Praise for the author's other books and work…

Rescuing General Patton

"This novel feels original and fresh. With its appealing blend of fiction and fact, it will especially delight war and history buffs. 9 out of 10!"
Publisher's Weekly (BookLife Prize)

"Highly Recommended!" *US Review of Books*

"5 Stars out of 5 Stars", *Online Book Club*, official review

"5 Stars out of 5 Stars" *Readers Favorites Book Reviews*

"Recommend! Starred review (highest)" *Hollywood Book Reviews*

"Not only do I recommend Rescuing General Patton for lovers of military, action-adventure fiction, but this is one of those rare books I'll read again!"
Lex Allen, Major (retired) US Army

Protectors of the Black Prince

"This exciting historical work explores the adventures of an aspiring master archer as he discovers the horror of war and the ugliness of xenophobia. Burdick's prose is elaborately descriptive and evocative. Burdick excels at creating a full and vivid world that readers of the genre will ultimately find captivating."
Publisher's Weekly (BookLife Prize)

"This is awesome! The premise is exciting and the action is non-stop, which suits the genre. As I neared the final pages, I felt genuinely disturbed that the story would end. The writing is top notch. I was literally unable to tear myself away from this story."
Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Nicholl Awards

Tales from the Gray Area

"An amazing blend of science-fiction, fantasy and reality. This book consists of seven spellbinding novellas! There are supernatural beings, magic, UFOs, aliens, and monsters to keep readers turning the pages. The book is enthralling. 4 out of 4 stars!
Online Book Club, Aniza Butt, Senior Staff Reviewer

"Intriguing. Reminiscent of *The Twilight Zone*. Recommend!"
Publisher's Weekly (BookLife Prize)

"Recommended." *The US Review of Books*

***Hundreds of reader reviews posted** on Amazon (US and international sites), Online Book Club, and Goodreads.*

Shanghai'd

The Adventures Begin

Joshua Cabot, Harvard educated, was among the first to Travel to 'Gold Rush' California in 1848 to make his fortune. Tragedy strikes; alcohol becomes his escape until he wakes up a 'shanghaied' sailor on a merchant sailing ship's long, perilous voyage, trading at many of the Pacific's most dangerous ports before finally arriving at Shanghai, China.

This is the first book in an epic story.

A Novel

By

Curtis Stephen Burdick

Cover Design/Art by Hunter Ives (H9D Studio)

Copyright © 2024 Curtis Stephen Burdick
Published by Gene Freak Publishing
All rights reserved.

To my loving, kind, unfailingly cheerful, and truly extraordinary wife, Dolores, my best friend, without whose constant encouragement and support I would not have written this book or became a writer.

******

The California Gold Rush left increasing numbers of merchant sailing ships short of crew in San Francisco harbor. Desperate captains resorted to kidnapping drunken men from saloons, gambling emporiums, brothels, even opium dens and forcing them into service on their ships.

Many of these ships traversed trade routes across the vast Pacific Ocean; along the western coast of North America to Russian Alaska, the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), remote South Pacific archipelagos, and notorious Dutch East Indies and Southeast Asian ports, until eventually arriving in Shanghai, China, thus the kidnapped men were said to be "shanghaied."

One of them, Joshua Cabot, a young man educated in the sciences at Harvard traveled from Boston to San Francisco to open an assay office and mint for a prominent gold company. He was enticed by the promise that upon his eventual return he would have the fortune needed to establish his own scientific laboratory, his all-consuming passion.

A year later he experienced a shocking, personal tragedy. He turned to alcohol to help ease the pain and one fateful night found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time.

He would be pushed to the limits of his endurance and experience adventures few have ever known. It would be his knowledge of science and unexpected friendships that would help him survive.

This is the beginning of Joshua Cabot's epic adventure story.

******

Part One

Adventure of a Lifetime

Chapter One

On January 24th, 1848, San Francisco was no more than a village of less than eight hundred people with the abandoned, crumbling, adobe walls of Mission Dolores a reminder of its origin as a Spanish settlement. Ninety miles northeast sat Sutter's Fort in the center of what would be called, two years later, Sacramento. The fort was located at the confluence of the American and Sacramento rivers. A small but thriving center of commerce in the California Territory, it served as John Sutter's base for what he dreamed would become his agricultural empire. Sutter, an early settler and Swiss immigrant, came to the area in 1839, among the first to travel via the Oregon Trail.

Forty-eight miles farther northeast, on the outskirts of the remote outpost, Coloma – named for a nearby Maidu Indian village – a sawmill was being constructed on a bend along the South Fork of the American River by James Marshall. He was a millwright hired by Sutter to supply the lumber needed for his expanding fort and the many, new agricultural outbuildings planned.

Late in the day, as Marshall was inspecting the shallow millrace that workers had dug out to redirect water into the mill's waterwheel, something caught his eye glittering in the waning sunlight. When he bent down for a closer look, he picked out of the shallow rush of water what look like a gold nugget.

"My God, this looks like . . . could it be . . . *gold*?"

In quick succession he found several more. A few minutes later, using a tin chow pan he retrieved, he swirled out sediment from the bottom of the millrace to reveal flecks of gold dust.

"Unbelievable," he mumbled, trying to keep his excitement under control.

Marshall felt the discovery was significant but at that moment he could never have imagined in his wildest dreams that he would soon be responsible for igniting the frenzy of what would become known worldwide as the 'California Gold Rush.'

Early the next morning Marshall set out on horseback to Sutter's Fort and brought the evidence of his discovery to his employer.

"Have you told anyone else, James?" was the first thing the astonished forty-year-old John Sutter said. His tone was filled with a mixture of anxiety and excitement that he tried hard to keep under control as he repeatedly examined the nuggets and the small, folded packet that contained the dust.

Sutter, with Marshall's help, immediately conducted a crude assaying test to do his best to determine if the nuggets and other flakes Marshall had panned were in fact gold as they suspected. Satisfied with the stunning results, they repeated another rudimentary test. As crude as it was it strongly suggested that the purity of the gold content of the nuggets could be of an extremely high grade.

Sutter immediately decided to send one of his foremen, who he trusted more than anyone, to Monterey the next day to meet with Colonel Richard Barnes Mason. Sutter's foreman showed him one of the gold nuggets and flakes of panned gold. Of equal importance was his task to obtain from the colonel certification of Sutter's claim to thousands of acres of land along the river that had been granted him by the Mexican government in 1841, after he had become a Mexican citizen. The foreman, as instructed, also made it clear to the colonel that Sutter, "would be *most grateful* for the colonel's help." The meaning was not lost on Mason.

Colonel Mason was the highest-ranking U.S. Army officer in California during the Mexican-American War and, as a result, became the defacto military governor. Mason, a Virginian, was a descendant of George Mason, framer of the U.S. Constitution and father of the Bill of Rights. Also present at the meeting with Sutter's foreman was an unknown, twenty-eight-year-old junior officer and West Point graduate, Lieutenant William Tecumseh Sherman, who happened to be in Monterey delivering dispatches from his commanding officer in San Francisco. Sherman was part of the 1st Regiment of New York Volunteers who had arrived in the Spring of 1847. But he was bitter about being posted to California instead of fighting in the front lines in Mexico.

Mason and Sherman performed their own tests on the nugget and flake samples brought to them by Sutter's man and satisfied themselves that what had been found was in fact gold and remarkably pure in content. They were also intrigued by – although more than a bit skeptical of – what Sutter's representative had excitedly and repeatedly said was, "Gold just lyin' 'round in the river beds everywhere just waitin' to be plucked out!" They were aware that gold had been found before in the area but never in significant enough quantities to cause much excitement.

Colonel Mason told the foreman he could inform Sutter that they agreed the samples he sent were gold of a very high grade. He also flatly stated he could not act on Sutter's request.

"Land claims, even those in writing from the Mexican government, cannot be certified without a survey and, in any event, regrettably, I have been given no such authority to do so."

Just days later, on February 2, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American War and California officially became a possession of the United States. Soon after a military courier, Major Jeremiah Bridges, brought Colonel Mason the expected news. With his responsibilities greatly expanded as a result, he named the newly arrived major the commander of all American military forces in California which included the 1st Regiment stationed in Monterey and San Francisco.

It wasn't long before Bridges met with John Sutter, who had traveled to personally meet with him and ask for soldiers to be stationed at the fort. Intrigued by Sutter's stories about the gold discovery at his mill site which he said had greatly added to the need for a military presence at the fort, Bridges decided to travel back to the mill site with him.

After seeing the location of the gold discovery for himself, the excitement that had engulfed the area, and containers of gold nuggets and bags of dust readily displayed by the workers-turned miners, he realized the discovery was significant and potentially bigger than anything Colonel Mason realized.

On his journey back to San Francisco, Major Jeremiah Bridges realized that by sheer chance a life changing opportunity had presented itself and he made the decision to immediately act upon it.

Chapter Two

On April 22, 1848, in Boston Harbor, a sleek, three masted, one-hundred-seventy-foot-long 'clipper ship,' the *Sea Witch,* was maneuvered by a rowing tug manned by twelve oarsmen into a docking berth along the harbor's massive, mile-long wharf. The ship attracted immediate attention from all working the port that day. Its one-hundred-forty-foot main mast – the tallest of the three – that carried five tiers of unfurled sails, was still being firmly secured in place by linesmen and could be seen from any point on the enormous wharf. It was one of the first of a new class of sailing vessels and the fastest ships afloat. It was a cool but sunny spring day with a slight wind out of the northwest that all who were on the wharf were thankful for.

The famous Boston port held scores of fishing boats and merchant and passenger sailing vessels and a dozen of the newer side-paddle steam ships of all sizes and designs. It was an impressive and unique massing of ships that, in just ten years, the world would never see again. A three-story custom house dominated the entrance to the port, with dozens of warehouses crowded behind it that ran down the center of the entire mile-long length of the wharf.

After lines had been secured to pilings along the ship's berth, a gangplank from the clipper thumped loudly onto the thick oak planking of the newly lengthened wharf from the open gate on the clipper's port rail. The sun was well into its downward arc in a nearly cloudless sky and would complete its descent behind the elegant homes on Beacon Hill not far in the distance.

The first passenger off the ship was a clean-shaven, twenty-six-year-old Army officer, Captain Forest Clayton. A narrow short-brimmed royal-blue officer's hat trimmed with a thin gold braid was on his head, and he wore his dress uniform with a double row of brass buttons on his tunic. A scarlet sash was tied around his waist, the tasseled ends of which hung from his right hip. On the other hip was the polished pommel of a sword in a silver scabbard. His pants, with narrow, dull-gold stripes down the outside of each leg, were tucked into highly polished, black long boots. In one hand he carried an officer's elongated leather satchel. The bag contained his everyday service uniform and other essential changes of clothing as well as his weapons, a Springfield rifled musket with its stock and a bayonet detached in a leather sheath tied to one of the satchel's handles and, inside, a percussion cap pistol, powder-and-ball ammunition, and an Army version of the Bowie knife.

Clayton was a West Point graduate and career Army officer who, as a lieutenant, arrived in California with the 1st Regiment of New York Volunteers in the spring of 1847 while the Mexican-American War raged on. He was eventually promoted to captain by Colonel Mason – over his former West Point classmate and friend, Lieutenant Sherman – after sickness took the lives of two other senior officers. Family ties had played a part in Mason's decision as had Sherman's hardly disguised dissatisfaction with being sent to California instead of Texas and action in Mexico. After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the War, newly arrived Major Jeremiah Bridges took command of the 1st Regiment and became Captain Clayton's commanding officer.

Weeks later, after gold had already been discovered at Sutter's Mill and the enormous potential of the discovery was starting to become apparent, Major Bridges surprised Clayton by ordering him on a mission he described as 'secret and crucial.' It was done with the approval of Colonel Mason, who had officially become California's first military governor, and passage for Clayton was booked on a fast merchant schooner out of Monterey Harbor to the Isthmus of Panama's west coast. From there he traveled overland on a challenging trek using mules along jungle trails and native canoes across a lake into a river connecting to a port on the Isthmus's Caribbean coast.

Eleven days later, and three days earlier than planned, he used his military orders to obtain and purchase preferential passage onboard one of the new, much-faster clipper ships, which, curiously, would take him to Boston. Bridges had explained that once Clayton arrived there he was to proceed to an address, to meet with a man whose name was etched into a rolled-up and tied waterproof, oilskin packet handed to him by the major. This route, using a schooner and a clipper ship, cut nearly three months off the equally dangerous sea

route around Cape Horn. It cut over five months off the more unpredictable overland routes via either the Oregon or Santa Fe Trails.

Major Bridges had explained further to the young captain, as he continued in a hushed, gravely serious tone, that immediately after his Boston meeting, he was to catch the very next train to New York City. From there he would take a horse-drawn passenger coach to Baltimore and then board a ferry up the Potomac to Washington, DC, where he would proceed to the War Department and Army Headquarters. There, he was to deliver a sealed dispatch to General Winfred Harkens, also contained in another, more officially adorned oilskin pouch, from Colonel Mason. The vital dispatch contained news and details about what he had determined was a significant discovery of gold and the urgent need for a meaningful increase in military personnel, equipment and supplies before the news spread around the country and the world. Major Bridges emphasized to Captain Clayton to make no mention of his Boston meeting for which his discretion in the matter would be appropriately 'compensated' by the person he was to meet with in Boston.

Captain Clayton waved to the closest of the dozen or so livery drivers standing outside their horse-drawn carriages lined up on the wharf. The driver waved back and immediately jumped up onto the outer seat and spurred his horse and carriage to meet Clayton at the roped-off passenger disembarking area. The air was still filled with the lingering smells from the open-air fish processing area where restaurants and local markets picked up freshly caught and cleaned seafood. The sound of the seagulls that flew above the processing area in the hope of more discarded scraps competed with the constant din of activity that engulfed the wharf.

"Where to, General?" the driver said deferentially to Clayton after jumping down and opening the livery's door.

"I'm a captain," Clayton said as he put his satchel into the carriage and handed the driver a piece of paper.

"Here's the address. Hurry!"

The driver looked at the address, frowned, and in a distinct Boston, working class accent said, "A, ah, Beacon Hill address. Well, once on those goddamn cobblestones won't be able to hurry much."

"Just go as fast as you can, and then wait there for me no matter how long it takes," Clayton said and handed the driver a silver half-dollar – one of a dozen given him for expenses – surprising the driver and perking him up.

"I'll use the whip."

"Oh, do you have the Boston train schedules by chance, sir?"

"Of course," the driver said and pulled the small, dog-eared booklet out of an inner pocket and handed it to the captain.

"Excellent," Clayton said and climbed into the coach.

The livery quickly made the transition from the wooden planks of the wharf's wagon and carriage pathway bordered by slightly elevated, worker and pedestrian walkways on either side. He passed numerous pushcarts used by workers who continuously scooped up manure, to the dirt road of the harbor area and headed south, away from the city's center. The horse galloped past a long stretch of dock workers and fishermen shacks until reaching the beginning of a cobblestone road, where it slowed to a trot. The road turned sharply to the right and angled upward and marked the entry, closest to the wharf, that eventually led into the exclusive neighborhood of Beacon Hill. Although reduced over time from its original one-hundred-thirty-eight-foot height to eighty-feet, it was where Boston's elite lived and literally looked down on the inhabitants of the rest of the historic city in 1848.

The loud, rhythmic *clip-clop* of the horse's hooves was sporadically interrupted as they slipped on the cobblestones as it tried to pull the carriage faster up the road, in response to the crack of the whip.

After navigating the last of the inclined stretch of the access road the livery driver deftly maneuvered his carriage around a turn without slowing and onto the most desirable of all the Beacon Hill pathways, Chestnut Street.

The carriage stopped in front of the address Clayton had given the driver, an impressive three-story, gray-stone mansion. It was twice as wide as the rest of the elegant, tightly packed, similar-styled three-story homes that lined the entire street on both of its sides. The driver quickly dropped down from his perch seat to open the carriage door as the horse snorted and wheezed.

"Fastest I ever got up that damn hill. I'll be waitin' right here, General."

Captain Clayton exited the carriage with his satchel, said nothing to the driver while handing the train schedule back to him, and hurried along a red brick walkway to a set of stairs that led up to double doors painted a dark red. The captain set his satchel down and banged a door knocker, the handle of which was attached to an oversized shape resembling a glistening twenty-dollar gold piece bearing the stamped

impression of the head of an American eagle. He straightened his hat, brushed his uniform front, arranged his sash, and straightened further his erect bearing.

One of the doors opened and a woman servant in an apron peered out. She was both surprised and impressed by the Army officer, in the most elaborate uniform she had ever seen, standing before her. Clayton removed his hat, revealing matted-down, light brown hair that needed the attention of a barber.

"My pardon, madam. I'm Captain Forest Clayton, here to see Mr. Elias Moffet on extremely urgent business."

"Oh, is Mr. Moffet expecting you?"

"No. I just arrived this afternoon on a clipper ship."

"A clipper - oh my." The servant's eyes widened. "Please, come in. I-I will inquire if Mr. Moffet is available."

"Thank you," Clayton said. He picked up his satchel and entered the spacious marble-tiled foyer with a spectacular crystal chandelier overhead. Numerous candles in silver holders formed the ring of its lowest and widest tier. The foyer led to a centered staircase with narrow hallways on either side leading to other rooms within. The polished oak, beveled staircase railings fanned out wider as they rose and led to the two upper floors. On either side of the foyer where Clayton stood were elaborately carved double doors containing a family crest that were closed to the rooms beyond them.

The servant pointed to a cushioned bench along a wall behind Clayton. It sat next to the doorway with a rack for hats and cloaks and a holder for umbrellas.

"You can sit if you wish while I let Mr. Moffet's secretary know you are here."

"Thank you," Clayton said and set the satchel down next to the bench. He chose to remain standing, though he allowed himself an 'at ease' position with his hat under an arm.

"Please, emphasize that the news I bring is of the most urgent nature," Clayton said, and the servant turned and nodded with a matching grave expression as she hurried up the stairs as fast as she could and disappeared down the hallway off the landing.

Minutes later a younger man, impeccably dressed in fashionable business attire, came down the stairs followed by the servant. She hurried away down one of the hallways as the man introduced himself.

"I am Mr. Moffet's secretary, Samuel Thomas. Mr. Moffet will join you shortly."

"Thank you, sir. I'm greatly relieved he is here. My orders are to deliver something to Mr. Moffet in person, before continuing on to Washington."

"His firm's offices are in the building next door. You are fortunate, though, that he is in town, although I possess a document designating me to act as his agent in his absence."

"Even so, I'm afraid my orders are quite explicit in that regard. I would have been compelled to find lodgings to wait for his return."

"In that case, the timing of your arrival is most fortunate indeed, Captain. Come this way, please."

The secretary promptly opened the doors on his right and led them into a lavishly appointed and furnished library. Sunlight lit the room through open, wooden-louvered shades that covered the expanse of windows along the front wall. The gold-embossed lettering on the bindings of some of the hundreds of books that lined the walls seemed as if illuminated within by the sun's rays that shined directly on them.

"Please, make yourself comfortable. This is Mr. Moffet's personal library. Can I have a refreshment brought in to drink while you wait? Lemonade, cider, or something more-"

"Water," the captain said as he stared in awe at the library's stunning interior. "I would greatly appreciate a large glass of clean, clear water more than anything else."

"I will have a pitcher and glass brought in. Would you like ice added?"

"Ice? You have-"

"Yes. In our cellar. Mr. Moffet has a small but very profitable ice business shipping blocks of ice that are cut every winter from inland lakes and shipped south as far as the Caribbean."

"I, I am most grateful for your hospitality, sir."

"My pleasure. Please, have a seat, Captain."

Clayton sat erect in one of the two high-backed armchairs positioned across from a massive mahogany desk waiting patiently for Elias Moffet. The chair was covered in a rich, supple, dark brown leather. His hat lay on his lap on top of the oilskin packet he had removed from his satchel. A glass and pitcher of water, now half empty, with a few remnants of ice chips floating within, was on a tray on the table next to him between the chairs. Also on the table was a large glass lamp fueled by expensive whale oil, which the servant had lit in anticipation of the late afternoon sunlight soon disappearing which it had already begun to do. She had

also deftly arranged logs and tinder in the fireplace made of ocean-polished, rounded dark gray stones to the right of the desk and lit a fire. The crackling flames were instantly relaxing and also provided additional light for the room.

Clayton drained another glass of water and his eyes became heavy as he felt the exhaustion from his trip as never before. Just as his eyelids closed, Elias Moffet entered with his commanding voice greeting the exhausted officer sitting with his back to him.

"Captain Clayton! An unexpected visit."

Clayton's eyes shot open instantly and his training immediately took over. He leaped to his feet then stood at attention while his hat and the oilskin fell to the floor. "Sir!" he answered loudly turning to face Moffet.

Elias B. Moffet was fifty-one-years-old and, although only five-foot-five, seemed much taller. He was solidly built, could even be described as burly, exuded energy and confidence and had what would later be called charisma. He sported bushy sideburns on a face with features that were distinct and seemed more imposing because they were on a head that appeared larger than most. The nose, though, incongruously, had the flattened, broken appearance associated with boxers which, in fact, Moffet had been in his hardscrabble youth. A pair of spectacles with a short handle hung on his chest from a thin chain around his neck.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," Moffet said as Clayton reluctantly turned and bent down to pick up his hat and the oilskin.

"I came as soon as I could," Moffet said further as the officer straightened back up and set the hat on the desk.

"Thank you, sir. I-I appreciate you meeting me without advance notice but -"

"Not at all. I'm glad I was in town when you called. Please sit."

Clayton sat back down, holding the packet on his lap and waiting for the right moment to offer it to Moffet and explain it was the reason he was there.

"Can I offer you brandy, whiskey?" Moffet said, motioning to the decanters behind his desk on a credenza.

"No, sir. I-"

"Understand you just arrived on one of the clipper ships?"

"Yes, sir. Remarkable speed. An amazing experience."

"I wholeheartedly agree. I am personally invested in their potential. And where did you come from?" Moffet asked eyeing the packet Clayton held as he sat down behind his ornate desk.

Clayton noticed and promptly offered Moffet the rolled-up oilskin as he answered. A deepening frown took hold of Moffet's face.

"California, sir, via the Isthmus. This is the reason I'm here; to deliver, in person, this packet from Major Jeremiah Bridges."

Surprise instantly replaced Moffet's frown.

"California? From Major Bridges?"

"Yes, sir. He's my commanding officer and he -"

"I know Major Bridges."

"He ordered me to come here with the utmost urgency and secrecy."

Moffet untied and unrolled the oilskin, opened the double overlapping flaps and took out an envelope inside of which was a single-page letter. He frowned deeply as he held his spectacles to his eyes and read the letter. His expression changed. It was replaced by raised eyebrows, quickly turned to a look of elation.

Moffet looked over at Clayton and smiled broadly at the puzzled captain.

"This is astounding news, Captain! I applaud your bravery for undertaking such a dangerous journey to bring this letter to me."

"Thank you, sir, but I was just following -"

"Orders. I know, but a journey on two oceans across the disease-and bandit-infested jungles of the isthmus deserves a reward."

Moffet set the letter down, got up and immediately turned to the wall above the credenza where, to Clayton's surprise, he removed a large oil painting of ships in the Venice harbor, revealing the door of a recessed safe. He took a key from his vest pocket and entered the key into a lock, turned a handle, and pulled open the thick iron door. He took something out and came around his desk. He held a small black velvet bag with draw strings, poured out several gold coins into his other hand and stacked them on the desk in front of a wide-eyed Captain Clayton.

Moffet offered his hand to Clayton. He immediately stood up and shook it, as his eyes shifted back down to the stack of gold coins.

"Ten brand-new twenty-dollar gold pieces from one of my own mints. Your reward for your extraordinary bravery, Captain."

"Thank you, sir, I -"

"And of course, for your discretion, as requested by your commanding officer, Major Bridges, who is a personal friend of mine."

"I understand, sir," Clayton said and swallowed hard at the realization that what he had done required continued secrecy.

"Are you sure you wouldn't want a drink? You must be hungry, a meal perhaps?"

"Thank you, sir, but with regret I must decline. With your permission, I need to depart. I have a livery waiting and can still catch the overnight train to New York. Then a coach to Baltimore and then -"

"A boat up the Potomac to Washington. I've traveled the route many times. I'll see you out."

"Thank you, sir."

"I'm sure whomever you are to see in Washington will be as impressed with the swiftness of your remarkable journey as I am."

Clayton lowered his voice as if revealing information he shouldn't share, but the receipt of the gold prompted him to do so.

"I'm to deliver urgent communications to General Harkens at the War Department."

"I see. No doubt vitally important. I know the general quite well. But, of course, I won't be able to ask you to pass on my regards now, will I?"

"No, sir. Major Bridges made it quite clear I was not to mention to anyone my meeting with you."

"And you leave with something that will ensure that. Right, Captain?"

"Absolutely, sir."

The moment Captain Clayton left, Moffet was back in the library at his desk. He placed his spectacles to his eyes with one hand and picked up the letter in the other so he could reread the stupendous news. He let out a deep, satisfied sigh. He relaxed back in the heavy leather chair with excitement in his eyes and a smile across his face.

"*Finally*," he said, the same excitement he felt now manifest in the one word he had uttered to himself.

He stood up and put the letter into the safe, closed and locked it, and returned the painting to its place on the wall to resume its assigned task of rendering the safe invisible.

Chapter Three

Elias Moffet traveled in a lavishly appointed carriage, painted black with polished brass metal work, in stark contrast to the livery Captain Clayton had taken. It had a uniformed out-driver at the reins of an imposing Morgan draft horse. Two lanterns hung from holders on the carriage above and on either side of the driver to provide a dim light on the roadway, especially important when it left the coal-gas-lit streets of Beacon Hill, among the first to be lit with gas in Boston and the country. The carriage deftly navigated its way down the cobblestone pathway from Moffet's mansion and connected to a hard-packed dirt-and-gravel road that stretched southwest away from the city center until it reached the neighboring town of Brookline, just outside of Boston's city limits.

The carriage stopped in front of a residence on a street of three-story row houses. Each had an exterior coal oil lamp on a post out in front near the street and a cleaner-burning, candle-lit lantern attached to the house next to the entrance. Both provided a dim but adequate light to navigate with. The houses were far more modest by comparison than those in Moffet's lofty Beacon Hill, but still in an upscale part of greater Boston that resembled more of a neighborhood than an actual separate municipality. Elias Moffet jumped out before the driver could get down to open the door.

He hurried up the brick pathway to the house's entrance. There were no steps to climb with the doorway at street level. He firmly rapped the door's knocker configured in the shape of a mortar and pestle, the emblem of an apothecary.

Inside, the loud, incessant rapping brought Jonas Cabot to the door.

"I'll answer the door!" he yelled to whomever else might have responded. He wondered who might be responsible for the abrupt intrusion into the evening's tranquility just as dinner was being prepared and close to being served.

Jonas was in his mid-fifties, of medium height, and although thin of frame had a robust look about his face punctuated by kind eyes that seemed to widen when he smiled. His brown hair was evenly mixed with gray, although the gray dominated his neatly trimmed goatee that gave him a dignified professorial appearance. Jonas was the owner of Cabot's Apothecary & Medicinals, with three storefront locations in Boston and well known to the prosperous and expanding merchant class as well as the city's elite. The establishments' signs had recently been updated with the addition: *Jonas Cabot, chemist and pharmacist.* Jonas was the first in Boston to adopt the title of 'pharmacist,' in place of the term 'druggist,' since an association by that name had been organized in New York to adopt standards and qualifications to elevate the apothecary trade to one with professional status.

Jonas frowned as he checked a pocket watch as he reached the door and then promptly opened it.

"Who could possibly-"

Jonas was stunned by the appearance of Elias B. Moffet, his face lit by the flickering flame of the lantern that hung outside next to the door.

"Mr. Moffet?" he asked hesitantly, finding it hard to believe what his own eyes were telling him.

"Hello, Jonas. May I come in?"

"Oh, of course, of course. Please do," Jonas blurted out recovering from the shock of seeing Moffet at his door and instantly embarrassed at not immediately inviting him in. He quickly stepped aside to allow Moffet's entry.

"Let me take your cloak and hat, sir," Jonas said as Moffet entered the house's small foyer lit by an overhead, candle lamp with a metal shade that reflected the yellow light throughout the foyer. He hung up Moffet's apparel on a nearby stand.

"Thank you, Jonas. I apologize for the late hour, possibly interrupting your dinner, not sending word in advance but-"

"Please, no need to apologize, Mr. Moffet."

"I had hoped I would catch you home this evening."

"You're welcome at any time. Have you had dinner? We'd be honored to have you join us."

"That is kind of you but no. I need to talk with you about an extremely urgent matter and then still meet with others and attended to vital concerns."

"I- I see. Come in here then."

Jonas opened doors that led into a small but comfortable living room with modest book cases, a small desk, and several cushioned chairs with end tables and a small elevated fireplace on a wall. He lit a lamp on one of the tables as Moffet continued.

"Jonas, I cannot stress enough the importance of our conversation and that it requires the utmost secrecy."

Jonas's confused look turned even more so.

"I-I understand, sir. Um, please, please be seated and let me inform others I have an unexpected visitor. I'll be right back."

"Of course, Jonas."

Moments later Jonas returned followed by a maid who carried in a tray holding decanters of whiskey and brandy and heavy crystal glasses. The tray was set down on an end table, and Jonas set down a box of cigars next to it that he had brought in. Jonas closed the doors the moment the maid left.

"I'll light a fire, take the chill off."

"Thank you, Jonas, for your hospitality," Mofffet said, continuing to survey the room as Jonas arranged kindling under split wood already on the grate and lit the fire with a long match.

"You must be bursting with curiosity at this point," Moffet added.

"Quite true. Brandy or whiskey?" Jonas asked.

"Brandy, please."

Jonas partially filled a glass and handed it to Moffet, then poured a drink for himself. He sat down next to his unexpected and surprising guest, one of the country's foremost businessmen and the head of arguably Boston's most distinguished family, no member of whom had ever set foot in his home before.

"Please help yourself to the cigars if so inclined."

"Thank you. Now I'll get right to it. Gold has been discovered in California."

"Really?" Jonas responded, genuinely surprised by the significance of the news but it did not lessen his confusion about Moffet's presence in his home, it only added to it.

Moffet continued in a tone that barely contained his excitement although his next words were said in a lowered, hushed tone. "A discovery that could very well turn out to be one of the largest, if not the largest, ever on this continent."

"Astounding," Jonas replied, eyebrows raised as he leaned forward in his chair. "And to think that territory was just ceded to us!" he exclaimed.

"I received this monumental news from a confidential source whose representative arrived earlier today on a clipper ship via the Isthmus direct from California."

"A clipper via the isthmus. My word," Jonas responded truly impressed.

"Not many people know of this yet, Jonas. And California statehood won't be far behind."

"I-I am flattered that you deem me worthy to share such news with, but why, Mr. Moffet?"

"I do so to inquire about your remarkable and well-regarded son."

"Joshua?" Jonas frowned, "How -"

"He's Harvard educated in mineralogy and the sciences."

"Yes. Chemical science originally, then mineralogy, although this new field of metals, metallurgy I believe he calls it, is dominating his time now. It is his passion, I'm afraid."

"Really? Interesting . . ." Moffet thought for a moment. "Well, that could prove valuable as well."

He noticed Jonas looked distressed. "Do I sense you may not approve?"

Jonas let out a sigh before answering.

"It has led him to an involvement with firearms, armaments, that is of concern."

"I see," Moffet replied trying to decide how best to address Jonas's obvious distress.

Before Moffet could say more Jonas continued, "He met one of the sons of a man named Remington at University. They are a family of gunsmiths, and without warning, he took a job at their metal works in upstate New York. He was there for a few months until he came back here to work, but now he's employed by another firearms maker named Samuel Colt."

"Colt, you say? Interesting. So, Jonas, I gather you had hoped he would join you in the apothecary trade, take over the family business?"

"If truth be told, I had hoped he would have used the knowledge gained working with me during his school years to pursue medicine, attend university in Paris actually."

"Ah, a physician. A noble profession to be sure."

"The most noble of all, I believe. But I don't mean to imply, in any way, disappointment. Joshua has made us quite proud with his remarkable academic achievements and as a person who-"

"Jonas, to finally come to the point of this intrusion into your evening, I would like to meet with Joshua, as soon as possible. Could you facilitate and hasten that?"

"Um, of course, but I still don't understand why-"

"I've had my eye on him for some time, and I'm prepared to offer the potential of partnership if he would accept a great responsibility."

Jonas's eyes widened in disbelief. "A-a *partnership* in your firm?"

"His education, skills, combined with an impeccable reputation and your family name, make him uniquely qualified, regardless of his youth, to help establish a Moffet & Co. assaying office and mint in *San Francisco, California*."

Jonas stared at Moffet as his disbelief turned to genuine excitement not just about the astounding opportunity Moffet wanted to offer his son, but also that it might lure him away from his new fascination with metals manufacturing and, more importantly, the abhorrent armaments trade.

"But, if you do not mind, Jonas, say nothing about the particulars to your son until we all meet."

Jonas nodded in agreement. "Of course, sir."

******

An occasional carriage passed by Moffet's Beacon Hill mansion with the loud, rhythmic clacking of the horse's hooves ringing out on the cobblestone street that was lit by the Globe Gas Company's 'coal gas vapor burner' lamplights. The lantern-style, copper fixtures were attached to the top of wrought-iron posts and found in Boston's city center and its upper-class neighborhoods. Lamplighters went around each evening lighting the gas lamps and again in the early morning to turn them off and replace wicks when needed.

Inside the elegant dining room of the mansion, its oval mahogany table was comfortably and fully occupied, without being extended with inserts, and lit by a half dozen, thick, scented candles in silver holders placed down the center of the table. Casual small talk was heard as the remnants of a lavish dinner were being cleared by servants. Moffet and his wife, Abigail, sat on either end of the table. An oil lamp on the side serving tables provided additional light.

Abigail, a forty-year-old, handsome woman who wore her elegance and jewels effortlessly, was from a prominent Philadelphia family that could trace their ancestry directly back to William Penn's first group of colonists. She was Moffet's second wife, after his first marriage had been annulled under questionable circumstances. Their union though had also failed to produce children, giving credence to the fact that the problem in that regard was solely Moffet's. But Abigail's lineage, combined with a great-grandfather who was a Revolutionary general, proved invaluable to Moffet's business dealings.

Guests filled each of the table's curved sides and included Jonas Cabot and his wife, Clara, a fifty-year-old, somewhat plump woman with kind eyes and a quiet manner that hid a sharp intelligence and a self-education provided by extensive reading. They sat on either side of Abigail. At the other end of the table, sitting on the right side of Moffet was his chief engineer, Barnabas Keyes, who also sat next to Jonas. Keyes was imposing, six-foot tall with the build and scarred eyebrows of a bare-knuckle prize fighter which he had briefly been in his youth. He had red hair that was neatly trimmed and combed down in a wave across his head and sported a trimmed mustache that connected to mutton chop sideburns. He spoke with a slight but noticeable Scottish brogue.

On Moffet's left side sat Joshua Cabot with his mother next to him. In stark contrast to Keyes's muscular build, the twenty-four-year-old Joshua was slight of frame, could even be described as thin, was clean shaven, with dark, longish, semi-combed hair. He had been sickly as a child and, as often happened in the early 19th century, his parents worried about and were prepared for the possibility that he would die in childhood, as had a sister born two years before him. He was fortunate, though, to be born into a family of modest wealth from his father's prosperous apothecary business. As a result, they had the means to keep Joshua quite sheltered as a child and educated by tutors who also taught him Latin and French–Latin being a language requirement for apothecaries, which it was assumed Joshua would also become if he survived into adulthood.

Joshua had been regularly attended by a physician until reaching the age of twelve when his overall health seemed to significantly improve, as did his frail body. The unhealthy pallor of his skin and his muscular development improved noticeably, and he eventually attained average height. He had developed sharply

defined facial features that prompted all who met him later during his Harvard years, men and women alike, to described him as quite handsome.

In a household surrounded by books and constantly read to as a child by his mother, it soon became clear he was an intellectually gifted child when he began to read independently at three years old. He continued to surprise and delight his parents as he progressed to read, with comprehension, textbooks on chemistry and the natural sciences by the age of eight. Books became his world, and were encouraged by his tutors. They provided an escape from a sheltered childhood overshadowed by the specter of fatal illness, reinforced by the ever-present lingering reminder of his older sister's childhood death.

Joshua listened politely to the small talk around the Moffets' elegant dinner table, mostly about the unusually mild spring weather and the wonder of the new coal-gas lit street lamps. As he did so it was easy to notice he had his mother's expressive and inquisitive eyes, but frown lines on his forehead were a testament to a pensive and often intensely serious expression.

And the lines had become quite evident as he became aware that Keyes, whom he sat across from, had been repeatedly glancing at him throughout the dinner. Joshua felt intimidated by his critically appraising eye, even when Keyes talked with his father. Joshua, somewhat introverted by nature, tended to be shy in larger gatherings with people he did not know and said little during the dinner. He briefly answered casual questions directed to him by Moffet about his Harvard days and academic pursuits, but did not initiate further conversation.

Finally, Moffet threw down his napkin after his plate had been cleared and proclaimed, "Ladies, I beg your pardon. The men have important business to discuss in the library."

Joshua entered the library with his father, followed by Keyes and Moffet who were talking in a low voice. At that point all Joshua knew about the surprising and curious dinner with one of the most well-known and wealthiest of Boston's elite was what his father had told him, that they had all been invited to have dinner at Moffet's mansion, and Elias Moffet wanted to speak with Jonas about a possible business venture. When Joshua voiced no interest in attending, Jonas had, rather uncharacteristically, strenuously insisted that it was vitally important that Joshua accompany them. So, he did.

A crackling blaze in the fireplace greeted them and added to the relaxed intimacy of the meeting. They sat down in the library's heavy and comfortable leather chairs, after helping themselves to snifters of brandy and expensive cigars, except for Joshua who perused the library's impressive collection of books. Moffet took notice.

"I've collected books for some time, Joshua."

"It is a truly impressive collection, Mr. Moffet."

"You are welcome to borrow any books of interest."

Joshua gave a nod. "Thank you, sir."

"Now, sit down and join us. I'm sure you are curious about why, exactly, we are all together here."

"Um, to discuss a business venture with my father as I understand," Joshua said as he helped himself to a snifter of brandy and sat in an empty chair positioned directly across from Moffet.

"Not with your father but with you."

"With *me*?" Joshua glanced over at his father, who smiled and gave a shrug of 'what could I do?'

"Yes, you. Your experience, academic background, especially in the sciences, reputation, your family name, all make you uniquely qualified for a most unusual and, frankly, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

The lines of Joshua's frown deepened, and he shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"Gold has been discovered in California," Moffet said and eyed Joshua for his reaction. But the young man's expression showed no change. Moffet continued undeterred.

"Very few people know this yet. And I want you, Joshua, to join the group I'm sending to San Francisco to establish and oversee an assaying office, smelting foundry and mint for E.B. Moffet and Company."

Joshua's jaw dropped and he glanced at his father who nodded to him and smiled in excited approval. The first thing that entered his mind was that the whole idea was ridiculous and he couldn't possibly even consider it, much less accept. He wondered then how long he needed to politely appear he was at least considering the proposal from an individual such as Elias Moffet before turning it down. He certainly would not do or say anything that would embarrass his father or impair a relationship that could affect his father's business.

"How do you know -"

Moffet interrupted Joshua's expected question.

"I maintain contacts in various locations in North and South America, and pay rather handsomely to be informed about the discoveries of gold or silver that could prove to be significant."

"I see. And, um, when are you planning to send this group to California?"

"In eleven days," Moffet answered without hesitation.

Joshua was shocked.

"Leave in just eleven days!"

"In this case time is truly money," Moffet said. "Outside of California very few have received this news yet or even understand the potential enormity of the discovery."

"A clipper ship with a stop at the Isthmus will be departing then," Keyes added.

"And the next one could be as long as six weeks later," Moffet emphasized, leaning forward in his chair toward Joshua.

"A few weeks even a few days," he continued, "could be the difference between success and, well, less success."

"Mr. Moffet, I am humbled and quite flattered that you would consider me for this opportunity but, my work, everything I'm interested in, is *here*. I've signed a contract with Samuel Colt, the Colt Firearms Company, to supervise castings at his new foundry and -"

"I know of Mr. Colt," Moffet interrupted smiling, "Quite the salesman. So, your fascination with this new field of metallurgy is focused on perfecting firearms?"

"At the moment. I worked at the E. Remington & Sons factory in Ilion, New York, until Sam - um, Mr. Colt - gave me the chance to return home as it were. His foundry and manufacturing facility is the only one involved with developing new metal alloys in all of New England," Joshua answered after which he noticed his father shifted uncomfortably in his seat and looked distressed. Joshua continued.

"I would prefer to pursue metal research and application involving machinery, especially the new steam engines being developed in England, but Mr. Colt's factory is the best that's available to me at present."

Moffet nodded in understanding.

"Nevertheless, firearm manufacturing is a growing business, quite important for the country's defense, and provides important jobs in Boston. And, frankly, could give me the money I need to establish my own laboratory to do the research I'm passionate about."

Joshua eyed his father who sighed and smiled at him weakly.

"*Could* give you the money?" Moffet asked.

"Well, if the innovative firearms designs, new alloys I'm developing, casting and machining processes, can facilitate large orders for government contracts, of course."

"Joshua, I share your enthusiasm for the science of metal fabrication and certainly the development of firearms. If we don't do it, Europe will."

"It will surely change the future, Mr. Moffet."

"I agree. And I'm prepared to also offer a *guarantee* that you will have all you need for your laboratory, right here, when you return."

This statement got Joshua's attention.

"A guarantee?"

"Absolutely. In writing."

Joshua considered Moffet's compelling assurance.

"I will provide a promissory note in the amount of five-thousand dollars backed by a certified draft to be held at my bank in your father's name until you return."

"Really . . .?" Joshua sat back in the chair, forced to contemplate the offer. Moffet eyed Keyes who nodded, and looked over at Jonas whose face revealed his positive reaction.

Joshua thought about all that had been said. There was no question his work with Colt had been exhilarating. He had made the initial breakthroughs with using a new steel alloy and designs for radically new and innovative firearms and ammunition. The problem was, Colt constantly struggled to find the resources to allow them to fabricate and test their new designs which was a constant source of frustration for Joshua. So much so that he had been seriously considering returning to the Remington facility.

"But," Joshua finally responded, "when would I return, Mr. Moffet?"

"In three, maybe four years, if the gold discovery proves as significant as I expect it will."

Joshua's eyes went wide. "*Four* years! With all due respect, sir, I -"

"Your laboratory would be a *bonus*, to the opportunity to truly make your fortune, allowing you to do *whatever* you wish the rest of your life," Moffet said cutting off Joshua's attempted rejection.

The declaration silenced Joshua and his face reflected the impact of Moffet's last words which echoed in his mind, *"do whatever you wish the rest of your life".* For the first time he gave serious consideration to the proposal from Boston's most prominent businessman.

"You will be so busy, Joshua, the months, years, will go by faster than you think," Moffet added.

Joshua's eyes moved from Moffet, to Keyes, who had a slight, expectant smile, and finally to his father's anxious face as he mulled all Moffet had said. The truth of the matter was, he had become genuinely intrigued by the opportunity.

"Moffet and Company *partners* do quite well, Joshua," Moffet said calculating it was the right time to mention that inducement.

Joshua's eyes widened. They instantly met Moffet's gaze who let a slight smile show, feeling the implication of his words had the intended effect. But Joshua remained silent, and his frown deepened.

"Perhaps there are romantic considerations?"

Joshua sighed, hesitated a moment, looked at his father, whose face revealed an apprehensive uncertainty. Joshua shook his head but did so hesitantly.

"Um . . . well, no, not-not really, no," he answered quietly and shifted uncomfortably in his chair making eye contact with no one, suggesting there was more to his answer than he was prepared to admit.

"And remember, Mr. Keyes here, my chief engineer, will take care of the burdensome tasks of assay office and foundry construction and help oversee the mint's stamping operation. His loyalty paid off with a partnership also."

Joshua looked over at Keyes who nodded and smiled.

"I was a young quarryman in Vermont when Mr. Moffet took notice of me after he bought the quarry. He made me a cutter's boss. Like you, Mr. Moffet saw something in me and sent me to get an education and I became an engineer. Now I'm a partner."

"Barnabas is the toughest man I've ever met. Always gets the job done," Moffet added.

"No doubt," Joshua responded.

"And you'll have an assistant," Moffet added.

This got Joshua's attention and raised his eyebrows.

"A young man, Mr. Ethan Poole, my nephew who's recently joined us, eager for the challenge."

Joshua looked at his father, who was nodding in approval as Moffet continued.

"What more could a young, educated man want? The adventure of a lifetime; travel to a new American land few have seen, at an historic time in the country's history."

"And California will certainly become a state soon," Jonas added.

Joshua took a deep breath and his expression suggested he'd made a decision. He began nodding.

"I, I will talk with Sam, um, Mr. Colt, tomorrow."

"And, in the matter of your contract, I'll be happy to personally discuss it with, *Mr. Colt*, if necessary, as well."

Moffet stood up, smiled knowingly, and refilled their glasses from the decanter.

"This calls for a toast! Welcome to E.B. Moffet and Company, Joshua Cabot!"

******

A livery moved down a sunlit street of narrow but elegant three-story residences called 'town houses,' similar to row houses but newer and slightly larger. The buildings lined each side of the street with mature beech and maple trees in front of each, bursting with spring buds. The street, although not paved with cobblestone, had a layer of small stone mixed with sand over the packed dirt underneath that allowed rain to drain and keep the mud to a minimum. And, like most upper-class neighborhoods, a cart came down the street twice a day, collecting horse dung from carriages and liveries. The sun was in its early afternoon position, and the temperature was warmer than normal. The neighborhood, not far from the city's center, was home to Boston's prosperous merchant class and had easy access to the expanse of warehouses on the wharf or located near the harbor area.

The conveyance stopped in front of one of the houses. The driver jumped down and opened the door for Joshua. He got out, paid the liveryman, and walked on inlaid bricks that formed a raised path up to the house that, like all the others, was made of dark red, kiln-fired clay brick. He climbed five stairs, took a deep breath, and let it out as he rapped the door's American Eagle knocker.

Inside the foyer of the house, the door was opened by an apron-clad family servant, Mrs. Stewart. Joshua removed his fashionable, short top, Cahill hat.

"Why, Mr. Cabot. Hello, sir. How unexpected. Haven't seen you in a while. Come in please," she said in a warm, familiar manner.

"Hello, Mrs. Stewart. How are you?"

"Oh, just fine, sir. Thank you for asking."

"Is Martha, Miss Spencer, in?"

"Is she expecting you?"

"Actually, no. But I was hoping -"

"No matter, Mr. Cabot. Have a seat. I'll let her know you're here. I'm *sure* she'll be pleased to see you. Can I take your things? Get you anything?"

"I'm fine, thank you," Joshua said then added, "Please also convey my greetings to Mr. and Mrs. Spencer."

"Polite of you, but they are presently out of town, Mr. Cabot," the servant answered and hurried away and up nearby stairs.

He put his hat on a hook on the stand in the foyer and hung his coat underneath.

A few minutes later Martha Spencer, a young woman of nineteen, appeared at the top of the stairway and greeted Joshua with excitement.

"Joshua! What a surprise. How pleasant to see you this afternoon," Martha said as she hurried down the stairs. She was a comely young lady with an elegant, privileged look and manners. She had a pleasant face with smiling eyes. Although not considered beautiful, she possessed an engaging personality, sharp intelligence, and had been schooled in the demands of running a household, typical for the times for a privileged young woman.

"I had begun to fret over how long it had become since last seeing you," she said with genuine excitement in her voice and on her face as she reached the bottom stair.

"Hello, Martha. You, you look wonderful."

"Thank you, Joshua," she said and gave him a peck on the check.

"Can we, um, speak in private?" Joshua asked clearly uncomfortable, with his frown lines becoming pronounced.

"Of course, Joshua," Martha said both intrigued and becoming excited with the anticipation of what she had fervently hoped, that Joshua had finally decided they could announce to the world what they had kept between them.

Martha sat on an embroidered, tufted, winged sofa across from Joshua on a matching chair in a small parlor in the back of the home's first floor. The room looked out at the garden and contained various pots on stands with flower plants that had just started to sprout. Martha's framed needlepoint samplers hung on the walls and a basket of knitting was on a side table next to her. But her look was one of utter disbelief that matched the tone of profound distress in her voice.

"And you, you will be gone three or, or *four* years?"

Joshua nodded and avoided eye contact as he responded.

"It is truly the opportunity of a lifetime, Martha," he said looking down as he spoke. Had he looked directly at her he would have seen she was crest fallen and valiantly fighting back tears.

"I wish I could tell you more, but I'm not at liberty to say what I'll be involved in, just that I'll be leaving Boston on a clipper ship in ten days and traveling around to the opposite coast of this continent. I am truly sorry for that."

Silence filled the room as Martha tried to regain her composure. She wiped away a tear as her look of stunned disbelief turned to more of an expression of the numbness of shock as the realization of Joshua's news took firm hold of her consciousness. Joshua resumed talking but Martha did not hear him.

"It will all become apparent, in the newspapers I'm sure, at some point after I depart."

She just stared at him dumbstruck, then struggled to respond.

"I-I am caught unprepared as to what to say, Joshua."

Joshua haltingly repeated his apology. "I am truly sorry for-"

Martha interrupted as if not hearing him and gave voice to her thoughts, "We have not publicly announced our intentions because-because you had insisted on not doing so . . . until you were *established*."

"Yes." Joshua interrupted nervously. "And this new opportunity will eventually and definitely allow that, Martha." He leaned forward to make sure he had her attention, and added, "But, well, since I would be gone for so long I, I think it best to, um-"

"Yes, of course," she interrupted and stared at him for a moment before continuing. "So much can erode affections, intentions, over *three* or *four* years," Martha said but in a tone that was sharper and could have been described as sarcastic if it wasn't for the emotion in the words she tried to hold in check.

"I've-I've always been quite fond of you Martha and I hope-"

"Frond of me? *Frond* is the word you use now?" Martha responded pointedly with disbelief in her tone before he could finish.

They sat in silence as Martha looked away, clearly struggling to contain deeper, angry feelings while trying to maintain her dignity and fight back a flood of tears. But her emotions began to overwhelm her. Her distress became impossible to hide. Her lower lip quivered. Her face began to show her growing realization over the enormity of Joshua's announcement as well as the devastation that was taking hold inside her from the stunning news. Her next words couldn't mask her anger.

"I-I allowed your professed feelings for me to become passionate, *intimate*, surrendering to your desires as I've never done with anyone. Since then, I tried to excuse how distant you've become these last many weeks after seeing you *so* often after you returned from New York and now-"

"Oh Martha, no, that is not-I've been consumed by my work with Samuel Colt and-"

"Now you suddenly decide to leave and not return for *four years*!"

Martha began to sob. Joshua reached out to touch her shoulder to console her but she'd have none of it. She pushed his hand away.

"I gave you what you wanted, gave you my honor, and now there's no reason for you to stay to keep the promise you made."

"That is not at all what happened, Martha. I swear it. I never meant to-"

"So, Joshua, I must ask." Martha once again interrupted him, but now her tone was harder, and she sat more erect. "What expectations did you have bringing me this news? A hope I would simply wait for you to return?"

"I could not expect that or ask it. I just wanted to tell you this news immediately."

Martha had to close her eyes tightly to hold back a resurgence of tears. She finally opened them. Even though her eyes were glistening she looked directly at Joshua and regained control of her emotions.

"All right, you've told me. Is there anything more to say, Joshua?"

"Only, I want you to know that I've treasured our time together, and-"

Martha cut him off even more firmly this time.

"Joshua, if you write me, I will write you back."

She stood up, with her chin upraised, she said, "I promise no more than that."

Joshua stood in response. "Thank you, Martha. That is, um, that is kind of you, and I promise to do so."

"You will excuse me for not showing you out," Martha said curtly.

"Of course," Jonathan said in a contrite tone and promptly left, quite relieved to do so.

Martha maintained her erect bearing until she heard the front door close, after which she crumpled down onto the sofa and began to cry uncontrollably.