AGAINST THE MACHINE: *LUDDITES*

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AGAINST THE MACHINE: *LUDDITES*

Brian Van Norman

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For Alan, and as ever, for Susan

1812


Redcar
Middlesbrough
Mickleton
Bowes
Whitby
North York
Moors
Richmond
Northallerton
Scarborough
Sedbergh
North Riding
Pickering
Yorkshire
Thirsk
Helmsley
Filey
Filey Bay
Ingleton
Dales
Malton
Norton
Wolds
Flamborough Head
Bridlington
Ripon
YORKSHIRE
Driffield
Bridlington
Bay
Bowland
Sladburn
West
Harrogate
Ainsty
York
East
Craven
Skipton
Yorkshire
Beverley
Bradford
Leeds
Selby
Riding
Holderness
Halifax
Huddersfield
Wakefield
Goole
Hull
Riding
Spurn
Head
Saddleworth
Barnsley
Doncaster
Rotherham
Bawtry
Sheffield

PROLOGUE

Antsey, Leicestershire

IT WAS SNOWING indoors.

It was big, white tufts floating inside the mill with the rumble of the waterwheel and clacking of the looms. It was the clamour of mechanical parts and curses of the overmen strapping at terrified children who picked the loose pieces of wool from beneath clattering machines. It was the stench of grease, sweat and carded *woollen*. And the heat; the heat that made a man faint away after fourteen hours at his machine. And now some fool had dropped a bale and the wooly fibres twirled around the shop like snowflakes. Big flakes, the like he'd seen on days of deep winter with the air fresh and clean. And as it floated down the fleece snarled the machines. Workers muttered in fleecy snow as they lost time and money to the unnatural blizzard.

It was this which broke him.

"'Tain't natural," Ned said. He was a tall, well-muscled boy, dressed in tattered fustian stained with the sweat of his toil. Despite his fourteen years his face was swarthy, like a man's face, brought on by long days of mill work. And now as he flustered over his stocking frame, clearing the fleece, cursing the heat, he recalled better days before the *enclosures* when he was a true boy out on the *weld* with a flock of sheep

and his collie, Spot. The weather sported around him: big, bosomy clouds sweeping the horizon shadowing grass so green just after the rain and a breeze which coddled him like a mother.

His mother now dead, his sister carding wool, his father an overman flush with his power had forced the boy into the mill to drudge through each day from dark to dark, sunlight now just a memory, a pewter colour seeping through narrow windows high up on the sandstone block walls.

"'Tis the *brass* we need!" his father said, his big voice always too loud. "Now your mother's gone and the farm's taken off there's no other way. Dost understand, lad? Stop your tears! The dog was old and no use t' us now. I've found a place for you in the mill. You'll do this or go for a soldier. I'll not feed you nor your sister without your help!"

But the fleece has cloyed into the warp and each moment his machine is stopped no *brass* will be made. His fingers plucked at the threads like those of an enraged harpist. It took too much time to unclog the machine and with each passing moment his rage stewed and boiled.

Oatcake for breakfast in the dark, then hard black bread and water while standing at his frame for his lunch, then the repetitive hours of shuttle-knit-shuttle-knit and the roasting heat and the stink of lanolin and the clamour and shake and now this; this prigging, prinking, pulling with his fingers at warp threads.

"Dammit!" he spat, shoving two bloody fingers into his mouth, sucking blood, tasting salt.

"Boy!" the overman snarled. "Get that frame going!"

Ned glared past his shoulder at the man, now advancing, his thick strap dangling from his belt, hand straying toward it: a threat of a beating.

"'Tis clogged! I was fixing it!" Ned shouted.

"Then stop standing about and get back t' work!"

"Aye! I'm trying!"

"Now!"

Then at it again, this time with his other hand; blood in the cloth means no coin. He picked the last of the snow dream away and was left with an unsettling maze of threads. He tried a knit: clatter, bang … and all crooked.

"Shite!" Now he must pull the errant weft out. More time lost.

"Do it!" the overman bellowed.

The machine would not submit. He'd gone under and over it, searching out the snag but could not find it; the overman bawling abuse all the while. He knew he was in for the strap the moment he emerged from beneath the frame. But there, in the detritus of discarded wool beneath the machine, was the hammer. A sledge so big the men had a name for it: *Enoch*. Made in the smithy of Enoch Taylor. Ned's pastor had told him once the name meant *wisdom* from something in the Bible, but he knew it was named after Enoch Taylor. It didn't matter now. He would not submit to a beating. He grasped the hammer and crawled out to face the overman. The strap was already loosed. It swung in the overman's calloused hand all leathery shine, thick with anticipation.

"You'll not touch me," he said, shifting the maul into both hands, holding it chest high.

"Set that down!" the overman ordered, but with a quaver in his voice.

"I'll not do a thing 'til that strap's gone!"

"If that maul ain't put down now I'll have you up t' the *Maister* and cast out of the mill!"

"'Tis nowt t' me. I'll not take a beating."

"You'll take what I give!" The overman's voice was too shrill. It brought the mill to silence. The fleece snow was gone by then, replaced by the normal thickness of dust as though they all lived inside a cloud. From somewhere off by the looms a girl's voice cried out: "That's the way, Ned! Give him the business!"

And that helped him; cracked him even more.

He recognized then that the overman was actually smaller than him. Now it came clear what had made the man seem larger: his power. All that size shrank before Ned as he hefted the hammer. The man retreated a step, just enough. A laugh tittered throughout the mill, growing.

The overman's eyes shifted left and right. He had lost his power and, bereft of it, had no idea what to do next. For a moment the two of them stood facing off: boy to man, hammer to strap, for now Ned too found he had no recourse. He tried to think of some action, some words which would settle the thing. Already it had gone too far.

Then the overman glanced past him. Ned knew, even before he heard, what was coming.

"Edward Ludlam, what would you be up to? No good, I see!"

The voice of his father, overman father, rang out harsh in the still of the silence and dust.

That voice pushed a weakness into Ned's arms and lowered the hammer. There was no response to this man who possessed such a weight. It ran back all the years of childhood commands which were never contended.

"Turn about and look at me!" And Ned turned.

Thomas Ludlam was a hard man: thick, muscled, dark, eyes like stone. If he'd ever been kind Ned could not recall it. What he could remember was cuffs and kicks in the hard school of his father's creation. And the way his mother would shrink when Thomas entered the cottage, his presence filling the single room crowding out all else as his family waited, pensive, for his mood. Sporadically he might be in good spirits, usually brought on by drink, but he could turn sour abruptly. If his wife was too slow bringing food to the table, or Ned unfinished his chores, or his sister too carefree with her kittens, there would be costs. And just now that mood was a thunderhead as he faced down his son in the maw of the mill where everyone feared him.

"You'd challenge an overman, child?" he said, ensuring his deep voice was loud enough to surmount the rumble of the waterwheel.

"The frame was clogged. 'Twas all that fleece! I'll not take a beating for something that weren't my fault!" Ned said. Too loud, a mistake.

"Talk t' me like that one more time and you'll be in for a true thrashing!" His hands curled into huge fists. The fists looked like rocks. Ned knew what they could do.

"Father, I didn't mean this t' happen!"

Tears welled in the boy's eyes.

"I'm overman here," his father roared, "and this man as well! You'll yield up that maul and give way t' your punishment!"

"'Twas the machine, da! Not me!"

"Did you not think t' square your heddles, boy?" his father said sarcastically. Ned lowered his head. The tears dripped black on his

fustian blouse, turning to mud in the blouse's dirt. He had not thought of that fix, an obvious thing, but the snow and the noise and the very day had conspired against him. Now his father thought him a simpleton.

Breaking him.

And just then peering down through his tears past the rags of his clothes past the head of the hammer he looked further into himself. He remembered his father kicking the kittens, slapping his mother, killing his dog, thinking him simple, and *that*, finally, with everything else, shattered anything left of the boy. In an instant a man looked up into the eyes of his overman. Father no longer.

"Square my heddles, Sir? No, Sir. But now just let me do it for you."

And with that he let the hammer head drop, feeling the shaft run through his calloused hands until it had reached its end and the huge iron head thumped the floor. Then he swung it: a huge arc up, around, over his shoulder and smashed into the delicate heddles of the frame. The frame exploded in splinters, and he hit it again, then again, revelling in the destruction. Threads of wool fluttered out like banners of victory with each crushing blow.

His father came at him.

The hammer came up.

"Stay back! Touch me and I'll have Enoch on you!"

And, wonder of wonders, his father retreated; confused by the boy become man become hooligan he too found no answer to what happened next. Ned strolled past the first overman, who also did nothing, to the next stocking frame.

"And how about this one? Can I square up the heddles?"

And again he smashed. Splinters everywhere. Then another. Then he moved on toward the doorway down the long hall of the mill. No one blocked his path. No one came after him. As he passed each machine he would swing and smash and leave shards in his wake. As he neared the thick oak door he heard cheers, and turning, saw them all clapping.

And back down the walkway, between the machines, the walkway littered with fragments of his rebellion, he saw his father standing there: broken too.

He opened the door and walked through it.
Outside.
Into the sunshine: golden green, warm and free.
No one in Antsey ever saw him again.

—

News of this incident spread as does all unusual news. And after a time, when it became less unusual, when machines were sabotaged or mills burned, and people fought their masters' greed so as not to starve, they would jokingly say: *"Ned Lud did tha'!"*

And later: *Luddites*.

1

A PENNINE FOG crawled down from the moors on a January night in the year 1812. It was a cold fog, filled with the icy moisture of what men in those parts called *moor grime.* It was a thick fog, sluggishly flowing its way down the vales of the countryside, drowning them in its coils. Through the West Riding in Yorkshire it moved over Marsden, Haworth, Huddersfield and Halifax, reaching as far east as Bradford. It smothered the land like a hoary blanket and concealed every movement within its grey realm; even certain men tramping through slushy snow toward John Wood's cropping shop and a meeting with their destinies.

They were hardened men whom hard times had brought to this place. There had been massive change since the century's turn. Farmers and shepherds driven from common lands by the Enclosures Act. Then in 1811 torrential rains had ruined the harvest and caused starvation. More pertinent, there had been a plunge in production of *woollen*, the material made from combed, long-fibred wool which, when woven and finished, made the hardiest cloth in the world.

Bonaparte's war suppressed English trade in Europe. Parliament struck back with Orders in Council forbidding trade with *any* nation with French connections. Then the Americans entered the fray against England, stopping another market.

To keep their fast waning trade, the mill owners sought technological answers. They began to employ machines to do the work of men: *gig-mills, knitting frames, power looms* and *shear frames*, all driven by water from streams in north England's vales. So families who had spent generations working the wool lost their livelihoods and fell into penury.

Finally, men banded together to stop the hopelessness. The wet, fustian clothed group, surreptitiously knocking on John Wood's door in the dark of night in the thick of fog, was one such desperate band.

They entered Wood's small cropping shop: a medieval mix of stone, wood and leaded glass panes. There was a table at one end and some stools but most of the shop consisted of *woollens* stretched on frames with nary a glint of new age mechanicals. John Wood possessed too small an operation and too little ready money for machines. Yet he coveted them. This night would see his opening strategy. Wood was lean, middle aged and balding. Yet it was his eyes which told the tale of the man: sharp grey orbs constantly moving, behind which an observant person might discern a calculating mind.

The first in was Thomas Smith. A portly young fellow, his freckled skin glistened from the fog's dampness. He removed his soaking hat beneath which a dirty blond mop of hair tumbled into his hazel eyes. He was a simple fellow, a follower.

William Thorpe, next, was older: a huge man who could reach up and touch the rafters of Wood's shop. He was brawny and strong and possessed a barrel chest, the result of his love of good ales. He was illiterate, as were most souls of the West Riding, but he was no man's fool. And no man ever dared fool with him.

Behind him came Benjamin Walker, as opposite Thorpe as a man could be. Somewhat gawky in look, Walker was a weaver. He was thin; not in a womanish way yet still delicate from his careful weaving. Ben Walker was cautious. In a world of bigger, bluff men he had to be; though he did not have to like it. Instead he used gossip and rumour to achieve his goals.

The fourth of the group was the man John Wood had most wanted at this meeting. George Mellor was but twenty-two years old yet possessed experience beyond his years and an almost carnal charisma. He

was striking: sparkling diamond eyes within a firm face, high cheek bones and a solid chin, hair close curling and auburn in colour. He was also John Wood's step-son and had only just returned from his merchant voyages, to Russia and other foreign ports, within the past two years. Still, since that time he had swiftly advanced to *journeyman cropper*.

The build of his body showed shearing's effects: He was sculpted and strapping; for to crop the *woollen* a man had to control a fifty pound metal shear, then push the huge, sharp blades together so deftly as to remove miniscule flaws in the nap of the wool and turn it to smooth, fine *worsted*. It was a highly skilled trade requiring delicacy and strength and George Mellor was one of its best.

Mellor's father had disappeared from Huddersfield long years past leaving his family penniless. So the lad had had to make his own way, taking ship as a cabin boy advancing to sailor for seven years, until he'd returned to find his mother, Mathilda, remarried to Wood. Wood and Mellor had grown to respect each other.

If there was to be a leader in his secret campaign, John Wood knew it would be George Mellor: a young man who had learned to read and write, a youth who had seen obscure parts of the world, a fellow who tolerated no edicts and felt no inferiority toward the titled and wealthy. His magnetism would make others trust him. And he in turn trusted John Wood.

Wood was counting on it.

Wood placed a pewter jug and cups before them on the table. The smell of the shop, damp lanolin and old wood, comforted them as they drank their ale. Wood commenced the meeting.

"I've taken the liberty of inviting some guests. I think you'll agree 'tis a wise choice." His West Riding accent was prominent though unnoticed by his peers. It may have sounded to an outsider as ludicrous, even rustic, but the men who spoke it knew it marked them as Yorkshiremen, known for their business acumen and hard work.

"Who are they?" Walker half stood, seeming ready to flee.

"Sit down, Ben!" Mellor said, laughing. "You'll be pissing your britches before you know it."

There was no love lost between Walker and Mellor, for Walker

loved a local girl named Jilly Banforth. Unfortunately, she'd made it clear she preferred the lusty George Mellor.

"Dost believe me a careless man?" Wood said, chuckling. "Here they are!"

From the shadows stepped a man and woman affluently dressed. Mellor stood quickly to greet them.

"John! Mary! 'Tis good to see you."

"It is, George," the man replied, "and our thanks to you, Mr. Wood, for your invitation."

His accent was different from the others: more refined; that of an educated man, one from more southerly parts of England. His face was handsome: eyes hazel, hair a light, thinning blonde. He wore tight pantaloons with riding boots, eschewing the *woollen* stockings and rough breeches of the poorer men. With his greatcoat undone, there was a glimpse of a fashionable jacket and short waistcoat beneath and, quite notably, the white linen *stock* of the clergy.

"Aye, John, 'tis good you're here," Wood said. "Brothers, you all know Curate Buckworth and his wife, Mary."

In the hallowed tangles of the Church of England there existed, as in all bureaucracies, a distinct set of seniorities. John Buckworth's place was to serve as Curate of Dewsbury, a small situation at the edge of the West Riding under the auspices of the Very Reverend Hammond Roberson, Vicar in charge of the Parish. Roberson performed that office with a certain prejudice against common people and was not loved for his work, whereas John Buckworth was esteemed for his caring nature.

Buckworth, born in the town of Gravesend of a moderately wealthy tea trade family, was a second son and as with most second sons who would not inherit the family business, was sent off to school to make something of himself. He chose the clergy, by far the most obvious course for, with a suitable position and the proper marriage, John could become a man of substance.

Buckworth possessed a slim, well proportioned frame which attracted those of the female sex from amongst his parishioners; never a bad thing. Eventually he'd met and married the lovely, accomplished Mary Taylor; daughter of a Nottingham mill owner.

Mary Buckworth was dressed in a *redingote* of deep forest green. Beneath were a plum jacket, muslin dress and a tailored chemisette. The usual calfskin gloves and fashionable turban completed her ensemble. Mary was a woman accustomed to fashion. She was the daughter of a wealthy, devoted father who had wished to see her advance beyond his own mercantile world. So marriage to a man with potential to rise in the Church was the perfect answer. It was also the answer to other, more troublesome elements: in particular, Mary's rebellious nature.

A brief interlude with a Captain Hollingsworth when she was sixteen had ascertained her passionate character though, fortunately, the thing had been nipped in the bud without scandal. But Calvin Taylor had recognized the unfortunate spirit his daughter possessed and had married her off with an attractive dowry to the young Curate Buckworth.

John Buckworth loved his wife to distraction. Not only was she physically beautiful with unsettling green eyes beneath honey locks, she possessed a perfect pale complexion and a figure simultaneously petite yet full. If her lips were a hint too sensuous and flashing eyes too fervid, those elements John overlooked. More significantly to him, his Mary possessed an intelligence which consistently helped him create both sermons and texts far beyond his own talents.

"Now then, John," Wood said, "you've brought your ... what do you call it?"

"A manifesto," Buckworth said, withdrawing a document from his coat.

"Mr. Wood," Thomas Smith said, "watch your voice, Sir! What about Special Constables? They could be lurking!"

"Nonsense!" Mellor replied. "We're as safe in this shop as in the fields, and a damn sight warmer." He glanced quickly toward Mary. "Please excuse a rough cropper's tongue, Mrs. Buckworth."

"You need not concern yourself, Mr. Mellor," she said, smiling. "You recall my father once owned a mill. I am accustomed to workmen's jargon."

Mary's accent was also markedly more refined than all but her husband's with just the soft click of Nottingham in a few of its consonants.

"But where are the others, Mr. Wood? John said this was an important meeting."

"They keep vigil at Cartwright's mill," Will Thorpe said.

"But why?" Mary asked.

"They await the coming of ..."

"Cartwright has ordered machines," Mellor said, finishing the thought, accompanied by grumbles around the table. "He's bringing in shear frames. So men stand outside his mill in protest."

As the others muttered, Thorpe turned to Mary.

"Are ye staying here, ma'am, for the meeting?"

"Yes, of course," she said, a trifle confused.

"What's the trouble, Will?" Wood asked.

It took a moment for Thorpe to respond. He had carefully measured his words.

"I see no sense in a woman joining this business. 'Tis the work of men; a brotherhood! Women have no understanding of this."

"Ah, but this one does, Mr. Thorpe," John Buckworth said. "We both see the way the world is going. Had Mary's father not sold his business he would now be facing ruin. Believe me, Sir, we know a new order must be advocated."

"But a woman ... " Thorpe could not find his way from that path.

"Will," Mellor said, "we need these good people and more like 'em! They're educated. We ain't. They can make the pamphlets we'll need t' spread our word t' the public."

"But *you* can write," Thorpe said.

"Not like these two," Mellor said.

"Can we get t' the business, George?" Walker said.

"Right then," Mellor said, smiling. "To business!"

2

"I HAVE THE newspaper: the *Leeds Mercury*."

George Mellor spread a broadsheet on the table.

"Is that one edited by Edward Baines?" Mary asked. Clearly she knew of the newspaperman and his liberal reputation. Clearly as well, from the tone of her voice, she agreed with his views.

"Aye!" Mellor replied. "He's followed events quite some time now!"

"He's also somewhat of a radical, George," Buckworth said.

"Just look here!" Mellor raised his voice in excitement. "They smash the machines that beggar them! The Nottingham lads are showing them soldiers a bit of real sport!"

"So it's come to that," Buckworth said. He picked up the broadsheet, angling the page toward the lantern's dim light.

"Soldiers?" Walker said, again nervous.

"It says they've hundreds organized there." Buckworth closed the paper. "The least we can do is support them. We must publish my manifesto!"

"More words," Thorpe replied.

"You're right, Will," John Wood said. He did not want his stratagems going astray. "I believe in your words, Curate Buckworth. And that's the true business here! You, Sir!"

Buckworth was taken aback.

"I don't understand ... "

Mary placed a hand on his arm, Mellor subtly moved to Buckworth's other flank.

"John," Mrs. Buckworth said quietly, "listen carefully now."

"Join us, man!" Wood said, enthused; his plan depended upon his next words. "'Tis time for action! You must become one of the brothers, one of Gen'ral Ludd's followers!"

If ever a man bore the look of a cornered animal, John Buckworth did in that moment. His eyes skimmed quickly from Wood to his wife, then to Mellor. He spoke in a halting manner.

"Luddites? You intend ... vandalism then?"

"Were you not safe with your money, friend," Thorpe said, looming across the table, "you'd see things a different way."

Mellor placed his hand on Buckworth's shoulder, the curate's wife tightening her grip on the other side.

"You must examine ... both sides ... before you stoop to violence," Buckworth said, stuttering, then regained his confidence. "These machines might become a blessing for you if society were different. There is an international economy which reaches far beyond our Yorkshire. These machines will allow us to join that economy, increase our trade. The machinery itself is not evil. Think how efficiently it works, how it does the most arduous part of a workman's task!"

"It takes our jobs! Leaves us nowt but beggary," Walker replied.

"If the owners would recognize people's needs," Buckworth said, "surely the situation would improve."

"If? If?" Thorpe thundered. "What's the use of your sermons t' starving men? If the *maisters* would do as you say, well, it would be better we all know! But they won't! What do they care about us when they make their *brass* a bit faster?"

"The course of the Luddites is not negotiation," Buckworth said, "but confrontation. Violence is no remedy."

"Aye, but it makes 'em sit up and take notice!" Thorpe shouted.

"The Luddite plan will never succeed. We need reform, Mr. Thorpe, not revolt!"

"Reform? Bah!" Walker said.

"But would it not be better to lay these matters before the owners and reason with them?"

"Reason with 'em? Reason with stones I say, for their hearts be hard as flint!" Thorpe said. "The only chap who can reason with them is *Enoch*!"

Thorpe raised a huge sledge hammer from a line of tools beside him, the head weighing thirty pounds. This maul had a storied history; forged by Enoch Taylor when he'd been a mere blacksmith, now he owned a manufactory. Now he made the cast-iron shear frames which would put yet more men out of work.

"Enoch hath made 'em," Thorpe recited, "and Enoch shall break 'em!"

It was a powerful, ironic statement and popular rallying cry.

"This chap," Thorpe said, "is the best reasoner I know! When he breaks them machines in a hundred pieces, then the *maisters* will understand!"

"But the country needs money, Mr. Thorpe," Buckworth said, remaining calm. "Bonaparte has cut our markets and now the Americans look to do the same. Am I not correct in this, Mr. Wood? If you could, would you not purchase machines?"

The shift took John Wood by surprise. This was treacherous ground.

"I've no wish t' put men out of work. And I've heard shear frames do a poor job of finishing. I've no use for machines that cheapen my product." Wood shifted the focus away from himself. "George Mellor, what say you?"

"Say you'll join us, John!" Mellor squeezed Buckworth's shoulder in a friendly fashion, then looked to Mary. "What does your wife say? Mary?"

"My husband is a man who abhors violence," Mary responded. "I know his feelings but, forgive me John dear, your arguments have fallen short."

Buckworth registered shock as an expected ally turned defector. For a moment he found he could not speak, then stuttered a brief: " … destroying machines?"

"As symbols of injustice, John," Mary said boldly. "You have said yourself in your manifesto there must be a focal point."

"My manifesto — " Buckworth said, trying to regain his footing.

" — will be ignored, if there is not some reason to hear it," Mary exclaimed. With his logic gone, his arguments in tatters, John Buckworth collapsed beneath her will.

"My wife is a wise woman. I ... I shall join you. My head tells me you are wrong but my dear wife shows me the way."

"You'll take the Oath?" Mellor said.

"The Oath is illegal. Taking it means imprisonment, or transportation."

Buckworth glanced again to Mary for her approval. It came in the smallest nod of consent.

"I will take the Oath." Buckworth spoke more assuredly, his way cast for him, yet with no idea where it would lead.

"The book, Thomas!" Mellor turned to Smith who produced a tattered Bible. Mellor placed Buckworth's right hand upon it and into his left thrust a soiled, much used parchment. "Then read the Oath, John, and swear."

Buckworth read the Oath, its ink smudged from many hands grasping the parchment, the parchment itself stiff and curling. He read carefully, as he would any writ, though he noted how it was oddly composed. He stopped and stuttered two or three times as he tried to comprehend the style of a barely literate hand.

The Oath read, and Buckworth recited:

> *"I of my own free will and A Coard declare and solemly sware that I will never reveal to aney ... Person or Persons aney thing that may lead to discovery of the same ... Either in or by word sign or action as may lead to aney Discovery under the Penelty of being sent out of this World by the first Brother that May Meet me ... Further more I do sware that I will Punish by death aney trator or trators ... should there aney arise up amongst us I will persue with unseaceing vengeance, should he fly to the verge of Nature. I will be gust true sober and faithful in all my deailings with all my Brothers So help me GOD to keep this my Oath Invoilated ... Amen."*

Buckworth finished, his *Amen* almost a prayer of regret, when Wood took the Bible from him and said: "Now you're *twisted in* as we call it. One of us, Curate Buckworth."

Buckworth faced Mellor blankly as the latter smiled.

"Now our business done, we'll be off t' the Shears Inn up the road for a jar of celebration! Well done, John Buckworth!"

"T' the pub!" Thomas Smith said. Yet amidst the noise Buckworth paused.

"I would join you, Sirs, but must see my wife home first."

"No John!" George Mellor said. "'Tis your night! I'll see your wife home then join the revels later!"

"Mary?" Buckworth turned to her, his eyes a question to which she responded with a wonderful smile, her green eyes becoming sea soft, securing her husband's acquiescence.

"I am proud of you, dearest," she said. "This night is your night. You must be its centre as you are mine."

"Off now, all of you!" Mellor instructed. "Upend a tankard or two. I'll join you soon!"

With his commands the men boisterously donned their coats and hats anticipating the Shears. It took little time to disperse and walk the two miles to bring them their *bitters*. Buckworth found himself relishing the walk even if the road was slushy, even if fog concealed all around him.

In the shop, the men gone, their shouts and laughter dissipated in the distance, George Mellor closed and barred the door. He turned to look at Mary. Seconds passed with his look and Mary, trembling slightly, turned away from him. The intensity of their mood made her loosen her jacket collar with quivering fingers.

"Well, it's ... best we go home ... " she said softly.

Mellor took a step toward her.

"Mary ... " he said, hesitant as well.

She turned to him, her face revealing a confusion of love, lust, longing and guilt. He swept her into his arms, she welcoming the embrace, and they kissed long and hungrily. His hand began to move over her, brushing her breast, pushing her hips closer to him. She returned his passion but as he began to tug at her laces she broke away.

"George, please, not here. Any of them might return."

"That will not happen, dearest," Mellor said, smiling.

He tried again to draw her into his arms but she resisted.

"No, George."

"In God's name, Mary, I need you now."

"Then walk me home. It will be safe there."

"In your husband's house?"

"Why not? We've manipulated him, George. Against his will he's joined you."

"We agreed it would be good for the movement as John Wood advised … "

"I cannot take the chance of being discovered."

"Aye," he said, "you're ashamed of me."

"We've been over this, George. I love my husband but he is … not you. Since the moment I met you in father's shop, you just off a ship looking for work. Even when he told you he was selling and could not hire you, you didn't wilt or slink away. I felt your power even then. And that is why I am yours, why those men are yours, why my husband is yours now too."

She had turned him, his bitterness disappearing as a smile crossed his face. He grasped her and lifted her off the floor spinning her around like a weightless doll.

"Mary … Mary … you're a wondrous woman!"

She laughed as she spun.

"George, put me down!"

"Aye, I will, but you must promise me one thing."

"Oh? And what would that be?" She smiled, straightening her outfit. As quickly as he'd become jovial, George Mellor altered: his voice full of worry.

"I'll need your help in this, Mary. 'Tis a frightening thing t' lead men yet they seem t' expect it. I'm a dolt, dear Mary."

"You are a born leader, George Mellor, despite your humble place. You shall be a great man one day soon."

Once again, with her words, his mood shifted. He grinned.

"And you'll be mine!"

"But now, see me home," she said gently, her eyes an uninhibited jade. "We'll walk quickly. In my bed I'll have some of that power of yours!"

"In your husband's bed," he said bitterly, but she shook him from his mood with a look, a touch, and a few simple words.

"Tonight it is yours, and mine, together. Hurry now ... where is your coat?"

As the two departed they extinguished the lantern. From an alcove which lead to his office John Wood moved through the dark. He too was smiling. The night had brought all he'd wanted. The inclusion of the curate and his manifesto would offer endorsement to his designs and young George Mellor had taken the lead to become the spearhead of his plans. In order to stay afloat, Wood planned to sabotage his wealthy competitors. The curate, the cropper, the wife and mistress ... they would become his arsenal.

But where they would take him when he set them loose, and the consequences arising, he could not possibly realize.

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