**DRUMS ALONG**

**THE BRANDYWINE**

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**- EXCERPT -**

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**DRUMS ALONG**

**THE BRANDYWINE**

FADE IN:

DISTANT THUNDER

EXT. A GLADE, BRANDYWINE VALLEY – EARLY MORN (1777)

Motes dance like fairies on sunbeams. SARAH, 19, rises like a beautiful nymph and covers her bare shoulders.

SARAH

We cannot keep on like this.

JOHN SAVIDGE, 22, smiles shirtless on the dewy grass.

JOHN

You say that every time --

SARAH

Because every time it is wrong!

Sarah does up her linen dress while John slings an indigo jacket over his broad shoulders and pulls on worn brogues.

JOHN

Why? We are of age and we’re --

SARAH

Not at liberty.

He helps do up her buttons.

JOHN

Well it’s high time we were.

SARAH

Don’t be a donkey, John! They can destroy you if they want. Take the farm, your livestock, all you care about!

JOHN

Not all.

He touches her lips. Her irritation melts.

A FAR OFF BELL TOLLS

She snatches up her straw hat and runs off.

JOHN

It is our right!

Her dress flows like a specter in the wood.

THUNDER ROLLS

INT. WEST BRADFORD SCHOOL HOUSE – AFTERNOON

The sun beats down on a little boy at the window. He plays with pebbles on the sill like toy soldiers.

SARAH (O.C.)

Isaac.

The boy marches back to his desk. Children, a baker’s dozen, fill out the one room school. They sit at desks, some with bare feet swinging in the big chairs. Sarah stands before a slate board at the head of the class.

SARAH

Mary?

Precocious MARY, 11, beribboned, reads aloud.

MARY

*…How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame which, like a canker in the fragrant rose, doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!*

SARAH

What is Mr. Shakespeare saying?

The children shrug, even Mary.

SARAH

Never fall for a handsome farmer…

THUNDEROUS RUMBLES

The children rush to the window. Sarah stands behind them.

MARY

A storm is coming.

SARAH

Yes…

But it’s not thunder. For the pebbles on the sill jump with each report of

DISTANT ARTILLERY

EXT. WEST BRADFORD SCHOOL HOUSE

The happy children scatter to the meadows. Sarah looks back, hair blowing, dark clouds on the horizon.

EXT. ROAD TO WHITE HALL – LATE AFTERNOON

Sarah is a speck on the dusty ribbon of road. She nears a small stone bridge. She dips her hand. Scoops a cool drink and wipes the back of her neck.

A PIERCING WHISTLE

She looks up. Two men wave from the top of a grassy hill.

EXT. WHITE HALL BRIDGE

John peels an apple with his blade as his younger brother BILLY SAVIDGE, 17, paces with youthful exuberance. Sarah pets their tired old hound dog, PUFF.

BILLY

Don’t you see? The war’s finally here!

SARAH

Oh Billy, you sound like my students. So eager to play soldier --

BILLY

And you sound like my brother: “Best to stay home, out of harm’s way --”

JOHN

Yep.

BILLY

Yet you itch to fight and you know it!

JOHN

Who’d milk Old Bess if we don’t?

BILLY

Who’ll earn our freedom if we won’t?

John eats a slice. Billy kicks up the dust.

BILLY

You know what he says, Sarah? “With all respect due Tom Jefferson, I don’t need a declaration to tell me I’m independent. Since I was eleven I’ve been tending you” -– meaning me – “and the homestead and everything else in this world that matters to me” -– meaning you.

Sarah raises an eyebrow at John.

SARAH

You? Said all that? In one day?

John just shrugs and peels.

BILLY

And what if the British come to take it?

HENRY (O.C.)

Loyal subjects have nothing to fear…

PUFF GROWLS. A well-to-do young man on horseback comes nigh the bridge. HENRY HEISINGER, 24, slight, privileged.

HENRY HEISINGER

And let the rest be damned.

BILLY

Spoken like a true Englishman, Heisinger.

HENRY HEISINGER

And you speak like a fool. You should try reticence -- like your brother.

(to Sarah)

Is it true what they say, cousin: that women find quiet men irresistible?

SARAH

Perhaps? Because the more you talk, the more unattractive I find you.

Billy guffaws. John allows a smile. Henry bristles.

HENRY HEISINGER

My father bids you back at the house now.

SARAH

‘Tis true then -- about the army coming?

HENRY HEISINGER

Yes. The Queens Rangers are in Kennett. Howe’s forces will close with the rebels on the morrow --

BILLY

See? All our fortunes ride on this!

HENRY HEISINGER

Indeed. Washington’s rabble will be crushed. Order restored. And those who supported the rebellion punished.

BILLY

And you Loyalists will take their land.

HENRY HEISINGER

If the king wills it.

JOHN

Not very Quaker of you, Henry.

HENRY HEISINGER

Nor very smart of you, Savidge: should’ve turned out that rebel brother of yours before. Now you’ll both swing as traitors.

BILLY

Better that than a land-grabbing coward hiding behind your religion --

HENRY HEISINGER

Perhaps I’ll “hide” you instead --

He whips Billy across the cheek with his riding crop.

SARAH

Henry --!

Billy feels his gashed face. He sees red.

JOHN

Now, Billy…

Billy yanks Heisinger off his high horse. A knock-down, drag out fight in the dust commences. Sarah turns to John. He offers her a slice of apple. She grabs it away. And eats it.

Heisinger flails at the boy with his crop but Billy’s a big lad and soon gets the better of him. Heisinger staggers. Billy rears back to deliver the *coup de gras* -– but John grabs his wrist in an iron grip.

JOHN

Feel better?

BILLY

Aye! You should try it!

Heisinger mounts up and wipes his bloody nose.

HENRY HEISINGER

My father will be well pleased to hear how you rushed to my aid, “dear cousin”.

He points his crop at Billy.

HENRY HEISINGER

Mark my words, pig farmer. You will pay for this!

BILLY

Can’t see how since I’ll be with the army!

JOHN

Billy –-

BILLY

(rounds on John)

Because helping them win is the only way we keep our home. And you know it!

Billy marches east. Heisinger rides west. John is left in the middle of the span to face Sarah.

SARAH

John --

JOHN

I must go with him.

SARAH

We talked about this --!

JOHN

He is still a boy --

SARAH

Fighting is wrong -–

JOHN

I raised him from a pup --!

SARAH

And if you are hurt -- no, I forbid it!

JOHN

Sarah, he is my brother.

SARAH

And what am I?

JOHN

(touches her cheek)

Everything.

SARAH

(parries his hand)

Not if you leave me.

JOHN

(torn to his soul)

You may forgive me if I return. But I never will if I don’t go.

He turns and walks off at a pace. She calls after.

SARAH

Fine, John Savidge! Ignore all our talk, our plans. Get yourself shot! Burn the soft words I have whispered in your ear for I will surely do the same with yours! To ashes on the wind!

He is well down the road out of earshot.

SARAH

Unless you turn around… right now… please…

He is far down the road.

SARAH

My God, what have I done?

She hikes her skirts to run after him --

ARTHUR HEISINGER (O.C.)

Sarah!

She looks back. Down the road, next to Heisinger on horseback, a portly man on a large white charger beckons.

EXT. PATH TO SAVIDGE FARM

Billy sits on a log and dumps a pebble out of his shoe. John swats the boy on the head as he walks past. Billy throws on his shoe and tags along.

JOHN

We go. Do our part. And go home.

BILLY

Aye!

JOHN

But just this once! We will not set foot outside the valley on some fool’s crusade.

BILLY

Agreed. Oh it’ll be grand, John!

Billy puts an arm around John’s shoulder and they march on.

INT. PARLOR, HEISINGER ESTATE

A great dark case clock strikes three. Its mechanism is the only sound. RUTH HEISINGER, 47, enters the paneled room in a rush. The anxious Quaker snatches up silver candle sticks, plate from the mantle, a shining bowl. She stuffs them in a sack.

A HORSE WINNIES

She hurries to the window.

EXT. HEISINGER ESTATE

Two horses and three riders approach the Georgian mansion set amid rolling fields, flanked by a stone bank barn. Sarah and Henry dismount. ARTHUR HEISINGER, 50, portly, gouty, struggles down from atop his horse. Ruth stands with her sack in the doorway.

ARTHUR HEISINGER

Ruth, darling --!

RUTH HEISINGER

Don’t “darling” me, Arthur Heisinger! I sent you to fetch her hours ago…

(gasps)

Henry!

She rushes to his side.

HENRY

Calm thyself, Mother --

RUTH HEISINGER

But your face!

ARTHUR HEISINGER

Just a bit of youthful hijinks --

RUTH HEISINGER

Fighting again? I told you to stay away from those parentless hooligans!

SARAH

It was only Billy.

RUTH HEISINGER

(rounds on her)

And John Savidge did nothing I suppose?

SARAH

No, he saved Henry.

RUTH HEISINGER

(to Arthur)

See? I forbid her to see him and yet she does! More proof he’s a bad influence!

SARAH

You don’t even know him.

RUTH HEISINGER

I know his parents were willful and reckless, God rest their Godless souls! And the apple never falls far from the tree. Low, uncouth and untutored --

ARTHUR HEISINGE

He’s a good boy at heart --

RUTH HEISINGER

And you are a soft man -- which is why you’ve lent him money time and again. But now you shall demand immediate repayment –-

ARTHUR HEISINGER

But that will ruin him!

RUTH HEISINGER

Good! Rather that than let her ruin the family name and disgrace us all.

(grabs up her sack)

ARTHUR HEISINGER

Indeed, eh -- what’s in the sack, dear?

RUTH HEISINGER

While you were gallivanting, I was securing our valuables.

ARTHUR HEISINGER

From?

RUTH HEISINGER

Get your head out of the clouds, Arthur! There is an army coming!

HENRY

But they’re our boys, Mother --

RUTH HEISINGER

They are nobody’s “boys”. They are soldiers: accustomed to taking what they will, as they please, as your wretched cousin can attest.

ARTHUR HEISINGER

Ruth!

Sarah blanches.

ARTHUR HEISINGER

Sarah, she didn’t mean…

Sarah runs off toward the barn. Arthur glares at his wife.

ARTHUR HEISINGER

Was that necessary?

RUTH HEISINGER

If it spurs you to action, yes.

INT. HAY LOFT, HEISINGER BANK BARN

Sarah lies in the hay and stares at flies in the sunbeams.

She closes her eyes.

THEIR BUZZING BECOMES THE SOUND OF SOLDIERS

YELLING, LAUGHING, BURNING

She lay in the heat and remembers…

SARAH’S MOTHER (A MEMORY)

Run, Sarah! Hide!

HER MOTHER’S SCREAM IS CUT SHORT

SOLDIER (A MEMORY)

Got me a young one! Now set still for me, girl, or I will cut you… oy!

Sarah leaps to her feet and runs to the door of the loft. She stops just short, teetering on the edge thirty feet above the hard ground. She feels the back of her neck. There an ugly knife scar throbs.

Then she sees it: just beyond the rolling green hills, a sickly cloud of dust like a whirlwind rising. Then they appear. Like army ants swarming over the crest: Redcoats.

EXT. HEISINGER ESTATE

Queens Rangers, the hardened advance guard of the British Army, deploy quickly, warily. German Jaegers, in green jackets and oily hair, dart about. Loutish dragoons charge forth on frothing horses. Only one moves with leisure, an officer on horseback: MAJOR PERCY, 30, laconic, refined. He halts and looks down upon the anxious Heisingers.

MAJ PERCY

*Sprechen sie* *Englisch*?

ARTHUR HEISINGER

Yes, sir.

MAJ PERCY

Brilliant. I am Major Percy in service to our king. Here to rid your heavenly land, hot as hell though it be, from the rebel scourge. You are loyal?

ARTHUR HEISINGER

Yes, sir!

MAJ PERCY

Then you won’t mind my men procuring victuals? Are there more of you? If so he’d be wise to show himself before…

The Heisingers look beyond him. He turns to see Sarah, set aglow by the setting sun.

INT. SAVIDGE FARM, GREAT ROOM

A well-used long rifle hangs over a stone fireplace. John takes it down, runs his hand over the gun metal, the burnished wood.

BILLY (O.C.)

Pa would be proud.

Billy watches from the doorway, a satchel on his shoulder, a musket in his hands. John walks past.

JOHN

And Ma would whip our behinds.

EXT. ROAD FROM SAVIDGE FARM

A bearded nanny goat eats an apple off an ancient tree. Sheep and chickens roam. The gloaming light gives the old farmstead poignancy as John and Billy leave it.

A WEAK DOG HOWL

Puff comes running up the dusty road.

BILLY

No, Puff! Go back!

The old dog drops at their feet, panting.

BILLY

See? War’s no place for an old dog! Stay and guard the farm.

John pets his dog like it’s the last time.

JOHN

Bye, old boy.

BILLY

Come on! We’ll be back in two shakes.

Puff watches the brothers walk on toward storm clouds.

BILLY

Oh but look at my poor shirt.

JOHN

Too late now, should’ve spoke up back at the house.

BILLY

Well I can’t join the army in this state! Unless…

He eyes John’s fine indigo jacket.

JOHN

Oh for…

John reluctantly pulls off his jacket and hands it over. Billy eagerly puts it on.

BILLY

Perfect! Now I look a soldier. Thank you. I know what this jacket means to you, Sarah having sewn it -–

JOHN

Just don’t get any holes in it.

BILLY

I promise!

THUNDER ROLLS

Raindrops fall erasing their footprints…