

SCENE IV

(The light comes up on the Narrator, center

NARRATOR

So the unprincipled William Tryon left Charlottetown, and the next month the Mecklenburg militia, with other companies from the western settlements, joined him in Hillsboro for the sitting of the high court.

The notorious grafter, His Majesty's agent Edmund Fanning, indicted for extortion, was convicted and fined one penny and the costs on each of seven counts. Herman Husbands and several others were charged with rioting, Husbands was acquitted, the others were found guilty and given long prison sentences, but the decisions of the court so infuriated the Regulators that the convicted men were aided in escaping.

And as the militiamen grew more restive and the news of the trials spread outward into the back country, the flame of discontent blazed brighter and developed heat. Tryon, fearing more trouble, ordered the militiamen to return to their homes, and His Excellency drove away to the fine comforts of his great palace at New Bern, then the most beautiful building in all America.

But the disbanding of the troops did not quench the flame in Carolina, nor did the chartering of Charlottetown on December 11, 1768, serve to soothe the feelings of Mecklenburgers. The fire grew, and spread, and the muttering became louder, and the anger flamed, and shrill, strident voices, stentorian voices, calm, unruffled voices cried out against the mounting injustices and extortions of the agents of the crown. And many of the voices shouted defiance, and many uttered imprecations and

and curses, and here and there -- in the coast country and far into the back lands -- a voice was heard to lift a prayer.

The growing clamor of the oppressed peoples of the province, however, served only to infuriate Tryon the more, and he determined to stamp out this detestible rebellion, as he termed it.

Once more Governor Tryon began raising his troops, collecting supplies for the march into Alamance, where the resistance still centered. But he gained little support from the west, and when ammunition and other supplies from Charles Town arrived at Charlottetown on the way to Hillsboro, no one would volunteer wagons to carry them farther. So Sheriff Moses Alexander had to impress three wagons.

And out from old Pat Jack's tavern and Joe Nicholson's tavern the news spread, and daring young men were quick to make plans and not afraid to carry them out. So that night, as the tired wagoners halted at Phifer's Mill three miles southwest of the present Concord, they had visitors.

(The light fades quickly from the Narrator and the stage is completely dark. For an instant there is no sound, and then the noise of horses coming along the road is heard, and the horses stop in center of forestage. A voice, low and calm, speaks:)

VOICE

Don't tie up your horses too tight, boys, We may have to run for it.

(For a moment there is a quiet stir of men and horses moving about. Then another voice speaks, sleepily.)

SLEEPY MAN

Hey! What's goin' on here. That you, Mac?

FIRST VOICE

(After an instant.)

Listen, fellow. I've got a long knife stickin' in yore ribs. It might pay you to keep uncommon quiet. And where is the rest of the drivers? But don't talk too loud. And you all got any guns?

WAGONER

(Now fully awake.)

They's right here. You mighty nigh standin' on 'em. And we ain't got nothin' to shoot with.

FIRST VOICE

How much stuff you got?

WAGONER

Three waggins full-powder and flints, blankets, and stuff. It's fer Tryon to use agin the Regerlators.

FIRST VOICE

It won't be. Wake up yore friends. And tell 'em the first one cheeps gits a knife and maybe some hot lead.

(To one of his companions)

Hey, Andy --

ANDY

No names, bry. You know better'n that.

FIRST VOICE

Sure. But you come over here and look after these fellows while we get our business finished. I'll git a little light so's we can tell what we are doin'.

(Slowly a flickering light near center of stage outlines a man bending over, his back toward audience, and as the light brightens other men are revealed, the wagoners sprawled on the ground, their straw filled sacks under their heads, men with blacked faces moving in and out of the light.)

WAGONER

Niggers! You ain't no niggers. Blacked yore faces so's nobody'd know you.

ONE OF BLACK BOYS

Well, you don't, do you?

SLEEPY MAN

Naw, but old Tryon he'll find out who you all are and he'll break yore necks.

BLACK BOY

That's what you think.

FIRST VOICE

Stop the argyment. We got business to do and be gettin' away. Git them blankets out here and pile 'em up. Fetch all the powder kegs out and stove in the heads. We'll pour it in a big pile. Then we'll lay a powder trail, and lether blow!

(Quickly the blankets and other equipment is piled up and fired, and the blaze lights the scene. Then the kegs are brought out, broken in, and the powder is poured into a pile. A powder trail is laid and everybody gets back. When everything is completed the first man speaks:)

Somebody see to the horses. We don't want them breaking away. You fellows might as well get on and be ready to take off in a hurry. I'll light the trail.

(He pulls off his cookskin cap, waves it, showing a white streak around the top of his forehead.)

That powder'll never kill any Regerlators. The devil take ol' Tryon!

(He walks over, picks up a burning bit of blanket, bends down and lights the trail. The blaze sweeps along, strikes the pile and it goes up with a deafening roar. The men, turning in their saddles, raise their caps and yell, and then they spur their horses and are off, left. The fire from the powder dies down quickly, and as it goes out, the voice of the Narrator, still in the darkness, is heard:)

NARRATOR

So William Tryon lost his powder and the Cabarrus Black Boys won immortality.