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**Opening Extract from...**

# **The Traitor's Wife**

Written by Kathleen Kent

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THE  
*Traitor's*  
*Wife*

KATHLEEN KENT

MACMILLAN



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*For Kevin and Kim*

## P R E F A C E

*London, England, April 1649*

THE WOMAN WORKED her way out of the crowd, grabbing Cromwell by the cloak, and pulled at it until he turned to face her. She was small with plain wheat-colored hair, but the blush in her cheeks was high, as with a fever, and her voice was surprisingly deep.

She said to him, "Sir, will you stay and speak with us?"

He had a mind to pull his cloak roughly from her grasp and move away into the darkened safety of the House of Commons, but he looked over the shifting, enclosing mass of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, who had come to petition him to release the imprisoned leaders of the Leveller movement and he tempered his voice to a fatherly tone. "It is not for women to petition, missus. You should be home at your plates and bowls."

"Sir," the woman said, "we scarce have any dishes left to tend, and those we have we are not sure to keep."

The minister of Parliament who had been close at Cromwell's heels, and who was eager to pass into the Great Hall, said with little patience, "I find it strange that women are now petitioning."

The woman cut her eyes to the man and said immodestly,

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“That which is strange is not of necessity unlawful.” When the minister brushed past her, she turned back to Cromwell and said bitterly, “It was strange that you cut off the king’s head, yet I suppose you will justify it.”

He stopped and this time he did pull his cloak roughly out of her hands. The supreme impudence of this little mouse, he thought, and turned the full import of his gaze on her. It was a gaze that had faced down generals in the field, brought court councilmen to anguished tears, and, some said, had looked without remorse or pity into the sightless eyes of the king as he lay in his lead-lined casket. There had been a time when he would have listened to the harplings of local women such as this, and their workaday husbands, when they still had the means to pay for armaments and food and fill the ranks with fighting bodies. But the Great War was over and he was nearly done with rubbing against the masses and would soon leave such rustic negotiations to the county councilmen.

He motioned impatiently for her to move away but she planted her foot in front of him and called out hoarsely, “If you take away the lives of our leaders, or the lives of any contrary to law, nothing shall satisfy us but the lives of them that do it.”

To his dismay he could feel the crowd pushing against them towards the open entranceway of the House. At first he had seen only women in the surrounding faces, but he realized they were solely at the fore, being shored up from behind by common men as well as rebellious soldiers, some of whom had raised their cocked pistols into the air. He watched as twenty or so men rushed into the House, shouting, “Free them, free them, free them...”

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Now half the day would be spent clearing the hallways of quarrelsome, menacing dissenters, his suit to raise the urgent funds needed to invade Ireland delayed for Christ knew how long.

The woman's sea green ribbon had slipped from her narrow chest, sliding down her arm, coming to rest like a wilted laurel around her waist. Two more women, likewise wearing the banner of the Leveller cause, emerged from the pack and entwined their arms with hers, forming a living chain to bar his movement forward. He had seen the same expressions on the faces of women fanatics of every degenerate caste and error-filled belief. Catholics, Anabaptists, Quakers, Diggers, Fifth Monarchists—they all carried the same look of unreasoning, unbending fervor. When he was a child he had seen a witch burn, and she had held that same unyielding, outraged mask until the flesh curled away from her skull like an Easter candle.

He took two steps towards the little mouse and, bringing his face close to hers, said firmly, "Will you to home, woman."

"This is England, sir. It is my home," she answered. Her eyes fluttered fearfully, but she tightened her grip on each flanking woman as though steeling for a blow, and pressed her lips together into a thin, implacable line.

And in that moment he recognized her. He had seen her many times from a distance: a screeching prophetess, standing on her box above the overanxious crowds, offering promises of impossible equalities. As though titled men of property would simply, upon hearing her words, yield up their ancient, hard-won inheritances to landless yeomen or their widows. He began to push his way around the women, using his staff to breach their clasped

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hands, demanding roughly, "What is your name?...By God, I'll have it, and you shall know the reasons why."

"Morgan, sir. My name is Mrs. Morgan." The fall of his staff had caught her sharply across the wrist and she pulled her stricken hand up to her breast, but she did not retreat from his path. She had spoken the word "Mor-gan" in two distinct parts, as someone in mourning would have said "death-knell" or "grave-stone" or even "mur-der," and for an instant he lost his footing. He turned his head to follow the tunings of his ears, and when he again met her eyes, he knew he had got it right. The image of fresh-laid straw fouled with the blood and brain matter of a headless corpse slid into his mind, like mercury poured into one ear.

"Jesu, woman, get you home..." He rushed past her into the darkened caverns of the House bristling with roaming bands of soldiers, clerks, councilmen, goodwives, and even a few doxies off the streets. Somewhere within the Speaker's chambers, there were shouts and a clash of arms, and bits of shredded parchment swirled around his head as though the very weather had begun dissent, bringing snow in April. He slipped into a privy, blindly closing the weighted door. He went hard to his knees and heard his thick cloak catch and tear on a nail. Two men scuffling, perhaps a guardsman and a dissenter, fell heavily against the door and then moved away down the hall, swearing and making oaths against each other.

Every undoing makes a sound, he thought, and these are the sounds of the unraveling of kingships and alliances and nations. For the hundredth, for the thousandth, time that day he prayed for guidance but felt his spirit blunted against the building noise and chaos outside. He heard his name being called from some-

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where inside the chamber, faintly but desperately, sounding like a drowning man calling out for a line of hemp.

He stood and placed his hand against the door, dignifying his presence, setting his face to iron, and when he finally exited the privy into the tide of men-at-arms, he braced himself by saying, “Mrs. Morgan, Mrs. Morgan, if you can bear to carry that name, I can bear to remember it...”

*Lord, thou knowest how busy I must be this day; if I forget thee,  
do not thou forget me.*

— SIR JACOB ASTLEY,  
*prayer before the Battle of Edgehill, English Civil War*

*I had rather a plain russet-coated Captain, that knows  
what he fights for, and loves what he knows, than that which  
you call a Gentle-man and is nothing else.*

— OLIVER CROMWELL

*[The Celts] were chopped down with axes and swords but the blind  
fury never left them while there was breath in their bodies.*

— PAUSANIAS,  
*Greek historian*

THE  
*Traitor's*  
*Wife*

## CHAPTER 1

### *Billerica, Massachusetts, March 1673*

THE YOUNG WOMAN stepped from the wagon and turned to face the driver still holding the slackened reins. From Daniel's vantage point, looking through the shuttered windows of the common room, he could not read the woman's face but could see the rigid set of her back. The man in the wagon was small and as hard-set as a dried persimmon. The brim of his felt hat was slung so low and angled over his eyes that its very putting on must have been an act of vengeance. Daniel had met his wife's uncle only once at market, and the number of words exchanged between them could not have filled a walnut. But Daniel remembered well the look of triumph on Andrew Allen's face when the old man bested him at a calf auction. That he was now giving his daughter the last of his cautious, brusque advice was clear from the way he punctuated his words with a string of country sayings: "Hech, now listen to me," and "Hark you well to me now." The sorts of words that the old Scotsmen still used were like pepperweed in a mutton stew.

Daniel moved through the common room and stood at the

open door. He saluted the old man, saying, "Will you come in for a breakfast?"

To his relief Goodman Allen shook his head and with a few muttered words of good-bye pulled his wagon around, taking the road back towards Andover. The woman stood for a long while watching her father ride away, the hem of her dress slowly soaking up the wet, ice-filled mud of the yard. Daniel studied the unbending arch of her neck, thinking it was a sad thing that she be past twenty and not yet married, still sent out by her parents into service, her few things put into some bit of cotton sacking.

Taking the full measure of her forlorn appearance, Daniel shook his head in sympathy. Andrew Allen was prosperous enough; he could have at the very least provided his daughter with her own bed. But Daniel knew from his wife, Patience, that for all the old man's parsimonious airs, he swore, drank hard ale, and gambled at dice whenever, and wherever, the opportunity arose, and was tighter than a tick paying for anything he couldn't raise from the ground or fashion himself from driftwood.

It would be a blessing for his wife to have another woman at the settlement. He could hear Patience even now retching and puking into a bucket by the bed, as sick in her fifth month with their third child as any girl would be with her first. He was eager to see his wife's cousin settled into the house as quickly as possible. The roads were freeing themselves of ice, and though they be a rutted misery, Daniel had a certainty that if he didn't attend to his carting soon, others would beat him to Boston, getting the best of the off-loaded goods from England, Holland, and Spain.

He called her gently by name, "Martha," telling her to come in and settle herself by the fire. She slowly turned her head in profile

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to him as though still reluctant to give up her vigil on the road. A few dark strands of her hair, as coarse as a horse's mane, had blown free from her cap and whipped around her cheek in the damp wind. He braced himself for the onslaught of tears that surely must come in answer to being left, yet again, in the home of near strangers. But when she turned fully to face him, his breath caught in his chest, for there, in place of tears, was dry-eyed fury, and a mouth so pinched and implacably set that his first thought was to hide his tender belly from her approaching form. Good God, he thought, and cleared a wide space at the door for her to enter.

A HEAVY RAIN had started that morning, pouring in unbroken sheets, and though Patience had begged her husband to put off his leaving one more day, Daniel had thrown an oiled canvas over his head, mounted his carting wagon, and clucked his heavy gelding out of the yard and onto the road. But for the downpour, Martha thought, her cousin would still be standing at the door crying, holding her slightly protruding belly, seemingly unaware that Daniel had made all haste in leaving. Martha looked about the room, noting all of the tamped-down and dirt-ridden rushes scattered beneath the table, the scabs of food clinging to the previous evening's dishes, the soiled linen loosely draped over a chair—the entire unwholesome mess creating odors both fetid and close. Patience, finally closing the door against the rain, began showing Martha the places where the house goods were stored.

“Of the cellar,” Patience said, motioning for Martha to lift the trap in the floor, “there are cranberries in a firkin of water, some

wheat flour, cornmeal, two baskets left of apples, pumpkins, and squash.”

Martha took a candle from the table and, lifting the hem of her skirt, stepped down the shallow ladder to the cellar. She held the candle high and saw at once that rats and mice had done their job during the winter months, chewing through the poorly tended baskets. Remembering her mother’s stone-lined cellar, carefully cleared each day of blackening mold or encroaching pests, she wrinkled her nose at a braid of darkly speckled onions, rotted and evil-smelling from hanging too close to the sweating dirt walls. She could hear Patience shifting her weight restlessly in the space above her head. Finally Patience called down, “It’s been a month or more that I cannot climb the ladder. I send the children down to fetch food for the table...and they...things may not be as they should...”

In the small arc of light, Martha quickly tallied the remainder of the cellar’s holdings: one half-barrel of cider, thirty head of dried corn mixed with peas, two sealed pots of salted pork and salted cod each, one covered tin of autumn tallow, and fifteen candles in a box. The approaching scarcity of food would have to be addressed at once, as it would be days yet before any seed could be put to ground for the house garden. She had been told by Daniel that one of his two field men was a creditable hunter. They would need his skill, and soon, for they would all require fresh meat, whether it had swum or crawled, to have the strength to put the house to rights.

She prodded with her foot a bag of potatoes made unfit for eating by lying too long on the damp floor, but she reckoned with a hard boiling the spuds could be rendered to starch for the wash.

It would take a week at least to get clean all the dirty linens. Even now there were three or four baby's clouts hung close to the fire drying, looking as if they had not been scrubbed for weeks.

She held the candle up to light her way to the ladder and saw the pregnant woman's face appear at the hatchway, her eyes and lips still swollen from crying. Underlit by the soft yellow light, Patience looked like nothing so much as a petulant child, even though the woman was on the downhill path to twenty-five. As Martha climbed up out of the cellar, Patience was saying, "I think it fitting that Will and Joanna be made a porridge now." Two children, a boy of perhaps five and a much younger girl, came to stand behind their mother, yawning and rubbing at their faces. Martha bent to drop the cellar trap, hiding a look of disapproval, as it was long past the breakfast hour. When she raised herself upright again, she realized with a jolt that Patience had given her her first order. She'd been there only an hour and already she was being sorted like a common stone to the bottom in household prominence.

"When you are finished with the porridge you may—"

"Cousin." Martha's arms had crept together to cross in front of her apron, fingers gripping tightly at opposing arms. She saw Patience wince at the biting tone, and she quickly unclenched her hands, letting them fall to her sides. She cautioned herself from speaking so abruptly, a habit she had learned from her father, and one her mother had warned her would chase away flies, leaving only the vinegar.

She gentled her tone and began again. "Cousin, if I am to be both husband and wife to this house, there must be an order to things. Breakfast is past, and since there is no greater sauce to a meal than hunger, the children will eat at midday with the rest of us."

“Martha,” Patience said testily, her mouth pinched and resolute. “The children are hungry. I cannot have them hanging about me, crying for their breakfast for two hours or more until their dinner. Cousin though you may be, you are here to aid me in my labors. So now, if you will be so kind, you may serve the porridge for my children.”

Martha saw it all clear in that moment: this was the instant her place in the family would be decided. If she lost her footing at the outset, she would forever be dealt with as no more than a servant. She resisted the indignation that threatened to turn her voice shrill and said quietly, “Very well. But then Will *may* fetch the rain barrel, as he is such a great big lad, and if Joanna can stand on a stool, she *may* wash and wipe the bowls. You will need to call in the men straightaway and, *if* you can push a broom, you need to sweep free those rushes or we’ll have rats crawling into the stew. I will soon need a book for the house accounts, a quill, and whatever ink you have for writing. The washing will be started as soon as we are free of rain, and I will want to strip today every bed and mattress and smoke them for lice.”

There was silence in the room for a few breaths until Patience, grabbing the mantel for balance, retched violently into the hearth. After the spasms had passed, she took each child in hand and walked them back to the bedroom, firmly closing and latching the door behind her.

THE EVENING WAS late before Martha closed the door to her own narrow room. It was farthest from the hearth and cold; she

could see her exhaled breath by the circle of candlelight. She sat carefully on the edge of the bed, feeling the ropes under the mattress give way, and began sorting through her meager belongings: two blankets and a pillow with ticking, a pair of summer stockings for the coming warmer weather, a good collar and cuff. Her father had given her a bowl to show Patience and her husband that his daughter would work to fill it with her own labors and not be a burden to them in this regard.

I have certainly been a burden in my own house, she thought bitterly—although not from what went into her mouth but rather from what came out of it. Earlier, Martha had tried to make amends for her harsh words to her cousin by kneading the pregnant woman's back with lard and mustard seeds. Patience had shown her gratitude with a kiss on the cheek, and Martha had felt a more amicable balance restored between them. But in her deepest heart, she knew that relations between them would always be more like servant and mistress. Patience as a child had been sullen and demanding, with an inborn grasping nature that had blossomed into a sense of entitlement after she had made a profitable marriage with Daniel.

Blowing out the candle, Martha pulled both of the blankets close under her chin and lay in the dark. Here I am, she thought, traded like a kettle to yet another family. She knew it was not just for the wages, though, wages that went to her parents; it was to find her a husband. Her father had said to her that morning as they rode in the wagon, "Ye've spent more time in the company of far relatives than in yer own house and ye still have yer maiden-head. Fer Christ's bloody sake, my hunting dog is more hospitable.

Yer twenty-three and I begin to despair of ye ever comin' to bed with a husband. Can ye not for once, just for once, guard yer tongue and mind yer place?"

It had been pointed out, and often, that Martha's own sister, Mary, had been married and settled in Billerica for ten years; she had a good home and a husband who provided for her, a son to share in their labors, and another babe on the way. Martha rolled over on her side, restless and overly tired, and spread her hands over her belly. She had at times wished it possible to be with child without having to be bothered with the needful attentions of men, their smells and their gropings, their intrusive probings. Even if she were to settle on a husband, and make children of her own, she doubted that her father would ever resolve his disappointments over her stubborn and contrary ways.

Sleep finally came, washing over the demands of her family, the calculations of laundry to be done, the setting to rights of the cellar, the sweeping of the floor, the scrubbing and sanding of pots. The imaginings of work yet to be done stayed with her through her dreams and left her exhausted and ill-tempered in the morning.

DESPITE A HIGH, buffeting wind and slanting rain, the entire household had embarked early on Sunday to attend the meeting-house in the town proper. The women and children rode in the horse cart, each one struggling to hold on to a corner of the oiled canvas draped over their heads, while the hired men followed behind on foot. Sodden dirt caked their boots to midcalf, and the younger of the two, a Scotsman named John with a ruddy childish

face, mired himself again and again in the muck. The other, a Welshman named Thomas, walked between the ruts in easy strides. He was, without doubt, the tallest man Martha had ever seen, and though she was accustomed to having indentured laboring men about her father's house, he had a hard-bitten look about him that made her uneasy.

Past the one-mile mark, the cart tilted dangerously into a hole, one wheel sinking to its upper rim, and Thomas moved quickly to support its sagging weight. John took the horse's head and pulled at the trappings, but the cart would not be freed. They lifted Patience and the children onto a small hillock out of the ground water, but when Thomas offered his arm to help Martha down, she gave him a withering glance and waved him away.

She jumped from the wagon into the mud, and as she struggled to keep her balance, she saw John palm a grin. Her pride would cost a good hour cleaning clods from shoe leather, and her irritation grew as John passively eyed her wilting progress to join Patience and the children on the hump of ground, already crowded with furze and lichen.

Thomas bent his shoulder to the frame and, with little effort from the horse, pushed the cart rocking from the sump. There was no labored exhalation of air or grimacing of his face to prove to the women a superior show of strength. There was only a corded straining of tendons in the forearm and neck to mark the effort of freeing a baling wagon weighted with oak and a full morning's rain.

"As easy as plucking a plover's egg from a nest," John said with a grin and a whistle. He gave his hand to Martha to help her back into the wagon, but she refused it, barking her shins as she climbed

over the spokes. He turned his head to stifle a laugh and she blushed with anger. The Scotsman may blow all he likes, she thought, but it did not give him a place to ridicule her. She would bide her time, waiting for the opportunity, and then he would learn who gave the marching orders in the Taylor household.

After the evening meal, Martha lingered at the table, watching John as his head drooped into the hollow of his chest. The meal she had prepared was sparse but savory, with heat and grease enough to loosen the day from the men's heads, and she knew John was thinking longingly of his bed in the new-built quarters behind the hearth. It was a room he shared with Thomas and was close and cramped. But the walls were boarded tight, the shake roof sealed properly with pitch, and, unlike the barn where the men had slept all last summer, it would not leak.

"I heard howling during the night," Martha said suddenly, turning to Patience. "The rustling of the hens has brought feral things from the brush."

John opened one eye drowsily and said, "Oh, it's only a fox come to pester the hens."

"No," Martha said, shaking her head. "It was a wolf I heard."

The rattling on the roof surged louder as the day's rain turned to ice. It would be an especially cold night, Martha knew, for anyone sleeping outside the walls of the house.

"Mark me," Martha said to Patience, her eyes resting heavily on John. "Someone should stay in the barn tonight or we'll wake tomorrow to find feathers with nothing besides but air."

John had been roused fully from his pleasant nodding and he lifted his head, cutting his eyes to Thomas, who sat close by with a whetstone, slowly sharpening a hoe. The stone made harsh

scraping noises at odd intervals, and Martha sensed, although she was not certain, that the Welshman was marking every one of her pronouncements with purposefully long screeching sounds.

"But surely," Patience answered weakly, "it is too cold. And Daniel has never before insisted the men sleep in the barn before the first of April..."

It took another quarter hour for Martha to cow Patience into submission. She reminded her cousin that Daniel would be sorely disappointed to lose his prized hens to his wife's careless disregard, while bringing base and predatory beasts to their front door, endangering the very lives of their children, and on and on. Patience, complaining weakly, finally retreated to her bed, dragging the children along behind her. Martha, left alone with the men, turned triumphantly to John and pointed to the front door.

John, walking as though carrying a sack of stones on his back, took his time putting on his greatcoat and sighed at long intervals, hoping for some word of intervention on Thomas's part. But Thomas said nothing as he quietly put away the whetstone and walked to the warmth of his own bed. John soon followed him behind the hearth, harping at his bad luck. His voice carried back to the common room, muffled but angry. "She's a feckin' night-terror driven to ground, Thomas.... To be sent out to the barn like a dog... Come morning she'll know what for..."

There was a dull creaking of ropes, as though Thomas had settled his tall form onto the rope bed, and he said in warning, "Lay it by, John, or she'll beggar you."

Martha walked to the linen chest and pulled from it the thinnest quilt. She waited for John to reemerge from his room and,

handing the quilt to John, said pleasantly, "You'll need this. It's no doubt very cold in the barn." She opened the door and then, as John stepped into the chafing rain, said, "You'll next time think before laughing at me."

She firmly closed and latched the door behind him. Her mouth curled tightly upwards as she thought of John climbing, diminished and swearing, into the manger, the barn filling with the murmuring of hens and horses, a chorus blending with the sounds of wounded muttering.

BEFORE DAWN, MARTHA roused the entire house to help with the washing. She sent Thomas to fetch John from the barn and he appeared at the table sullen but silent, his hair and coat covered in straw. In the midst of the breakfast meal, the giving and taking of food and the talk of work to be done, Patience sat slumped in her chair, carelessly picking at bread soaked in milk. One lock of hair fell in a limp ribbon over her face and her skin held a greenish pallor.

Martha scratched with her nail a split seam in a stocking she had been mending and wondered if Patience would be well enough to at least mend some of the fraying collars and cuffs. A dark thought, playing beyond her work-filled mind, shifted and settled behind her eyes. It was common-enough knowledge among midwives that the unborn, to be born in good health, would by necessity make the mother sick, the mother's vital essences usurped by the quickening child.

But something unwholesome and yeastlike in the pregnant woman's sweat made Martha uneasy. She would try to remember

later to save by her cousin's water. In this way she would sniff out the unbalancing elements. She had been present at numerous difficult, painful, and even violent births, but she had never yet lost a babe and had learned from older, more experienced women the collective wisdom of generations: the seeing, the smelling, the touching, the *knowing* of the sacrificial rites of birth. No, she had never lost a babe, but three women had been laid into the ground, two of them shrouded in cloth made to grace their infants' swaddling.

Walking out into the yard, she lifted her face towards the morning sun and, closing her eyes, felt the heat of it draw blood into her cheeks. The frigid sleet had ceased during the night, and the clouds, which had covered the skies for weeks, began to disperse into crisscrossed bands of gray. A crown of sweat soon prickled her skin under her cap and she opened the laces, pulling it from her head. An easterly wind, chilled and saltwater pungent, blew at her back, filling her apron like a sail and lifting the ropy strands of hair at her neck. She opened her eyes again, slowly, lids creased and fluttering from the sudden light and, with her fingers, smoothed away the sweat from the hollow of her throat. She tried banishing the dark thoughts about her cousin and filled her lungs with the briny air.

A lengthy shadow over the yard startled her and she turned to meet the unapologetic gaze of the Welshman. He had been studying her, she had no doubt, while her eyes were closed and had come upon her with soft-footed guile. Behind him stood John, who was also staring, but he dropped his eyes once she pierced him with a threatening look.

"Well?" she asked, jerking the cap back over her head, hiding

the tangles of black hair. "The two of you won't work off servitude in the company of mischief."

"I need my man to come trapping with me," Thomas answered, his voice deeply resonant, as though he had swallowed pebbles with his mash.

Martha crossed her arms and considered him. She was a tall woman but next to Thomas she felt near to a child. She hated the way she had to tilt her chin up to see the whole of him. "My man," he had said. "My man," as though John Levistone were indentured not to the Taylors but to Thomas.

"You can tend to your traps when the other one has finished the clearing," she said, turning on her heel and walking away. There was a satisfactory silence that followed her to the house, and when at length she looked over her shoulder, Thomas had returned to the barn. John gathered up a hoe and a slotted rake and began pulling a winter's worth of dirt and leaves away from the damp foundation of the house.

She sat for an hour or more, sorting through the seeds that would go into the house garden. From time to time she looked up through the window or open door, following John's progress around the house. He sang snatches of a song, "'For other manly practices she gain'd the love of all, for leaping and for running or wrestling for a fall,'" sometimes stopping to swear softly or moan to himself, "Christ, the woman is a tartar."

When she had finished counting the seeds, she glanced through the window and saw Thomas coming from the barn. He stood looking fixedly at the ground as though the firing pan had fallen off his flintlock. Something about the way he stared prickled the back of her neck.

Leaving her shawl in the house, Martha quickly crossed the yard to the barn, coming to stand behind Thomas, who had knelt down and was examining a late bank of snow worn down to gray, rounded lumps of slush and mud and pocked with deep channels and ridges. When her shadow crossed his path, Thomas stood upright again, suddenly alert, his gaze sweeping across the melting fields and into the surrounding woods. She followed his gaze but could see nothing beyond the bare trees.

He pointed to a marked depression in the mud. There, impressed like a mold into the wasting snow, were four distinct circlets over one larger circlet. Martha bent and spread her closed fist over the print and saw her own hand dwarfed by the size of it.

"Wolves," Thomas said, looking at her with frank appraisal. "Two of them. It seems John and I will both be in the barn tonight."

Martha hugged herself tightly with her own arms, shivering slightly in the cool, shaded air. There was no look of satisfaction on her face. Only a deepening crease between her brows, and lips that were open and moist, like a child's mouth caught at the moment of surprise.

LATE AFTER DARK, Martha kept vigil by the window, listening for the howling or yipping that was not from a fox or badger. She sighed, remembering her last worded exchange with her cousin. Patience, ill and fretful, wanting only to escape to her bed, had become overwrought and cried uncontrollably when Martha pressed her to take greater charge of the men, especially

now that wolves had come prowling to feed at their door. Clapping her hands over her ears, Patience had cried, "Do what you will, only leave me be."

Rushing for the comfort of her bed, she had tripped over a stool, and when Martha rose to catch her, Patience waved her away and ran to her room, breathing bubbles of snot from her nose like an infant. Later, when Martha brought her a strained broth, Patience grabbed her hand and, holding it to her belly, wailed, "I am afraid of this birthing." She began to cry miserably and Martha stayed with her for a while, smoothing her hair and whispering reassurances that she herself did not feel, until her cousin had fallen into a heavy sleep.

In a year's time, Martha thought, shifting her weight to peer out the window again, Patience would be delivered of another child, with a husband and a home. Even Thomas and John Levis-tone would, next spring, have land on which to build. Earlier that evening Patience had corrected Martha's mistaken belief that the men were indentured for the accustomed term of seven years; Thomas and John had in fact been hired by Daniel to work for three years in trade for prime land owned by the Taylors on the Concord. They had one more year of laboring on another's land, and then they would have their own.

And what would she gain with her own sweat? Even the room in which she slept would have to be shared with Joanna and Will once the babe was born. And once Patience had recovered her strength and Daniel had returned, she would most likely be sent home. An unmarried woman too long in a strange household of men was a challenge to virtue, a carnal distraction not to be borne.

## THE TRAITOR'S WIFE

Well, then, she thought, spring would bring open roads, and if she had exhausted her chances for a husband in Andover, perhaps the market or meetinghouse in Billerica would bring more success. Tomorrow would be the first of April, a day of hopeful warming, and she would begin the cleaning in earnest. She would open all the doors and with sand and ashes and birch rods both dirt and despondency would be swept away with the old season as proof of renewal for the new. Perhaps, she thought, her mouth twisting into a grim smile, some journeyman, still damp from the crossing, would stumble upon their threshold and see some coveted quality beneath the gritty sweat over her lip, and the stains through her bodice, and say to himself, "Here is a woman to wife."

And thus would things be decided; for, Christ knew, the man who had a mind to marry her would not sit and talk to her about it. He would know that at her advanced years, if she had had a choice for husband, she would already have come to the marriage bed. It would be taken as a matter of course that the set of her back and the knitting together of her brows signaled the Work of Ages. It would be taken for granted that she did not have a thought or a wish for herself apart from carrying a man's seed in her belly.

"And if I hardly dare speak to myself of other hopes," she whispered, "how can I speak of them to another?"

She regarded for a minute more the ebbing light on the walls, and when the candle at last extinguished itself, she felt her way to her bed in the dark.