillip pulled the knife from his boot and charged into the small kitchen. He slammed the blade into the man closest to him, bringing the point down on the man’s upper arm, leaving him howling, bleeding, and one-armed. The second man had turned by then.

“Who the fuck are you?”

“I’m the guy who’s going to cut you up,” Phillip said and yanked the knife out of the first man’s arm, making him scream and then scream louder when Phillip punched the wound.

The second man came at him, climbing onto a chair and launching himself through the air, hitting Phillip square in the chest and taking them both to the floor in a tangle of arms and legs, his knife flying out of his hand. Phillip was hitting his assailant but didn’t have room to swing and get power behind his fist. They rolled as one, knocking over other chairs and bringing the table down over their heads in a crash. Phillip got to his knees and grabbed a chair that had tumbled over. He jammed it down over the third man’s neck and arms, the rung against the man’s neck, making his eyes wild, his feet and legs kicking out, trying to reach Phillip.

Phillip sat on the chair pushing the rung tighter against the man’s neck and leaning down to see him face-to-face. “Why are you here? Who sent you? Which one of you killed Jackman?”

“Can’t breathe,” the man whispered.

“I’m going to kill you soon anyway for terrorizing a woman and her baby and for making her a widow. Do the right thing before you see Saint Peter.”

The man shook his head, his eyes wild with fear. He would lose consciousness soon, Phillip knew, and be worthless to find out about the mysterious Scotsman who had tempted Greta with news of her son. He stared into the man's face, wondering if he could get any more out of him when a hand landed on his shoulder and pulled him from the chair.

Phillip was not prepared for the fist that hit his chin and made his eyes roll back in his head or the crunch of a chair leg hitting his ribs. He dropped to his knees and covered his head with some instinct still alive in his muddled brain. A hand lifted him from the floor by the hair.

"Stay out of my way, boyo," a man growled with a Scottish accent. "You don't know who you're up against." He dropped Phillip to the floor and leaned down to whisper in his ear. "That sister of yours is a pretty one. She'd be pretty naked and begging for her life too." Then the big man kicked him in the gut.

Phillip shook his head, clearing some of the fog, tasting blood, and guessing several of his ribs were broken. What hadn't cleared was his willingness to injure himself further in defense of his sister. Nobody would talk about Sarah that way. He could see the big Scotsman standing in the next room, his back to the kitchen area where the man he'd caged with a chair lay on his side holding his throat a few feet away. The one-armed man was at the Scotsman's side holding his shoulder as blood trickled down his arm. The Scotsman turned to him with a laugh and slapped the man's shoulder, eliciting a howl from him and nervous laughter from the other two men who stood nearby.

Phillip turned on his side, closing his eyes momentarily and gathering his strength while ignoring any pain he felt. He pulled himself to his feet, let the last of the dizziness fade where he stood out of sight of the men in the other room. He heaved a breath and launched himself through the doorway and onto the back of the Scotsman. He dug his thumbs into the man's eyes and kneed him in the small of his back. Phillip

slid down as the other men in the room backed away. The Scotsman turned, growled, and lunged. Phillip stepped aside at the last minute, latching on to the back of the man's coat and helping to send him headlong into the corner of the doorway. He dropped to the ground with a thud and didn't move.

Austraw was in the doorway then, looking worse for wear himself, when Phillip glanced at the other men who were staring at him and backing up. He walked up to the man who'd killed Jackman.

"Tell your boss he'd better never threaten, bother, or even speak of anyone in my family or in my home again," he said quietly. "I'll kill him if he does."

Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 5:35 am

“ T here’s a message for you, miss,” Smith said as she finished reading her correspondence just after luncheon.

“Thank you.” Virginia dreaded one more letter that required a response and thought seriously of leaving it until the next time she would be at her desk. She and her father had spoken, both with some regrets for angry words, and she believed he realized she must be independent at her age, as she knew she must take more care in a sometimes dangerous world.

She opened the letter when she recognized the writing and jumped from her seat as soon as she scanned the short note.

“Please call for Mr. Turnbull and my carriage, Mr. Smith,” she said as hurried out of the small sitting room she used as an office. She found Colleen sorting through sheets with one of the maids.

“We’ll be going out shortly, Colleen. I think we have some spare blankets in one of the cupboards on this floor. Can you bring a few when you come downstairs? I’m going to change, and you must dress warmly too.”

They were soon on their way to an address she did not recognize in a part of town where many working-class residents made their home. A crowd was gathered toward the end of the street, and Mr. Turnbull opened the slot to speak to her.

“Won’t be getting through ahead. We’ll have to stop here.”

“That’s fine, Mr. Turnbull. We can easily walk that short distance.”

“Be careful of that crowd, miss. Crimlock will walk with you and Miss Hughes.”

The little door closed, and Virginia looked at Colleen with a smile. “We’ll never lose our minders, will we?”

“We won’t, and it looks like it is for the best.” Colleen picked up the blankets they’d brought and stepped out of the carriage with Crimlock’s help. Virginia followed and shook out her heavy wool dress and the cape that covered it.

The crowd ahead parted for her, nodding to her and stepping out of her way as she walked slowly toward the tenement where the bulk of the people had gathered. She climbed the wide stone steps to the narrow double doors that stood open to the wind and cold. She saw Phillip’s uncle leaning against the wall near the entrance, looking through the open door of an apartment.

“Mr. Brown? I received a note from your niece that my assistance may be needed.”

He straightened immediately. “Now don’t get yourself in an uproar, miss. It will only get Phillip rattled.”

“Whatever would I get in an uproar about?” Her spine tingled with some unforeseen damage or despair. “What has happened, Mr. Brown? Is he all right?”

“Nothing a few days, or maybe a week, won’t fix.”

Virginia turned her head sharply to the open door of the apartment, taking in the destruction and a child whimpering against a woman’s shoulder. The woman herself was weeping and clinging to the child. Virginia hurried through the doorway, taking in the overturned table in the room ahead and the broken window and the torn and cut cushions of the sofa, its stuffing spilling out. She took one of the blankets from Colleen and wrapped it around the woman and child. Colleen spread another over the

sofa, and Virginia urged the woman to sit down.

Virginia could hear men talking in the next room—the kitchen, from what she could tell. She heard Phillip’s voice, wheezing a bit, and his sister telling him to sit down until the doctor arrived. It was all she could do to not jump up and see what had happened to him, but this poor, desperate woman beside her needed her attention more.

“My name is Virginia Wiest. This is Colleen Hughes. Have you been hurt?”

The young woman shook her head and dug in a pocket for a handkerchief, then dabbed at her eyes with it. “The kilt him, they did,” she whispered. “My husband. My poor baby’s da.”

“I’m so very sorry, dear. So sorry. Can you tell me your name?”

“Glenda Jackman. This is Glynnis,” she said and kissed the baby’s bald head. She looked up then, panicked. “What will I do? How will I feed her? Keep a roof over her head?”

“Any relatives nearby?” Colleen asked.

“They’re all back in Glasgow. Peter convinced me that we could start a new life, a good life, here in America. And I agreed because I loved him.”

She broke down then completely, nearly losing her grip on her daughter, whom Colleen scooped up and cuddled, rocking her in her arms and cooing to her. Virginia put an arm around the young woman and let her cry herself out until she shivered once and then was quiet.

“Mrs. Jackman? Miss Hughes will sit with you and your baby for a moment while I

check on the gentlemen in the kitchen.”

Virginia stood, and Colleen took her seat on the sofa. She walked into the kitchen and covered her mouth with her hand at the violence in this humble home and at the man seated in a wobbling kitchen chair, holding a towel to an eye that was getting blacker by the minute. His lip was swollen twice its normal size, and he was holding his side with his other hand. His sister was staring down at him with worry.

“Mr. Brown.” She hurried forward. “You are injured.”

He closed the eye that was not already shut and sighed. “Virginia. What are you doing here?”

“I sent for her,” Sarah said. “As soon the message was delivered from that Dalton fellow who used to work at the cannery that you were in fight and would need help, I sent a message to Miss Wiest. I’m glad I did. You are being particularly stubborn, and I’m not even sure what has happened.”

“Trying to find out about Orville and the leather satchel, but it wasn’t Orville at all,” Phillip said.

“It wasn’t Orville?”

“No,” he said and told her and his sister what had caused him to be in the condition he was in, occasionally stopping to take a breath and touch his swollen lip. About his trip to the Durmand stable, Orville’s denial, Jackman’s escape and capture, and the knife that had killed the father of the child still crying in the next room. “He said ‘flour’ with his dying breath after he’d begged us to guard his wife and child. It must be significant.”

“How did the killer know that Mr. Jackman was being pursued?” Virginia asked. “It

sounds like it happened quickly. How did the man with a knife get to the Durmands' so fast?"

Phillip looked up at her and glanced at Austraw, sitting across from him with injuries of his own.

"That's a very good question," Austraw said. "I've a spy in the stable, I'm guessing."

"Maybe just someone who gets a penny or two to pass on information," Phillip said.

"Either way, I've got to get back to the stable and find out who it may be." Austraw stood. "Remind me never to get in the middle of one of your arguments again. I'm far too old to take a beating."

"You gave just as much a beating, or Mrs. Jackman wouldn't have her daughter in her arms."

Austraw leaned his giant fists down onto the wobbling table and whispered, "What will we do about the woman? She can't stay here. It's cold in here and dangerous if Campbell's men come back. And she'll have no income."

"I'm going to offer to send her and the child back to her family and Mr. Jackman's in Glasgow with enough to get her there in relative comfort and for transportation to her relatives," Virginia said.

Phillip looked up at her. "That is for the best if she'll do it. Where could we hide her effectively unless she moves to another city or state even, and there she'd be alone. In Glasgow, she'll have family."

"That's what I thought. For the time being, I'll take her to Shellington until arrangements can be made," she said.

“What is the meaning of the word ‘flour,’ do you think? Could he have meant something else?” Sarah asked.

“We dumped the flour from the bin as soon as they hauled themselves and the big Scotsman out the door. Nothing at the bottom. We turned it over, looking for a message or something attached to it. We didn’t find anything. The women on the street were throwing snow and old vegetables at those men when they hurried away,” Austraw said with a smile as he limped to the door.

Austraw stopped and spoke to Mrs. Jackman, and whatever was said made her cry harder than before. The rooms were finally quiet again.

“Maybe Sarah is right. What if he wasn’t saying flour? Maybe flower. What if he was saying floor?” Virginia asked. Phillip looked up, winced, and dropped his head with the sudden movement. She turned to Sarah. “Help me look.”

The two women pulled the worn rag rugs away and began examining the wood floor for any boards that look as if they were loose or had been replaced recently.

Virginia straightened, stretching her back and rolling her neck from crouching as she moved methodically from the far side of the small kitchen toward the center. She glanced at Sarah, now on her hands and knees, crawling through a checked curtain that hung below a counter where pots and dishes had sat before they’d been shattered or swept to the floor.

“Found something,” Sarah said.

Virginia hurried over and knelt down. Sarah backed out and pulled the curtain back. “Look there. In the corner beside that pan. I think that board is loose.”

“Let me see,” Phillip said from behind them.

“Absolutely not. Dr. Prosperi will be at home to tend you, and you will not jostle those cracked ribs any more than necessary,” Sarah said to her brother without even turning to look at him. “Do you see it, Miss Wiest? That loose board?”

“I do. Can you hand me a spoon or a butter knife? I don’t think it is nailed down, just sitting in place.”

She could hear Sarah rummaging around among the broken crockery. “Here.” Sarah handed her a small knife. “I’ll hold the curtain back so you will have some light.”

Virginia took the knife and scooted over enough to see the board. It indeed looked as though as it had been recently removed with some grooves on the end that matched up closely to the knife she held. She wedged the blade between the loose board and the next one and gently lifted. She pulled the board up and away but could not see what was between the floorboards below. “Is there a lamp that has not been broken that we could light? I hate to stick my hand in there without seeing what I’m doing.”

Sarah scooted away and came back with a small lit oil lamp. She crawled under the counter beside Virginia and rolled her eyes and smiled when she heard Phillip telling them to try and not burn the building down.

“We’ll do our best, Mr. Brown,” Virginia said. Sarah moved the lamp closer to where the board had been removed and revealed some cloth rolled up with a leather string holding it closed. Virginia reached down and pulled up the cloth and could tell by the feel that there were some coins inside.

“I think we should ask Mrs. Jackman to look inside. It is hers by rights anyway,” Virginia said after backing out from under the counter.

“We need to tell her a little about Greta, though, so she’ll let us see if there are any clues about Greta’s boy in there,” Phillip said.

“She’ll know her husband was part of it, then. Maybe it’s best to let her have her memories,” Sarah said.

Phillip shook his head slowly. “She needs to know. Otherwise, she may be reluctant to go back to Glasgow.”

“That is true,” Virginia said. “Let me talk to her.”

Virginia dusted off her skirts and wiped her hands on a towel she found near the small stove. She went into the room where Mrs. Jackman sat on the sofa. The baby was beside her covered with a blanket. Colleen was at the broken window with Phillip’s uncle. She was holding a board while he wedged another into the frame around the window and stuffed rags behind it. Virginia sat down with Mrs. Jackman and picked up her hand.

“Have you wondered how or why Mr. Brown and Mr. Austraw came here to help you?”

Mrs. Jackman nodded. “I wondered but am not sure,” she said and bowed her head. “Could be my Peter was doing something he shouldn’t have.”

Virginia knew some small disappointments in her life, including her father not always being completely honest with her, but she’d never felt those times were because he was doing something that might be construed as criminal. How upsetting for Mrs. Jackman to realize that she was in the situation she was in because of her husband’s misdeeds.

Virginia told the young woman an abbreviated version of Greta’s missing son and arrangement at the Durmands’.

“So Peter was taking these copies and giving them to someone, and that someone

killed him anyway?”

“I believe so,” Virginia said and squeezed her hand. “They told you he thought of nothing but you and the baby after he’d been stabbed. Other than perhaps a clue to where Greta’s child is being held. We’ve found a roll of cloth with some coins. Will you open it and see if there is anything that might lead us to this little boy?”

“Perhaps there will be enough coin for me to pay next month’s rent,” she said with a shaking voice. “But I don’t know what I’ll do after that.”

“I have an idea about that, Mrs. Jackman. But let us see what your husband has rolled up in this cloth first.”

Virginia helped her stand up and held her arm as they walked to the kitchen. Mrs. Jackman held the canvas cloth to her chest and closed her red-rimmed eyes.

“He said he was saving to get us a bigger flat,” she whispered.

She untied the string and unrolled the fabric. There were several coins and some paper money too. Probably twenty dollars all told. But no note or clue. Virginia stared at the money and sighed. She’d been hoping against all that there would be something to lead them to Greta’s child. She smiled at Mrs. Jackman.

“That will be helpful for you and Glynnis, won’t it? It looks as though he was always thinking of you,” Virginia said.

She nodded. “But not quite enough, was it? Not enough to stay out of trouble. I love him anyway.”

“It’s always the womenfolk who are left behind to carry on, isn’t it?” Sarah said wistfully.

Phillip glanced at his sister out of his one good eye. He was in pain, none of which he regretted, and did not look forward to Prosperi's heavy hand. But it hadn't occurred to him that Sarah could possibly still be pining for Alexander Halifax, who'd died in one of the last battles in the War Between the States, during the skirmish at Palmito Ranch. He and Sarah had met through a mutual friend when he was on leave and visiting Baltimore to see a relative, and it was obvious there was a romantic connection. Although she'd never said so, Phillip was certain that they had discussed marriage, even with their acquaintance only being a month long. She was feeling that old pain now, he thought.

He pulled himself upright, having to take a breath to dispel the dizziness he felt. Virginia's and his sister's eyes were on him as he made his way through the parlor where Uncle Patrick had managed to board up a broken window. The baby was fast asleep in Colleen's arms, and her eyes were closed too. Maybe she was dreaming of an old love as well.

He leaned against the wall beside his uncle. "Are Greta and Jenny home alone?"

Patrick shook his head. "I took 'em to Miriam."

"Miriam?"

"Yeah. What of it?"

"She threw you out of her house in the middle of the night last summer."

Patrick shrugged. "Jenny and Greta are safe there. Leave it at that."

There was too much emotion floating around for Phillip to be comfortable, and he intended to get himself home, one way or another. Poor Mrs. Jackman, so young, with a new babe and a dead husband who she realized had jeopardized her and their

child with his actions. Then Sarah's long face, most likely thinking about her long-dead beau, and maybe Patrick having patched things up with Miriam Dexter enough to hide Greta and Jenny. But who knew if he had fixed things with Miriam as no one but the two of them knew what their argument had been about in the first place.

Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 5:35 am

“Set it up as straight as you can,” Prosperi said to Phillip once they were delivered back to Wolfe Street via Miss Wiest’s fancy carriage. “I’ve got to listen to your lungs.”

Phillip pushed his shoulders back, the pain nearly overwhelming, before Prosperi stepped back.

“Amazingly enough, it doesn’t appear that you’ve punctured a lung. You’ve likely only cracked one or two ribs, although several more are bruised. Your eye will heal in time and will probably be bloodshot for some time, which may interfere with your sight. Your jaw is not cracked that I can tell, and only the one tooth shows a crack. Your shoulder is definitely out of its socket, and I’m going to have to get it back into place.”

Prosperi walked to the door of Phillip’s bedroom and spoke to Sarah. He closed the door and leaned back against it.

“Brown, I know we aren’t friends by any means, but as your doctor, I’m telling you you’re going to have to stop getting into fights. You’re not getting any younger, and one of these days you’re going to injure yourself past what can heal.”

Phillip looked up at the man, who had rightly said they were not friends, which made Phillip wonder why they weren’t. They were of an age; he wasn’t as educated as the doctor, but he was literate and wasn’t a common laborer, unlike most people Prosperi tended; and they’d known each other for several years and attended the same church—when Phillip went, which was not often. Was it just Prosperi’s interest in Sarah? It wouldn’t be a bad match for his sister if he was honest with himself. And

even though he suspected Prosperi of merely looking for a nursemaid rather than a wife, the doctor probably made a decent living, enough to have a good-sized house and a live-in nanny for the children as well as a housekeeper. But still, even after thinking about their similarities, he could not like the man. There was something there he didn't trust, which may just have been his concern for Sarah's happiness—or something real that he'd just not identified.

“You're right, Doc. But what was I supposed to do? They killed that man, Jackman, in front of me and had their hands on his wife and child, who would have been defenseless. I can't not do something.”

“Understood. However, you seem to be in the position to have to do something more often than average. Lay down, Brown,” Prosperi said as Uncle Patrick came in the room. “Hold him down, Mr. Brown. I'm going to set that shoulder, and he's going to howl.”

Patrick put a hand on Phillip's good shoulder and one on his chest. “Do your worst, Doctor,” Patrick said and smiled.

“You don't have to look so—” Phillip said before shouting out a word he would never say in front of a female. “Oh God. That hurt.”

Prosperi ran a practiced hand over his shoulder and declared it back in place. “Give yourself some time to let those muscles heal.”

Phillip sat up and took a deep breath as the residual pain ebbed away. “What do I owe you?”

Prosperi busied himself putting his instruments back into his leather bag and closing it with a snap. “You wouldn't owe me anything if you would stop discouraging your sister from taking my pursuit of her seriously. But since I doubt that will happen, I'll

take two bits.”

“I don’t discourage her,” Phillip said.

Patrick was nearly out the door when he stopped. “Oh yes, you do. Sarah worships the very ground you walk on, and the idea that she might disappoint you terrifies her. Do what the doctor tells you. I’m going to fetch Jenny and Greta from Miriam.”

Phillip glanced at his uncle and at Prosperi. He dug a quarter out of his pocket and handed it to the doctor. “I’ll do better with the other.”

Prosperi took the coin. “That’s all I can ask for. Don’t be a fool and wreck that shoulder any more than you already have. Good day.”

Virginia finished her meeting with Ivan Pointer, the secretary who attended her correspondence and her father’s when it was of a private nature, and in this case it was, as it concerned Mrs. Jackman. He would report back to her in a few days about what steamer Mrs. Jackman would board to take her back to the British Isles and the arrangements for her further transportation to Glasgow. A letter penned by Virginia from the woman’s words had already been dispatched to her family about the sad news of her husband’s death and her travels with her baby back home.

As Mr. Pointer left, Virginia saw Mrs. Jackman walking by carrying several items of clothing. Virginia wondered how the woman was doing with all the sudden changes in her life.

“Mrs. Jackman?” Virginia said as she stood.

“Yes, Miss Wiest?” the woman said and turned to Virginia’s office.

“How are you doing?” Virginia asked and nodded to the stack of dresses in her hands.

“Is everything fitting well?”

Mrs. French had the seamstress she often used for herself and for new employees' uniforms take Mrs. Jackman's measurements. Dolly's Dress Shop would deliver several dresses, skirts and blouses, nightclothes, shoes, and unmentionables for her as the woman's own clothing had been torn or ruined several days ago when Campbell's men invaded her home, and there hadn't been much to begin with when Mr. Turnbull and several housemen had returned with her to her apartment to retrieve a few personal items. Mrs. Jackman had been busy sewing new clothes for her daughter from fabric the seamstress had already delivered.

“I cannot begin to thank you for all you've done for me and me babe,” Mrs. Jackman said. “Everyone has been so kind to me and Glynnis. I'm so very sorry to have lost Peter but am looking forward to being home in Glasgow with family. My sister and her husband own a bake shop, and I'm sure I can work for her some while me Mum or Peter's watches the babe.”

“That sounds like an excellent plan. Did you get everything of yours from your apartment?” Virginia asked.

“Oh yes. There wasn't so much, but what there was means something to me and will mean something to Glynnis when she's older,” she said. “There was a note in our Bible that wasn't in Peter's hand, I don't think. I can't read much. Mrs. French says there's an address. I wondered if it would mean anything to that poor woman whose son was taken.”

The back of Virginia's neck tingled. “I'd be happy to take a look at it, if you don't mind.”

“I'll get it in a trice. Thank you, miss,” she said and curtsied, even though Mr. Smith had told her several times that Americans do not curtsy. Mrs. Jackman was back

quickly and handed Virginia a folded square of paper. “Glynnis is hungry, so I’ll just fetch the note later when you’re done looking at it,” she said and hurried out the door.

Virginia unfolded the paper and read it. She would have to act quickly if the information was accurate. She examined the paper, wondering if it was Mr. Jackman’s writing or someone else’s and if it was put in their family Bible to be kept safe. She had no way of determining that, nor could she allow this child to be hurt. She could not. She must do her best regardless of her father’s dire warnings and her own fears.

Virginia was soon dressed in a very plain dark skirt and shirt, both in heavy wool that she used for traveling. It was comfortable with only a light corset and very warm. She pulled on her stockings, added a pair of wool socks over top, and laced up her leather boots. It was Colleen’s day out, and Mr. Turnbull had taken the family carriage for repairs he or his staff could not do themselves. Mr. Crimlock would have to do. She asked Mr. Smith to send him to her.

She dug through the drawer in the small cabinet beside her bed until she found what might be of use, although the idea of hurting another person was horrifying. She pulled the spring-loaded knife with a beautiful pearl handle out from under a book she’d been reading and a long scarf she wrapped around her shoulders on cold nights. Her mother’s brother, Uncle Simon, had bought it for her on one of his many trips to the western states and spent an hour or more showing her how to use it on a day her father was not home. He’d told her all the ladies in the western towns carried one or a small pistol. She’d thought he was being ridiculous, but perhaps it was true.

She put the knife in her pocket and some coins in her other pocket and met Mr. Crimlock at the front door.

“I’m going out for a bit, Mr. Smith. Mr. Crimlock will be with me.” She hesitated and then did what she knew she must. “If I am late for dinner, please get this note to Mr.

Brown.”

“Yes, miss. Are you sure you don’t want to wait until Mr. Turnbull returns with the carriage?”

She shook her head and tightened her bonnet. “No. We’re not going far. I’ll be fine.”

Smith hurried to open the door. “If you’re sure, miss,” he said and pulled Crimlock aside. “Do not let Miss Wiest out of your sight.”

Crimlock nodded, undoubtedly remembering his last excursion with his mistress when he had been forced to apply to Mr. Brown for help. “I will do my best, Mr. Smith.”

“You’d best do better than that, young man. Our young lady is precious to us.”

Crimlock hurried through the door to her side. “Where is the closest trolley stop?” she asked.

“Trolley stop, miss? Whatever for?”

She set off toward the street, Crimlock falling behind her. “We’re going to take the trolley rather than walk to Orleans Street. It’s a good distance away.”

“Orleans Street? Yes, miss, it is, and we’ll have to catch the correct trolley, one going to the edge of the city.”

“We can’t give them our direction?”

“No, miss. We must catch the correct trolley. The north route, I imagine.”

“Lead on, Mr. Crimlock. We’ve not got a moment to spare.”

Crimlock guided her to a trolley stop, where many people were waiting and watching the street for the trolley arrival. “Come along, miss. We’ve got to get in line.”

She found herself among a crowd of men, women, and children waiting to board the trolley and head to their work or their home or just to visit a relative or friend. The horses came to a stop and a man jumped down from the wagon seat to collect. “Half penny. Pay your way. Move to the back and make room for others.”

Virginia found herself pushed forward and dug in her skirt for a coin, but Mr. Crimlock already had a penny in his hand. “Two,” he said and guided her up the step. There was barely room to move, and she had no idea where she would sit, if there was even a place for her to sit.

“You there,” Crimlock said to a young man. “Stand and hold a strap so this lady can be seated.”

The young man stood, reluctantly, Virginia thought, and she found herself seated beside a large, older woman holding a chicken in her arms. The trolley bumped along, the noise from the wheels and the constant chatter from the riders nearly deafening, but on some level it was exciting, even freeing. These were the people who made the city alive with work and commerce. She didn’t know what she would find when she got to Orleans Street, but she must do her best to save this child.

Because that’s what the note said. Bucciarelli is moving boy on 23rd. Must intercept. Be at Orleans at six of the night. Clearly, Campbell was looking to get Greta’s child away from Bucciarelli as more leverage for her to return to the Durmands’ and continue to give him information about that harbor property. She already knew the number of the house from Colleen’s sister’s friend and could not waste one more minute now that the note confirmed that the Orleans house did indeed hold Greta’s

son, William. It was nearly four in the afternoon now. She did not have much time.

The trolley ride was bitterly cold, and she was glad she'd had the foresight to wear thick undergarments and heavy socks. After changing trolleys, they arrived on the corner of Orleans and Caroline. She'd never been on this particular street, but she'd been in the area before as the hospital she often donated to was located nearby.

"We're looking for house number 1349," she said and tried to make out the number near the door of the home closest to them. The neighborhood seemed to be well-off middle class, with side yards and landscaping and curtained windows on two- and three-story buildings.

"This one is number 78," Crimlock said and glanced at her. "We've got thirteen blocks or more to walk, miss. Are you sure you don't want to go back to Shellington?"

"No. There's a child in danger of being lost to his mother forever."

"Maybe we should have sent word to Mr. Brown. He knows how to take care of these sorts of things."

"He was badly beaten just a day or two ago. He is in no condition to leave his home. We're going to get this child and hurry home before Mr. Campbell is aware."

Crimlock took off his hat and scratched his head. "I don't think we could hurry anywhere. We've not got a carriage. And we'll be quite a distance from a trolley stop."

"Mr. Crimlock, I understand your reluctance. There is some danger involved, I will admit, but if we are there before this man comes to take the child, we should be away before anything untoward could happen. But this is not what you agreed to when you

came to work at Shellington. You are free to return home.”

“Well, miss,” Crimlock said, red-faced, “if you think for one minute that I’d leave you here, why, I don’t know what to say. I’m here to watch over you and help you, and you telling me to go home won’t stop me from doing exactly what Mr. Smith told me to do.”

Virginia smiled. “Thank you, Mr. Crimlock. I didn’t relish the idea of wandering on my own. Come. We need to hurry now.”

Virginia’s toes were numb after just a few blocks, and she had to ask Mr. Crimlock to slow down several times as her breathing was erratic in the cold air. But each time she forced herself to think of little William, living with a stranger, and she pressed on. The neighborhood was less prosperous as they traveled the eleven hundred block, with some homes needing obvious repairs. They passed an abandoned church and a few people scurrying by in less-than-adequate warm clothing. Virginia’s fingers had joined her toes, making her wish she’d brought her fur muff with her, and Mr. Crimlock walked closer to her than previously, nearly touching her with every stride.

“We’re nearly there,” he whispered and looked around. “I feel as though there are eyes on us from everywhere.”

“I’m sure there aren’t. It is not even five of the clock. I think this is 1349 up ahead.”

Virginia hurried as much as she was able, anxious to learn if William was still here or if her plan had been in vain. Would the little boy believe that she would return him to her mother? Would this Campbell person have sent someone ahead who was, as Mr. Crimlock suspected, watching them this very second?

“We’re going to walk past the house and cross the street at the next corner, miss,” Crimlock said. “Take a look across the street now from around my shoulder.”

Virginia slipped her hand through Crimlock's arm and peered past him. The home they sought was in the middle of a group of five attached homes. There did not seem to be anything different about number 1349 than the others, and she did not see anyone suspicious or loitering nearby. They reached the corner and crossed to the odd-numbered side of the street. Virginia's stomach was rolling, and she worried her hands shook from fear more than the cold. She turned up the muddy walkway to the house and knocked on the door, Mr. Crimlock behind her, surveying the street.

A gray-haired, unkempt woman opened the door.

"I don't want any," she said and began to close the door. Virginia slipped inside.

"But you have something I want. Where is the little boy?"

The woman shrugged. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I can hear a child crying. Is that William Adamsen?"

"What if it is? Ain't none of your business."

"Bring him here," Virginia said in a stern voice, feeling the anger and frustration she'd felt for weeks about this poor child creep up her spine.

"How much you going to give me?"

Virginia slapped the woman across the cheek with every bit of strength she had left. The woman tumbled to the chair behind her and glared up at Virginia.

"Now. Get him now."

"He's in there," the woman said and pointed to a door.

“Open it,” Virginia said after trying the knob. “It’s locked.”

The woman pulled a ring of keys from her skirts with one hand while holding her reddened cheek with the other. She pushed the door open and turned away.

“You first,” Virginia said. She had no intention of being locked in the foul-smelling, dark room.

The woman walked ahead and plopped down on an old chair, kicking aside garbage as she went. Virginia knelt down beside a small boy who’d wedged himself against the wall, tears streaming down his face, holding a grimy blanket. He smelled of a dirty diaper. She looked back at the woman.

“You are a disgrace. To allow a child to wallow in his own filth. What is the matter with you?”

Virginia turned back to the boy. “William?”

He looked up at her, terror in his eyes.

“William. I know your momma. Her name is Greta. Did you know that?”

He nodded and chewed on the small bit of silk that still covered one corner of the blanket.

“I’d like to take you to her. Will you come with me?”

William stared straight ahead. The child was terrified and dirty and most likely hungry, and Virginia had no idea how to get him to trust her. She turned to the woman.

“Where are his coat and shoes?”

“Sold ’em.”

“Stand up. We’re going to your sleeping room. Hurry now. I haven’t much time.”

The woman hurried ahead, and Virginia followed her up a dark stairway and into one of the two rooms in the hall.

“I want two pairs of your warmest socks and the heaviest sweater you own.”

“Why would I give you my things? You’re nothing to me.”

“Because I will bring the magistrate down on your head for kidnapping and you will go to jail,” Virginia said and watched the woman’s face whiten. “Now hand me the socks and sweater.”

Virginia hurried back down the narrow stairwell and waited until the woman went into the room ahead of her. “Here, William. Let me put this warm sweater on you and some socks for your toes.” The child let her dress him, and she hummed the lullaby his mother had mentioned, “Over in the Meadow in the Stream So Blue .” His head came up, and he stared at her as she sang. “Your mother told me you love that song.”

He inched closer to Virginia, and she put her hands out to him. She heard the front door open, and Mr. Crimlock call to her.

“Miss? Miss? I think we should hurry.”

Virginia picked up William, and he laid his head on her shoulder. She grabbed his tattered blanket and wrapped it around him as she turned to the woman sitting on a rickety chair, her head in her hands.

“I would get out of here,” Virginia said. “They are coming for him soon.”

She hurried out, following Mr. Crimlock into the bitter-cold air. He took the child from her and bundled him to his chest. They headed back to the trolley stop, and she prayed they would not have to wait long for it to come. “You must promise me, Mr. Crimlock, that you will get this child to his mother. Whatever happens. You must promise.”

“I promise, miss.”

The blocks seemed to go faster, both of them walking quickly. Virginia fought to keep her breath even and wrapped her scarf around her nose.

“Only two more blocks, miss.”

She nodded, unable to waste any breath on words when she needed each one of them to remain alive. She was panting by the time they saw the trolley.

“Hurry, miss,” Crimlock said. “Can you run, miss? The trolley is filling up!”

Virginia forced her legs to move faster, but Crimlock was farther ahead with each step. She waved an arm forward when he looked back at her, now twenty feet or more ahead of her. “Go,” she said with her last bit of breath. She continued, walking slowly now, her hands on her hips, and saw him climb up the trolley steps, still holding the child. She caught up to the few left waiting to pay and board when a hand wrapped around her arm, yanking her backward. She could see Mr. Crimlock looking through the open window of the trolley, his mouth hanging open and fear in his eyes.

Virginia shook her head at him as the trolley rolled away. She looked at the man holding her arm and struggled to breathe.

“ M r. Brown! Mr. Brown!”

Phillip sat up from the couch he was dozing on to the pounding on the door just as he was thinking about climbing the steps to bed. Sarah dropped her sewing and hurried into the hallway, Uncle Patrick behind her. He lifted the bar on the door and opened it as the man on the other side identified himself as a Wiest employee, Crimlock from the stable.

“I’ve got to speak to Mr. Brown, Mr. Phillip Brown, please, immediately,” he wheezed and leaned back against the door, holding a bundle in his arms.

Then the bundle whimpered. “Mr. Crimlock? What is that? What are you holding?”

“Is Miss Adamsen here?”

“Yes. She’s in bed,” Sarah said, perplexed. “I think you should sit down before you fall over.”

Crimlock dropped down onto the small chair in the hallway and closed his eyes.

“This is her son. William. I’m afraid . . .”

“William!” they heard from the top of the steps. “William!”

The bundle began to move, and Crimlock pulled the worn and torn blanket from the child’s face. Greta nearly flew down the steps and dropped to the floor in front of Crimlock. “My baby,” she said and pulled him into her arms. The child began to cry, as did Greta.

“Dear Lord,” Uncle Patrick said.

“How can I ever thank you?” Greta said to Crimlock.

“‘Tweren’t my doing. I was just along to help.” He looked up at Phillip standing in the doorway to the sitting room. “Miss Wiest is the one to do it all, and they’ve taken her!”

“Taken her? What are you talking about? How was she involved?”

“Come to the kitchen,” Sarah said and helped the man to stand. “You need something to drink, and then you need to tell us the whole story.”

Crimlock let himself be led away, Patrick holding one arm and Sarah the other. Phillip helped Greta to her feet. “They’ll help you and the baby in the kitchen, Greta. I’ve got to get dressed.”

“But you’re barely well. You know you’ll be facing dangerous and violent men,” she said. “At least get your police friend to help you.”

“I’ll get plenty of help, but I need to know where she went first. Go on now,” he said and nodded in the direction of the kitchen as he hurried up the stairs, feeling furious, terrified, and inadequate for the task. He pulled on his clothes, ignoring the twinges and pain that movement of any kind brought. He couldn’t think about it. But he could think about how brave and foolish Virginia Wiest was. He needed to remain calm and clear-headed, knowing that undoubtedly Campbell or Bucciarelli, whoever had grabbed her, would want to get ransom money from Wiest, who would just as undoubtedly pay it and more. He did not intend to let things get that far.

Phillip pulled his coat from the rack near the door, stuffed the pockets with knives and bullets, and went down the stone steps into the kitchen. He could hear Greta

talking soothingly to her son as he howled in the bathing room, likely getting a long overdue scrubbing from the looks of him. Crimlock was at the table, where Eliza rolled bread and cut vegetables for soup. He was eating roast beef leftover from supper between two pieces of homemade bread, closing his eyes with every bite.

“You’ve got to tell me exactly what happened. I’m going to see Mr. Wiest first, so I need to know the details,” Phillip said.

Crimlock laid his sandwich down and told the entire story, the trolley ride, his unsuccessful battle to get Miss Wiest to return home, the long walk to the house, the horrible woman, and the long walk back to the trolley.

“She was so exhausted from walking and the bitter air and fell behind me. She kept waving me forward. I would have carried her myself, but I had the child in my arms, and once I was on the trolley, I watched her through the window as the trolley was packed full and I could barely move. She was last in line to pay, and then a man, a large one, took her by the arm and dragged her away. There were several other men there too, surrounding the large one and Miss Wiest. The trolley had started and,” Crimlock closed his eyes and swallowed, “I didn’t know whether to abandon the child and try and rescue her, but I think she would have been furious if I’d done that. You should have seen her at the woman’s house. She was like an avenging angel! She slapped that horrible filthy woman, she did, and shouted at her that she would bring the police down on her head if she didn’t get warm clothes for the boy.”

Phillip’s teeth were gritted and every muscle clenched. He knew she was deeply concerned about reuniting Greta with her child, but he did not understand the level of her commitment, her courage, her willingness to sacrifice herself for that small boy. He was as angry with her as he was in awe of her.

“She did tell Mr. Smith to send word to you if she was not home by supper. I ran into Billings, who was to deliver that message, a few streets over just making his way

here. He was so drunk he could barely stand!”

“Tell me about the large man,” Phillip said. “Anything you can remember?”

“Tall, a good-looking fellow, probably never has trouble with the ladies,” Crimlock said. “Dark-haired. Neck as thick as a tree trunk.”

“That’s Campbell,” Greta said from the doorway, where she held a clean and sleeping child. “That’s him.”

“Can you see that Sweitzinger gets the message that I might need his help, Uncle?”

“I’d rather come with you.”

Phillip looked around the room. “It’s possible Bucciarelli or Campbell will come here. I have to know that everyone is safe. You have to stay here with the women.”

Patrick nodded. “But you can’t go this alone.”

“Willis will go, and so will Turnbull, the coachman for the Wiests. No matter how many men I took head-on against Campbell, we’d lose. He’s undoubtedly entrenched and would be able to defend his property. This will have to be done by stealth. Muscle and stealth.”

“You don’t even know where his property is,” Patrick said.

“No. I don’t. But I know who does.”

Virginia struggled to breathe as they walked toward a closed carriage. Her knees started to buckle, and the tall man who’d grabbed her pulled her upright. She thought at one point she would faint from the cold and her fright and sheer exhaustion, but

she kept focusing on little William, now on his way to his mother. It had all been worth it.

“Get in,” the man said.

She did what she could to lift her foot up to the step but could not reach, her strength all but gone. Someone lifted her into the carriage and sat her on a seat. She leaned her head back and closed her eyes. She wanted so desperately to fall asleep, let the gentle arms of slumber take her where she was warm and comfortable, and maybe looking into the eyes of Phillip Brown. But she could not. She let her head slump to the side as the men climbed in, the large man sitting beside her.

The men began to discuss where they were planning on hiding her and how much ransom her father would be willing to pay. She let her head loll forward, her bonnet covering her face somewhat, and cracked open one eye to see out the glass window that they had not bothered to cover. These men must be very confident in their invincibility to travel openly, no shades drawn, with a kidnap victim.

Virginia had an idea where she was as she recognized the shopping area in the center of Baltimore, where the new “department” store, Gutman’s, had recently opened. The carriage continued on through well-to-do areas of specialty shops, gentlemen’s clubs, and literary associations. They turned down an alley behind a wide avenue and came to a stop. Virginia sat up straight as if she’d just woken and looked around the carriage. Her fingers and toes were beginning to warm finally, but she was still ever so tired. She did not ask any questions or pose any resistance as she climbed down from the carriage with the help of one of the men. She walked between the large man—Campbell, she assumed—and another man, up a graveled walkway from a fine and large stable to the back entrance of a brick building.

Virginia could hear women’s chatter and laughter as the door was opened. Campbell turned her up a narrow set of steps that wound up and up until she was out of breath

and turned herself to sit down. The man behind her told her to get up, but she did not think she could. She was just unable to conjure once more ounce of energy. Campbell clattered down the steps from above her and squeezed by her. He turned and picked her up in his arms and carried her another flight of steps, finally down a hallway to an open doorway, where a woman stood waiting for them.

“She won’t be any good to you dead,” the woman said.

Virginia turned her head to look at the woman, taking in an elaborate silk evening gown, low-cut in the bosom, and form-fitting otherwise. She was very beautiful with dark red hair, large brown knowing eyes and a pouting mouth. Virginia thought she might be any man’s dream, and the thought occurred to her that she knew exactly where she was, a place she’d only heard of when a servant was gossiping about what they’d heard from a neighboring servant. She was at the Ellipse. The most infamous and exclusive gentlemen’s club in the city of Baltimore that she was not supposed to know about.

Phillip was ushered into Alistair Wiest’s office at Shellington without saying a word to Smith. Wiest looked up and hurried toward him.

“What do you know? Brown! You must tell me! Where is Virginia?”

“Miss Wiest has most likely been kidnapped by Edward Campbell. Have you received a ransom note yet?”

The blood drained from the older man’s face, and he suddenly looked less like the confident, affable, and highly successful businessman he was and more like a man in a panic. A father with a missing daughter.

“Kidnapped?” he whispered. “No, I’ve not received anything.”

Phillip nodded. "I believe so, sir. This is what I know," he said and proceeded to tell his employer all. "I'm going to find out where she is being held and return her to Shellington."

"But how? How will you rescue her?" He turned away and covered his face with his hands. "I can't lose my little girl."

"I'm going to find out where she's being held and get her out. They won't have injured her, sir. She's valuable to them because they know you'll pay a ransom."

"I will pay a ransom, if it costs me my last penny."

"Go to the bank and withdraw a large amount of money in cash. As much as the bank will give you. Hire some men to guard you and the house once you are home. I need Campbell to believe you will pay."

"I will pay!"

"That is our last resort."

"What do you mean, our last resort?"

"Exchanges are dangerous. Once the money is in their hands, there is no reason for these types of criminals to keep the hostages alive."

"Should I contact the police?"

"The more people who know about this, the higher the likelihood that one of them is in Campbell's or Bucciarelli's debt or even on their payroll. I have an old friend I'd trust with my life—I have trusted him with my life—who I will contact if we need an official. But I'd advise we keep this as quiet as possible until then."

Wiest put his hands on Phillip's shoulders, and he could see tears in the older man's eyes. "Can you do this? Can you get her back?"

"I believe I can, sir. Or die in the effort."

"You would, wouldn't you?" Wiest said quietly.

Phillip stared straight into his eyes. "Yes. Without hesitation."

"What do you need?"

"Turnbull, if he is willing, and the use of horses. A carriage, perhaps."

"Whatever you need, Brown. Whatever you need," Wiest said and dropped down on the chair behind his desk. "I can't lose her."

Phillip did not think the time was right for him to declare that Virginia Wiest was more to him than just an innocent young woman in danger or his employer's daughter. She meant something else to him, and he was unsure if he could put words to it, but he did know he would do whatever was necessary to recover her and keep her safe. Maybe forever.

Less than an hour later, Phillip was on a horse from the Wiest stable and navigating through city streets, carts, wagons, carriages, and past other horses and pedestrians. He wasn't confident at riding, but he could sense he was doing better after heeding Turnbull's advice to be in charge of the horse instead of merely bouncing along. Mr. Wiest had also provided him the address for Geoffrey Morehead. Phillip slid down from King's massive back and tied the reins to a ring on a post in front of the tall building. He found the number he was looking for and rapped on the door. Several minutes later, it was opened by a yawning man.

“May I help you?” he said.

“I need to speak to Mr. Morehead. Is he in?”

The servant shook his head. “No. He is out,” he said and began to close the door. Phillip wedged a boot inside to keep it open.

“I need to know where he is.”

The man looked him up and down. “As if I’d tell any riffraff where my employer was. I won’t.”

“I’m not a debt collector,” Phillip said. “But this is a matter of life and death for a young woman Mr. Morehead is acquainted with. If you don’t know where he is specifically, tell me his usual haunts.”

The man scratched his head and looked up at Phillip. “Not here for money?”

“No. Where would I find him this time of day?”

“There’s a coffee shop around the corner. He spends many afternoons there.”

“It’s eight in the evening. Where would he be now?”

“Most likely the Garden Club. There’s cards and wine and a decent dinner.”

“Keep this door locked and don’t answer it unless it is your employer.” Phillip put a coin in the man’s hand as his eyes widened with the warning.

Phillip walked King the short distance the servant had directed him to and glanced up at the windows lit with candles. He climbed the steps, opened the door, and entered a

foyer. A thin man was speaking to a young woman in a servant's dress. The thin man looked at him, checking his wardrobe as he did.

"Deliveries to the back, please."

"I'm not delivering anything. I need to speak to Geoffrey Morehead. Is he here?"

"Our guests prefer discretion. Leave," he said, "before I have you removed."

Phillip stepped forward. His hand snaked out, and he lifted the thin man by his neck. "Is Morehead here?"

Within seconds, there was a large man at his side, strong enough to crush Phillip's grip on the thin man's neck. The large man wrapped his arm around Phillip's neck, pulling him toward the door. Phillip slammed an elbow into the man's stomach, eliciting a grunt but no lessening of his grip. He stomped down his boot heel on the large man's foot, which did give him a moment to pull free, swing his fist, and hear the satisfying crunch of bone. The man was seasoned, though, and rammed Phillip into the wall near a partially opened door where he could hear excited chatter and chairs scraping against the wood floor.

"Stop! Stop!" the thin man called out as patrons jostled for position in the doorway to view the fighting.

The large man backed away from Phillip, eyeing him warily. "Morehead. I need to speak to him."

Phillip could hear Geoffrey Morehead's voice telling others to stand aside as he shouldered his way through to the foyer behind the thin man.

"Brown?"

“Morehead, I need to speak to you,” he said. “Privately and immediately.”

Morehead stared at him and then gestured to a hallway.

Brown followed him to a room where a servant was setting tables for the next meal. Morehead jerked his head to the door, and the man scurried out.

“What? What is going on?”

Phillip gave him a summary of what he knew. “From the description, it sounds as if Campbell has taken her.”

“Virginia traveled by streetcar with one servant to Orleans Street? In this weather? Rescued a child she’s never even seen before and got kidnapped?”

“That’s the gist of it,” Phillip replied. “I need to know where Campbell’s bolt-hole is.”

Morehead held his hand to his forehead. “I wouldn’t even know who to ask. He’s only been in America for a few months.”

“You’ve got to know something, Morehead,” Phillip pleaded. “Anything. I need a place to start.”

“I did hear he was keeping company with Mrs. Van Dyke.”

“A widow?”

“Hardly, since no one knows of, or ever heard of, a Mr. Van Dyke,” Morehead said and glanced at him. “You really don’t know who Mrs. Van Dyke is?”

“I work at a cannery and pour beer a few nights. I don’t know any of these highfalutin socialites. I’ve been to one ball. The Waters’. Was this woman there?”

“Hardly. Mrs. Van Dyke owns the Ellipse.”

“The Ellipse? The bawdy house?”

Morehead nodded. “Supposedly, she entertains Campbell in her private suite. The man who told me that was drunk, but I heard it again elsewhere. She has never been known to entertain any man herself—her girls do that, for which she makes an extraordinary amount of wealth and most likely knows the secrets of the city and the state’s highest officials. The only man near her that I’ve ever seen is her bodyguard. A massive bald-headed ex-boxer missing one eye. Name of Cordle.”

“Where have you seen her?”

“At the Ellipse, of course, when my fortune was still intact.”

“Where is this place?” Phillip asked.

“Exeter Street. Close to the museum.”

“Isn’t that the area with all the fancy shops and restaurants?”

Morehead nodded. “You’d never know to look at it. The building is beautiful and well cared for. People think it’s just a gentleman’s club, and Mrs. Van Dyke is careful to maintain that facade.”

“How will I know her when I get inside?”

“ If you get inside, you mean. She is the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen.

Auburn hair and a figure to set a man on fire.”

“I’ll get inside. Don’t know how yet.”

“Wait for dawn or just before. The women are in their beds alone by then, and the place is shut up tight.”

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Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 5:35 am

Virginia sat on the edge of the bed, her eyes barely open. She heard a key turn in the lock, the door opened, and a very young girl, no more than thirteen or fourteen years old, walked into the room carrying a tray. A large man behind her handed her a porcelain pitcher and closed the door. Virginia imagined he stood in the hallway.

“Hello,” she said to the girl.

“Miss,” she replied and dipped her chin, not meeting Virginia’s eyes.

She carried the tray to a small table with a chair and pulled away the checked cloth covering it. Virginia breathed in the divine smell as steam rose from a bowl. There was a slice of crusty bread, buttered, and a glass of what looked like wine beside what she could now see was stew.

“Oh my! That smells delicious!” she said.

The girl nodded. “It is, miss. There’s a piece of Mrs. Williams’s pecan pie wrapped up beside it.” She looked up at Virginia, startled, and covered her mouth. “Oh. I wasn’t supposed to speak to you,” she whispered.

Virginia lowered her voice. “It will be our secret.”

“There’s warm water and towels, if you want to clean up first. Something to sleep in too.”

“Thank you. Thank you so much,” Virginia said, realizing how exhausted, how hungry, she was and how much she wished she could sleep for a full day straight

through. To be clean would be a luxury.

“Welcome,” the girl whispered. “There’s a pot in the closet there.”

“Thank you. I hope I see you tomorrow.”

“I don’t know, miss,” she said and turned quickly to the door. “Petey?”

Virginia unlaced her shoes and pulled off her sopping socks. She hung them near the small stove warming the room and sat her shoes below them. She could not wait a moment longer to eat and concentrated on chewing slowly and savoring every bite. Washing up and sleep would be next. She would worry that she may be harmed, or even killed, tomorrow. And she would pray that Crimlock had gotten little William home and to his mother safely.

Phillip stood in the gap between two buildings on Exeter Street across from the Ellipse. He’d sent a message to Willis Shoeman after leaving the Garden. Willis was now laying against a building after having doused himself with ale, his hat pulled low over his eyes. Turnbull had a plain carriage around the corner with a young boy holding the reins while he walked the alley behind the Ellipse, occasionally talking to a random stable master, acting as if his man was in the building, being served by one of the young women.

Phillip watched groups of men climb the steps, where a door was opened by a tall man in a formal suit. Light, soft music and laughter could be heard pouring out of those doors when there were no wagons or carriages going by as midnight passed. Fewer and fewer pedestrians and riders out and about as most buildings housed shops or services that closed in the evening. But the night did not stop the steady flow of men to the door of the Ellipse.

Phillip leaned against the cold bricks at his back and closed his eyes. It would be a

long night waiting for daybreak, but he was not willing to risk Campbell moving her in the middle of the night while he slumbered at home. He thought of her, Virginia, as she'd looked the night he carried her out of the ball and into her bedchamber. The trust in her eyes had nearly undone him. I'm sure everything will be fine. You're here.

But more even than that, their nearly platonic kiss haunted his dreams. He'd met many women, some more interesting, some more attractive than others. He'd climbed into a few of the widows' beds over the years, and some couplings had been more satisfying or more passionate than others. But he'd rarely, if ever, thought about that woman the next day or the day after, nor did he think any of them thought about him. Those nights were a mutually satisfying physical arrangement and nothing more.

That was why he was confounded with how often he thought about Virginia Wiest. Before he closed his eyes at night and usually the first thing in the morning, he wondered what she was doing. Who she would talk to. Where she might go and if she was strong enough to do so. She was not the most gorgeous woman who'd ever lived, but to him she was the most beautiful woman he'd ever set eyes on. He was concerned he'd let these new and untested emotions lead him to make a mistake during what would be a dangerous rescue. He must meet this moment clear-eyed, practically, and bravely.

Turnbull walked by his hidey-hole and hissed near four in the morning, "All dark."

Phillip waited a moment and stepped out from between the buildings and turned away from Turnbull. He walked two complete blocks before turning and finding the alleyway that would lead back to the Ellipse. He stood in the dark under a stable overhang, watching the building, waiting to see and feel the quiet of an edifice asleep. He saw Turnbull walking down the alley from the other direction, skirting in and out of deep shadows, until he was on the other side of the Ellipse property.

Phillip walked slowly toward the back of the building while Turnbull cooed to the horses in the stable. He imagined she was hidden on the top floor among the servants. Phillip touched the handle on the servants' door. It was unlocked, which meant a guard was most likely posted inside. He heard a short whistle and looked over his shoulder into the dark yard. Two small figures, heads bent, were walking toward the back door. Females, he guessed. Phillip moved behind a small pine tree near the door and crouched down.

“Let us in, Gordy! It's freezing!”

The door opened, and the two women hurried through. He could hear them fussing at the guard.

“Light us down to the kitchen. Those cheapskates didn't even give us a glass of wine or a scrap of bread!” Phillip heard as the door closed softly. He did not hear the lock turn and carefully cracked the door as the voices faded down a stairwell on the left. A narrow staircase on the right went up. He hurried up the steps, two at a time, until he could go no more. He nearly burst into the hallway when he saw a dozing guard in front of a door at the end of the hall. He would undoubtedly lose the advantage of surprise if he bolted down the hall at top speed.

Phillip tousled his hair and opened his shirt to his breastbone. He hugged the wall, walking carefully until the man began to stir. He walked quickly up to him and bent over. “Hey, mate! Lost my way when I left Tilly. How do I get out of here?” he whispered.

The man jumped from his seat. “Ain't no Tilly here!”

“What is that? A spider? On your back,” Phillip said and peered around the man.

The guard danced around, started slapping his neck and pulling at his collar. As he

did, Phillip slipped an arm around his neck and held while the man kicked out and tried to turn himself and attack. But Phillip had the advantage of a few inches in height and was able to keep the guard's feet from the floor and walls. He could feel him weaken as he struggled to breathe against Phillip's tight hold. He was slack at last, and Phillip reached down with his free hand to the ring of keys hanging on the man's belt.

He dragged the man toward the door he'd been guarding and laid him on the floor. He tried several keys until the door creaked open and he was able to drag the guard through.

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Miss Wiest," he said in response to her panicked whisper.

"Mr. Brown?"

The moon cast an ethereal glow across her face as she sat up in the bed in the corner of the room. She was wearing a shining silky gown he could see when the blanket fell away, and she quickly pulled it up to cover herself.

"What can I tie this man up with?" he asked.

She jumped out of bed and pulled the sheet off. "Do you have a knife?"

He could barely function as the moonlight shone through the length of her gown, revealing a slim, feminine, and naked figure. Her words finally registered as she continued to stare at him, and he pulled a knife from his boot. She took it and used it to start a tear in the fabric. Soon she had several long strips just as the guard began to groan. Phillip punched the man in the chin, quieting him for a second time, and then tied his hands and feet.

“Don’t gag him, please. That would be terrifying if you couldn’t get your breath,” she said.

“Then we best get out of here fast before he wakes and starts screaming.” Phillip glanced out the window and saw the glimmer of sunrise through the trees. A diversion was in order, and he hoped Willis remembered his job.

He heard a door slam on a lower floor and some chatter that finally erupted in the word “fire.” “Here we go,” he said as the shouting built. “Pull your cloak around your shoulders and over your hair. Hurry.”

“Where is my dress?”

“No. No dress. You must blend in with the other . . . women. Cover your hair.”

“We can’t leave this man bound. He will burn to death.”

“No, he won’t. There’s no fire in the building. Now hurry.”

She glanced at him blankly for a second or two and then shoved her feet into low boots by the stove. Phillip opened the door, pulled her under his arm, and ran down the hallway. He shouted, “Fire!” as they came to the stairs. They hurried down and joined the throng of people flooding out of the lower floors, mostly women in varying degrees of dress. They were halfway down the last flight of steps when he noticed a woman at the bottom near the door with long auburn hair curling around her shoulders and a satin gown barely covering her bosom, a brocade floor-length robe over top. She was directing staff and others to hurry outside when she glanced at Virginia and then at him. Phillip braced himself for her shouts as this had to be Mrs. Van Dyke. She eyed him, even speaking to others without turning her gaze from him. He had guided Virginia through the open door and down the stone steps to the now muddy yard when he heard her call out.

“You there! That girl doesn’t belong to you! Stop him!”

Phillip hurried Virginia past the stable and finally picked her up in his arms near the alleyway, looking right and left for Turnbull and the Wiest carriage. He heard it coming around the corner before he saw it, Turnbull in the coachman’s seat, frantically hawing the horses and nearly bringing the carriage up onto two wheels. Willis was clinging to the side of it, ready to open the door. Phillip shoved Virginia at Willis, who’d jumped off the carriage as it slowed. The crowd in the yard behind him quieted suddenly when he heard a Scotsman’s oath and the hard clap of a palm on flesh.

He glanced over his shoulder and saw Mrs. Van Dyke in a heap on the ground and her massive, bald, one-eyed bodyguard, Cordle, lunging toward Campbell with a primitive growl. Every woman and man in the Ellipse’s yard watched the confrontation while one of the women knelt on the ground beside Van Dyke. A gun’s report shocked Phillip and the others gathered, temporarily freezing them all in place. Cordle slithered to the ground, a black hole in the center of his massive forehead. Phillip shoved Willis to the carriage and looked at Turnbull. “Go. Go now!” he said and turned to the Ellipse as the carriage began to move.

Everyone scattered, the women crying, the men panicked and running from Campbell and his men. Mrs. Van Dyke sat up, holding herself up on her hands and knees in the mud and snow, screaming and crying. Phillip could see blood on her chin, running down from her lips. Campbell turned to her, his eyes boring into her while she screamed and called him a son of a whore. Campbell slowly brought his arm up, smiling at her panic, and pointed his gun at her face. She stared at him, clearly unwilling to be cowed as his finger found the trigger.

“Hey, Campbell!” Phillip shouted. “Too much of a coward to pick on anyone but a woman?”

Campbell's arm lowered, and he turned toward Phillip.

"You! Goddamn Irish trash!" he shouted as he stalked toward him.

Phillip eyed the carriage, just now making the corner onto the main thoroughfare.

Virginia was bouncing around wildly in her seat as Mr. Turnbull picked up speed in the alleyway. She looked out the carriage window as they began to turn the corner and saw Campbell stalking Phillip Brown, who was standing alone in the mud and the slush. She could hear shouting and crying even over the sound of the carriage rocking forward to Mr. Turnbull's commands to his team and the crack of his whip.

"Stop! Stop the carriage!" she shouted through the small door behind Mr. Turnbull's seat.

A man leaned down from his seat beside Turnbull. "Mr. Brown would have our hides. We're to get you safe first!"

"We cannot leave him!"

Virginia sat back on the seat, pulling her cloak around her, even though, strangely enough, she was not cold considering she wore only a satin gown with thin ribbons for sleeves, her cloak, and her half boots. She opened the leather pocket on the side of the carriage where she found a knife more appropriate for cutting string on a package than doing any damage when she remembered she'd put the blade her Uncle Simon had given her in her pocket before she went for the Adamsen child. Was it still there? Less than half a day ago? How is that possible? Virginia felt as if it were a lifetime ago.

She dug down in her cloak pocket and found the knife. She had no intention of leaving Phillip Brown to his fate. She could hear Turnbull shouting as he hawed the

horses to a near stop for a dray hauling lumber and stone. Virginia took a breath and made the only decision she could make and live with herself. She opened the carriage door and jumped down onto the street. She could hear Turnbull shouting at her as she went as fast as she could back to the alley of the Ellipse. She leaned up against a stable wall with some other women, trying to catch her breath, watching as four men ruthlessly beat Phillip Brown, even holding him up to hit him again.

Campbell was laughing as his men beat Phillip's face until blood flew from his mouth in a stream. Campbell removed his heavy coat then and handed it to a woman kneeling in the mud.

"Don't kill him yet." Campbell smiled as he shouted at his men. "I get that honor."

Virginia could not watch any longer. She could not. She must do her part, however futile. She walked up to Campbell, his back to her.

"Why are you such a coward? Why do you pick on women and children?"

He turned, put his hands on his hips, and roared with laughter. "Just who I was looking for."

"Why are you looking for me? Greta and her son are long gone, and she was your only chance to find out about the harbor purchase. You're done. You've lost," Virginia said to gasps from the crowd.

Campbell's smile fell. "You're destined for a brothel near the harbor. You won't be wearing satin there, girlie. And you'll learn to keep your sassy mouth shut unless you're servicing a navy man on your knees."

Virginia heard Phillip howl and saw him strain against the men holding him. Campbell stepped close to her, and she did not back away, although every instinct

told her that she should be terrified, frozen in place, and unable to draw breath. His hand snaked out in that instant, bringing her roughly against his left side, his arm around her neck. She did not kick or scream or panic, although every nerve in her being shouted that she should. She felt his focus change then, and she turned her eyes as much as she could to see him bring his right arm up, wielding his gun and aiming it at Phillip as his men inched away.

She pressed the small spring-loaded button, and the blade popped free of its handle where she gripped it in her pocket. She pulled it out slowly as she began to feel the effects of his thick arm at her throat. As he laughed at Phillip's efforts to remain standing, she brought the knife around with all the force she could muster, landing it in the soft flesh of Campbell's side. His howl of pain broke the air.

She pulled it out and stabbed him again. Campbell picked her up by the hair; she could feel her feet dangling, and she clutched at this arm.

Virginia saw the fist coming at her face, but in a flash she was on her back on the ground. She sat up, her hands sinking in the mud as she straightened, icy water seeping into her boots and her cloak. Then her eyes were on Phillip Brown pummeling Campbell and focusing his fists on the side where she'd stabbed the man. Campbell's men were closing in on the two men and on her when she saw Mr. Turnbull and the other man from the carriage, a small, dark-skinned man, both running toward them. The men each tackled one of Campbell's men and a few men from those still muddling around the Ellipse yard joined in. The beautiful woman from the Ellipse was kneeling over the dead bald-headed man, crying and touching his face reverently.

Campbell fell to the ground, his hands covering his head. Phillip stood over him, swaying on his feet, his hands and face bloody. She got to her feet, taking a moment to breathe slowly.

“Mr. Turnbull? Where is the coach. Let us go before we hear a police bell clanging.”

Source Creation Date: August 11, 2025, 5:35 am

Phillip looked at Virginia Wiest through the slit of his left eye. His right eye was completely closed. She was standing ankle-deep in mud and slush, her long cloak swirling but not closed over the stained satin gown she wore. Her hair was wild around her head, and her face was covered with dirt. She looked as if she were an avenging queen who'd led her ragtag army to victory. His lip was split open, and he could feel several loose teeth, but he smiled, although it may have appeared as a grimace.

Mr. Turnbull took her by the arm, and Willis put his arm around Phillip's waist, leading him down the alleyway to the carriage. Once seated, she opened the slot.

"Go directly to Wolfe Street, Mr. Turnbull. And I'll need you to get a message to the doctor—I think his name is Prosperi—and also to my father, who is likely frantic."

"I'll go for the doctor, miss," Willis said. "I'm Willis Shoeman, Mr. Brown's neighbor."

"I think I met your little boy, Darius, a few weeks ago," she said.

"You did, miss. He's told us time and again about your carriage."

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate your help this evening, Mr. Shoeman. And you as well, Mr. Turnbull. You'll take care of telling Mr. Wiest I am safe? I'll be at the Browns' until Mr. Brown is seen by the doctor and settled."

"Of course, miss. I'll let him know straightaway. I'll have Crimlock return for you with fresh horses." Virginia sat back against the seat after pulling a blanket from

under the carriage seat and covering herself.

“You’re a bossy woman,” Phillip mumbled, blowing bubbles of blood through his lips.

“Save your breath, Mr. Brown. You’ll need it when the doctor produces his needle and thread.”

Phillip would have laughed at her haughtiness if he wasn’t in so much pain. He hadn’t even begun to assess all the areas of his body that were bleeding or broken and leaned back in his seat, glad to be sitting. He could only take shallow breaths by the time they pulled onto Wolfe Street.

Turnbull climbed down from his seat to help him and Virginia into the house. “Do you want to wait and see the doctor for that cut on your mouth and your eye?” Virginia asked the coachman.

He shook his head. “No, miss. I’ll just be getting back to Shellington once Mr. Shoeman is on his way.”

The front door opened, and Sarah ran out to him, tears in her eyes when she saw him. “Come along now, Phillip. What has happened?”

“Your brother rescued me from a brothel called the Ellipse. He was the victim of a vicious attack. Mr. Shoeman has gone for the doctor.”

“House,” Phillip said, bent over, his hands on his knees.

Sarah and Virginia both took an arm and gently led him inside and directly up the stairs. Uncle Patrick came through the hallway from the kitchen as they climbed the steps.

“Good Lord, boy. What have they done to you?”

Phillip kept climbing, nearly faltering near the top.

“I’ll get him in bed, girls,” Patrick said. “Go tell Eliza to start a beef broth.”

Phillip could have cried when his head finally met his pillow while Uncle Patrick pulled off his boots and pants. He heard chatter below, and it was not long before Prosperi was in the room, surveying him from head to toe.

“Looks like you really did it this time,” he said as he opened his bag and took out a length of thread. “I’ll need hot water and towels. Let’s get that lip sewn back together.”

Phillip’s stomach nearly revolted, but Prosperi’s needle was too quick, and all Phillip could concentrate on was the slip of the needle through his skin.

Virginia and Sarah waited for the doctor to come down the steps after Virginia had put on borrowed clothes, a little too large, and washed herself as best as she could. She longed for a hot soaking bath, and Crimlock was waiting, but she would not leave until she knew the extent of Phillip’s injuries.

“What can you tell us, Doctor?” she asked.

Prosperi dropped his bag on the floor and shook his head. “I don’t know how he does it. I really don’t. He’s going to be bruised, swollen, and so sore he can’t move from his bed for a month or more, but I don’t think there’ll be any permanent damage.”

Virginia let out a held breath, and Sarah began to cry. The doctor was holding her against his chest, stroking her hair and talking softly to her. It was enough to make tears well in Virginia’s eyes, enough to make her envious of whatever connection the

two of them had, a connection she thought she might never have. Until now.

There was a sudden and loud pounding at the door, bringing Phillip's uncle clattering down the steps. He pulled a shotgun from behind a cupboard in the sitting room where she, Sarah, and the doctor stood.

"Who's there?" his uncle shouted.

"Alistair Wiest! Is my daughter here? Ginny? Are you there?"

"Father!" she shouted and hurried to the door as Phillip's uncle lifted the bar, suddenly desperate for arms that would keep her safe.

Her father hurried through the doorway, red-faced, reaching for her and pulling her against him. She gratefully went there, her head on his heaving chest, his arms tight bands around her, swaying on his feet.

"My dearest girl! I love you so very much. I . . . I couldn't imagine a life without you,"

he whispered in her hair.

"I am here, Father. Safe. Let us get the door closed. The wind is cold."

Sarah touched his arm. "Won't you come into the sitting room?"

He wiped at his eyes, his arm firmly around her shoulders. "Introduce me to your friends, won't you, Ginny?"

"This is Mr. Brown's uncle, Mr. Patrick Brown, and his sister, Miss Sarah Brown. This is Dr. Prosperi, their family doctor who was just with Mr. Brown, attending to

his injuries.”

“I’d like to see Brown, if he’s still awake and if the doctor allows.”

“Brown is conscious and refused the laudanum I prescribed so he could sleep. He may be hard to understand as I put twelve stitches in his lip alone.”

“Good Lord!” her father said.

“Come along, then,” his uncle said. “I’ll take you up.”

Virginia followed her father up the steps without asking anyone’s permission. She needed to see Phillip before she could leave this house and return to Shellington and get the rest she knew her body desperately needed. Her father went to Phillip’s bedside and picked up his hand, wrapped in tight bandages, showing spots of blood.

“Mr. Brown, I can never ever thank you for all you have done,” her father said in a quiet voice. “Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Crimlock have told me all that happened, especially your heroic rescue of my Ginny. You rest now, and when you are ready to be back at the cannery, you and I shall have a talk about your future. In the interim, you shall continue to receive your salary while you recover. No matter how long it takes.”

She could see the eye of Phillip’s that was open watching her father’s face. He nodded once and glanced at her where she stood in the doorway. She moved to the other side of the bed, her eyes never leaving his. She combed his hair back from his face when she was beside him.

“Oh, Mr. Brown. I will apologize to you fully when you are well enough to berate me for my impulsiveness. Please allow your family and the doctor to care for you. Do not be stubborn.” His hand reached for hers, and he kissed her fingers. Her cheeks heated,

but she smiled broadly and blinked back tears as he smiled back at her as much as his stitches allowed. This man, who was so dear to her, had risked everything, his very life, to save her. There would never be another man for her, even if she never saw him even one more time on this earth.

She looked up to see her father and Phillip's uncle and sister watching them as she leaned over the bed near his battered and bruised face. "Well," she said, "I believe the patient should get some rest."

Phillip sat up in bed eating a hot roll slathered in butter and honey while he let his soup cool on the tray on his lap. He was still uncomfortably sore, and Prosperi had said he must remain in bed for longer still, although in all truth, he enjoyed the luxury of being waited on and cosseted. It was a completely new experience for him, but he could feel himself growing stronger now, eleven days after the trip to the Ellipse, and bored and restless as well. He heard the front door open and hoped he had a visitor. Maybe Virginia.

"How's our patient?"

Phillip recognized the booming voice of Timothy Sweitzinger and Sarah's returning laughter. His bedroom door opened, admitting them both.

"Keep him company, Tim. You can take him to the privy after his lunch" Sarah laughed, smiling up at his friend.

"I might have to hurry back to the station house," Timothy teased. "Don't forget what I said about the dance at the fire station. I'll ask again next week."

Sarah walked to the door. "Ask as often as your pride permits."

Phillip laughed as they listened to her steps on the stairs. "She has always liked

making sport of you when she can.”

Timothy turned to the bed and sat down on the ladder-back chair beside it. “I kind of like it when she does.” He shrugged.

Phillip stared at his friend, who had picked up one of Eliza’s rolls from his tray. “Did you find anything out?” he asked.

Sweitzinger nodded. “Greta is legally married to Bucciarelli.”

“What?”

“I talked to him in his cell. I think he honestly cares about her. Bucciarelli’s lieutenant was supposed to take the baby to his sister. Bucciarelli had heard she’d stepped out with the fellow from Durmand’s office, Finkle, wasn’t it and wasn’t pleased. He also said Greta had threatened to leave Baltimore and take his son with him, and he intended to stop her. I told him about the condition his boy was living in when Miss Wiest found him,” Timothy said and chuckled. “There’s going to be a few of his gang members at the bottom of the bay before long. He didn’t say it outright, but I think one of them was making a grab for his territory and thought they’d leverage him by threatening his wife and hiding his son.

“And then along comes Campbell, figuring he can get an inside on that property he and Bucciarelli are vying for, so he dumps Greta on your doorstep when she starts making demands to retrieve her son from Bucciarelli,” Timothy added.

“And muddy the waters.”

Timothy nodded. “Have you heard from Greta?”

“She never did tell us the whole story and shaded the truth on occasion. Where is

she? Do you know? She sent a note to Sarah thanking her and the rest of us too.”

“She’s living in Bucciarelli’s house with her boy and plenty of spending money. She’s visited him in his rather lavish cell several times,” Timothy said with a wry smile. “I think they’ve come to terms, if you know what I mean.”

“What about Finkle? Did she say? She told us he was just good for an evening out.”

“She was using Finkle to get information and a dinner now and again. That’s all.”

“I’m never getting married,” Phillip said.

Timothy leaned back in his chair, propped his booted feet on the bed, and locked his fingers behind his head. “Never say never, my friend. I think one of these days we’ll both succumb.”

Phillip stared out his lone window to the winter sky, deep blue, like a woman’s eyes, and thought about the only one who had ever tempted him.

The Browns of Butcher's Hill

Baltimore March 1868

Chapter One

Phillip Brown stepped out the door of the Wiest Oyster Cannery into the warm spring air. His position there as a floor manager gave him some liberty that other employees did not have but which he rarely took advantage of. The shining sun was irresistible, though. He'd been bedridden with some stubborn injuries most of December and January, only starting to recover his strength and agility in February.

His employer's daughter, Virginia Wiest, had been kidnapped by a violent, unscrupulous man, and Phillip had been able to rescue her, but it had been a bloody battle which had left him with more significant injuries than was first realized. He was fortunate to work for a man who gave him time to recover and never cut a penny from his salary. He'd been back to work less than six weeks and was finally feeling fit for the job, no longer exhausted.

The bell rang to signal the end of the day. The door behind him opened, and he glanced back.

"Mr. Brown? Mr. Everly is looking for you," one of the young messenger boys said.

Phillip blew out a breath. His time was up for sunshine and fresh air, he supposed. His immediate supervisor, and the right-hand man to the company's owner, was Altimus Everly, who was, at his best, unpleasant, but more typically arrogant and

snobbish. Phillip had been the focus of Everly's surly disposition for years, and he imagined he was due to have a tongue-lashing for taking five minutes out of a twelve-hour shift to himself.

He knocked on the glass of Everly's office door and cracked it open a few inches. "You wanted to see me, Mr. Everly?"

"Come in, Brown. Hurry and close the door."

Everly stood in the middle of his office, his hand to his forehead.

"What can I help you with, sir?" Phillip asked.

Everly glanced at him, looked away quickly, and began to pace the room. Phillip stood quietly. Finally, Everly turned and faced him.

"Go back to the floor, Brown. I don't need you," he snarled.

Phillip nodded, his hand on the brass knob.

"Wait!"

Phillip looked over his shoulder, where Everly stood stiffly, his hands in tight fists, his jaw set, cheek muscles twitching. Phillip turned, casually waiting for whatever storm was brewing to pass or rain down on him.

"This must be between us and us alone, do you understand, Brown?"

"I won't break the law."

"Did I ask you to break the law?" Everly growled.

Phillip stared. "Not yet. You haven't asked me anything yet."

Everly continued some nervous pacing. "You're still doing your little side investigations?" he asked.

So typical of Everly to be smug while asking someone for a favor, which was what he thought Everly was about to do. "When someone asks for assistance, I try and help them. Do you need help with something?"

That caught Everly off guard. He walked past his desk and opened the door to the inner office, Mr. Wiest's. "Come in here. I don't want anyone walking in on us or overhearing what is being said."

Phillip followed him, closing the door behind him. It didn't particularly feel right being in the owner's office when he and his daughter were out of town, having spent the month over Christmas in New York City, where the late Mrs. Wiest's sister lived, and then on to a European trip. They were due home any day. Phillip tried to not think about how much he had missed Virginia Wiest. She had sent three letters to his family, witty and descriptive of her and her father's rather extensive travels, written in such a way that he could hear her voice. Ah, here he was being ridiculous about a woman who was far above his touch.

Everly looked up from where he sat behind Mr. Wiest's desk. "I have a situation at my home with staff that I have yet to solve. You being more in their class may have more success getting them to tell the truth."

"An issue with your servants?"

"Yes," Everly said impatiently. "It does happen, and it is not always easy to solve when one lives there. These are servants my mother hired and have been with us for decades. She would be devastated if I fired them."

“What are they doing that they would deserve firing?”

“Stealing! They’re stealing from my mother and me!”

Phillip sat back in his chair, away from Everly’s palpable anger. “Stealing? These longtime employees you suspect are stealing?”

“Money. Jewelry. Knickknacks, valuable ones.”

“How long has this been going on, Mr. Everly?”

Everly hesitated. “Since autumn.”

“Autumn?”

“Yes, yes, I know. It’s been too long, but I kept thinking I would catch one of them in the act.”

“What do you want me to do?”

Everly glared at him. “Find out who is stealing from me, Brown. I would have thought it was clear enough.”

“How many servants do you have? Can you make me a list with their positions? I’ll also need a list of items that are missing.”

“Stolen, you mean. I’ll get you your lists. How long will this take you?”

“It depends, but I’ll go as quickly as possible and with as little disruption as I can manage.”

“I don’t care who you disrupt. Just find out who is responsible. And don’t think you

can slack on your duties here. When can you begin?”

“As soon as you give me half of my charges up front.”

“You’re charging me? I thought you did all of this out of the goodness of your heart.”

“I do for folks like your servants. There’s a charge for those able to pay.”

“Don’t try and cheat me, Brown. I’m well aware of the tricks your type of men employ. Find this thief and don’t breathe a word of this to anyone, especially Mr. Wiest.”

“Of course, Mr. Everly,” Phillip said. “I’ll be getting back to the plant floor now.”

Virginia Wiest took a deep breath of the briny air of the Chesapeake Bay. Home. She was home after an uneventful steamer crossing from England and more than two months of travel. How fortunate she was to be healthy and wealthy enough to visit five European countries and see some of the sites she’d only read about during her childhood, when illnesses had kept her confined to her bed or sedate activities. But she was stronger now, thank goodness, and fully recovered from a dangerous adventure during the bitter winter weather which had required her rescue from a gentleman’s club, of all places.

She’d told her Aunt Essie every detail when she and her father visited her in New York City and spent the holiday there being cossetted and waited on and generally placid before setting off across the ocean. She would have complained but recognized her body needed time to recover. Her aunt had listened wide-eyed to every foolish thing she’d done and every dangerous event that had taken place. She’d declared, when Virginia finished the tale, that her niece should get busy and marry this Brown fellow. After all, who could resist a hero like that? she’d asked.

Virginia would admit that she thought of him often, wondered if he’d fully recovered

from his injuries from his rescue of her and if he ever thought of her, and if so, was it with kindness or exasperation for her foolish behavior? She was well acquainted with guilt. It hung over her like a shroud when she thought about the risks she'd taken and the violence imposed on so many others because she'd not considered the pitfalls, focused completely on a small child she'd never met.

“Well, Ginny? Happy to be back on dry land?” her father, Alistair Wiest, asked.

“Oh yes. Sad our wonderful trip is over, but I will be so very glad to be back at Shellington and seeing all the staff there. Won't you be glad to be back at the cannery?”

“I will. It appears from reports that Mr. Everly has done well since we've been gone. He has a tendency to be abrasive on occasion, and I worry I'll lose a valuable employee.”

“Look! There is our coach and Mr. Turnbull himself. Here!” she called out and waved.

The older uniformed man and another younger one made their way through the crowd to them, through families reuniting, lovers restored to each other, and men and women seeing their very first view of the United States.

“Mr. Weist. Miss Wiest. We are glad you are home. Get their trunks from the porter, Crimlock. Follow me, please,” Turnbull said and picked up the valise she'd been carrying.

“Are you ready to go home, Colleen?” Virginia asked, turning to her maid.

“I am, miss. But I will never forget these months. I never dreamed I'd get to travel like this. It was wonderful.”

Phillip worked a long shift at the cannery and a few hours pouring beer at the Bond Street Brewery after that. But Eliza Waterman's plate of sausage, eggs, and toasted bread revived him the following morning along with a steaming cup of coffee.

Eliza was the family cook at the Brown home on Wolfe Street and had been for over ten years. Uncle Patrick, his father's older brother, had found her walking along the Patapsco River where he was fishing and convinced her to come home with him and cook for a room and wages, a sight better than being a house slave in South Carolina.

"I thought this was a day out for you," his sister, Sarah, said as she came into the kitchen, carrying a massive basket of clothing.

"A morning out."

"Then why are you up and out of bed early? So unlike you, brother," she said and laughed as she peered at his plate. "How many eggs did she make you?" Sarah looked at Eliza. "Eggs are dear. But I suppose he told you some sorry tale that he is still recovering."

"He's too thin," Eliza said and turned to their maid of all work coming from their small pantry, her apron filled with onions and potatoes. "Over here, Jenny. We're going to start the oyster stew."

"Do you want me to get the kettle boiling for the laundry?" he asked Sarah.

She shook her head. "There's a young woman with two babies near Dolly's shop who takes in laundry. She doesn't charge much and needs the work."

"What does that cost us?" he asked.

"Don't worry about it, Phillip. My work at the dress shop is bringing in more than enough to pay it. I hate doing the laundry, and I'll gladly pay for it to be done."

“You shouldn’t be working at all,” Uncle Patrick said as he walked down the two stone steps near his small bedroom on the first floor and into the kitchen. “Should be marrying one of the men courting you. Setting up your own household.”

Sarah leaned over and kissed his weathered cheek. “I’d miss you too much.”

Uncle shook his head, not a man comfortable with Sarah’s affectionate pats and kisses. “Go on now. I need my coffee.”

Phillip smiled. His little family, some bonds of blood, some not, were the reason he was happy going to work and coming home to a hot meal, to this comfortable house, and the chatter in this kitchen on Wolfe Street in the Butchers Hill area of Baltimore. He was lucky—and thankful too; not everyone had the conviviality at home that he did, even including the occasional argument or disagreement.

“I’ve got to catch the streetcar,” he said and took his empty coffee cup to Jenny’s wash bin.

“Where are you off to?” Uncle Patrick asked.

“Doing a little work for a friend,” he said and kissed his sister’s cheek.

Phillip took the streetcar to French Street, getting close to the Washington Monument and the area where wealthier Baltimoreans resided. He found the address, an imposing gray stone home with six windows across. He went down the alley behind the Everly home and found the kitchen door belonging to it.

He knocked and waited. A lock slid back, and a man opened the door a crack. “Deliveries are done for the day.”

“I’m not here to deliver anything. I’m here to speak to Mr. Jenkins. Mr. Everly sent me.”

The man's eyes widened. "Mr. Everly did?"

Phillip nodded and noticed the uncertainty, and maybe fear, in the man's face. The door opened wider, and Phillip stepped inside the low-ceilinged kitchen, where a young woman was busy chopping vegetables. He could see tear tracks on her cheeks and thought that she must be cutting a particularly pungent onion. He followed the man, making his way through a labyrinth of hallways to a closed door near a narrow set of steps.

"Mr. Jenkins? There's a man here to see you. Says Mr. Everly sent him."

The door opened. "Thank you, Norris. You may go."

He entered the comfortable office when Jenkins opened the door the whole way. Phillip closed the door behind him when the other man seated himself at a desk. "Mr. Jenkins. I'm Phillip Brown. Mr. Everly has asked me to look into some thefts that have occurred here. Has he spoken to you about this?"

"Of course he has. I'm the most senior member of the household staff. I'm privy to all such knowledge." Jenkins looked him up and down. "I'm sure it's one of the new housemaids. There are several just off the boat from Ireland. It's certainly one of them."

"I have a list of staff members here," Phillip said and pulled the folded paper from his jacket pocket. "Can you tell me who the newest members are?"

Jenkins took the list, picked up the stub of a pencil, and made a few checkmarks. "Bridget and Ann, at the bottom of the list, are the two newest."

"Thank you. Is there a place I can speak to the staff, privately and separately?"

"There is a small room down the hall you may use. But you must not keep them from

their duties. I intend to tell them that if they are unable to keep up they will have to finish their work on their own time.”

Phillip nodded at Jenkins, knowing the man intended for him to get little cooperation. The butler reminded him of Everly, smug and pompous, a natural extension of Everly’s behavior toward those he deemed lesser. The room Phillip was shown to speak to the staff was small and chilly, which did not bother him at all but would undoubtedly make the women uncomfortable. He interviewed several employees: Norris, the man who’d answered the door, two upstairs maids, a pot-scrubbing boy, and a groomsman from the stables. They’d all heard there were missing items, some didn’t believe it, and all denied having ever stolen the smallest thing in their entire lives.

The last person he had time to speak to was the young woman who’d been chopping vegetables.

“Hello. I saw you chopping an onion when I first came in. It must have been a very strong one,” he said and smiled, trying to put the clearly terrified woman at ease.

She shook her head and whispered, “Not why I was crying, sir.”

“Oh?”

“No. Cook’s away and Mrs. Brandeis put me in the kitchen, but I’m only a tolerable cook at best. I can’t afford to lose this job. My husband can’t work.”

“Surely they must give you some lenience if you are only filling in,” he said.

“Don’t think so, sir. They aren’t a family that will put up with mistakes.”

Phillip sat back in his chair. Nearly every employee had expressed fear or at the least concern with their employer. There was no mention of the family being fair-minded

or kind or appreciative. Only anxiety about continued employment.

“Have you heard that the family is concerned that there are several items of value missing from the house?”

She nodded. “I’ve heard, but I know nothing about it. I would never put my wages at risk for some ceramic trinket that may not have any value at the pawnshop.”

“Sensible. I’m glad to hear it.”

“Is that all, sir? I’m terribly afraid my soup will turn out poorly, and Mr. Everly is having company tonight.”

Phillip reached across the table and tapped his knuckles on the rough wood. “If you are ever in need of work, I believe I could get you placed with a wonderful family. My name is Phillip Brown, and I live on Wolfe Street.”

Tears welled in her eyes, and her lip trembled. “You mean that, don’t you?”

He nodded. “Of course I do. You better go tend your soup.”

Phillip watched her go and could not dismiss the feeling that there was something more to this than a few missing coins or knickknacks.