

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
WARS DO END

I work at Mistress Jolly's shop for a while: 'twas fall when I came, 'twas the winter after and in early March, 1774, Boston started having bad troubles. I wouldn't have known but I heard people talk in the shop, "Did you hear abut the Boston Tea Party?" Some men in Boston dress as Indians, board a boat, and throw boxes of tea into the water. The British close the port and people, 'specially the poor, suffer. 'Twas a collection from all over Alexandria, money, barrels of flour, and bushels of wheat to send to the poor of Boston.

I was beginning to be able to read a little of the newspapers; the easiest part for me to read was the year and day. I name most of the letters and sound out the words. Mistress is glad that I learn but she say, "Abigail, please only read when I have given you some time for your own purposes." But she also tell me words some. And she teaches me how to talk better. I listen to her and her customers and I learn new words and how to speak them in a more proper manner.

Sometimes at night men make a lot of noise out in the streets and I am afeared. We sell less and the little bell over the door is most quiet. Mistress Jolly say, "Abby, I fear, if we go to war, I won't be able

to feed two mouths. The Governor has dissolved the House of Burgesses. But our town hotheads still meet right around the corner here at the tavern and they even meet at church. Some of my best customers have gone to England because they are afraid of imprisonment or harassment."

When I look comfoozled she explains, "Nicolas Cresswell, I believe you met him last week in the shop, came here to the Colonies recently to make his living as a farmer but may go back, because as he said to me, 'Everything here is utmost confusion. Committees are appointed to inspect into the Characters and Conduct of every tradesman, to prevent them selling Tea or buying British manufactures. All trade is almost at a standstill. When I went to Presbyterian meeting, they were even stirring things up there! These rascals might persuade the Colonies into a Rebellion.' "

Mistress says, "Some Patriots may be staying away from my shop because they know I have carried some imported goods. This trouble has gone on for a long time. Your hero Colonel Washington actually wrote to his friend Bryan Fairfax, 'Does it not appear, as clear as the sun in its meridian brightness, that there is a regular systematic plan formed to fix the right and practice of taxation upon us?' Of course Fairfax sees it a different way. Just wait until a patriot government would try to run a country without taxation--if it won the war with England."

I don't understand all she says, but I know she worries, so I worry a bit, too. But I keep on with my tasks and do the best I can to please her and ease her mind a bit.

Then one day in midsummer Neighbor Mooney comes and says, "Your Mama is worried about you. We hear 'tis a lot of fuss going on in the city. She hear Alexandria is worse for trouble than other cities except Boston and Philadelphia. She want you to come home."

I feel sad and my eyes fill. I wipe my eyes and Mistress Jolly puts her arm around me and says, "Don't worry, Abby, wars do end and you will always be welcome back here." She hugs me and I hug her back.

I go to get my old clothes and my new ones, and while I bundle them up, I think how I'm sad to leave but how good it will be to see Mama and Papa and the children. But, especially Mama. She will be so pleased to know I can read a good bit now, and how well I can sew. I smile to myself. Papa, he will be so surprised to hear I have a story to tell him about Colonel Washington.

And they will all want to hear how it is living in the city. I hope they don't think I'm putting on airs because I talk more nicely now. No, I think they will be glad I've learned so much. And I think maybe when all the troubles are over, I can come back, like

Mistress Jolly said. There is so much I want to find out about the world outside the farm. But while I'm waiting, I can help Mama more than before. And it will be good to see Henry and comfort him if he is feeling poorly.

When my things are all bundled, Mistress gives me my money from selling a few mittens, and says, "Abby, I hope you'll be back soon. I'll miss you." I say, "Thank you, Mistress Jolly," and curtsy to her, and she smiles.

I go out, the bell tinkles, and Neighbor Mooney reaches down to lift me up behind him on his horse to ride home through the night.