

SCENE V

(The light comes up on the Narrator, center.)

NARRATOR

But every such act of resistance infuriated Tryon all the more and he resolved unmercifully to crush the Regulators. On May 16, 1771, on the Alamance the troops of the Governor met the unorganized, indisciplined citizens who had gathered once more to urge redress of their grievances, slaughtered many of them, captured their leaders. And for days after the battle the people of the province were treated to the spectacle of seeing these unfortunate men being dragged about in chains behind the ornate carriage of His Excellency.

And the fury of an ill-treated people mounted, and voices were heard, some in the Scotch country mildly approving, many discordant, angry, many vehement, threatening, At Cross Creek--

(The Narrator stops speaking, and the light goes out abruptly on him and comes up on a small set at the left. Mr. McNeill and his daughter Elizabeth and David Barksdale are seated before the handsome mantel of the McNeill drawing room.)

ELIZABETH

(Scornfully.)

At any rate, Father, I think it is the most disgraceful thing I ever heard of. The Governor of this great province allowing his spleen to so assert itself that he drags a bunch of poor men about the country chained up like beasts. It's the way the Roman emperors did back in the dark ages. I'll never speak to old Tryon again!

MCNEILL

I don't approve of his exhibiting the prisoners in that

manner, Daughter. I think it shows lack of dignity, for one thing. But the Governor is determined to stamp out this rebellion, and in that I must support him --

DAVID

(Interrupting.)

But, why, Mr. McNeill? Do you not think that the people have real grievances?

MCNEILL

They have real grievances in some instances, no doubt, and many fancied grievances in others. But, Mr. Barksdale, they are in rebellion against the King by rebelling against the King's government in this province. And that cannot be tolerated. Certainly, sir, I cannot countenance it.

(He rises, begins unfastening the cuff on his left arm, pushes up the coat sleeve, turns the cuff back.)

I have never told you, Mr. Barksdale. Culloden. I was a young man then. After the battle I took an oath. See that tiny scar?

(Pointing with his right forefinger to his wrist.)

I opened my wrist there, drew out my own blood, and with it attested a most solemn oath to be loyal to His Majesty. Young man, I shall never be false to that Blood Oath. I trust that it shall not, but if it comes to fighting, I must be on the side of His Majesty.

DAVID

(Who has risen as Mr. McNeill was standing up.)

(Looking at Elizabeth.)

And I, sir, will be on the people's side.

(The light fades out, comes up again on the Narrator.)

NARRATOR

And out at Alexandriana in Mecklenburg --

(The light fades on the Narrator and comes up simultaneously on set at right of center. Jane Bain Alexander, wife of John McKnitt Alexander, whom her husband affectionately calls "Jeanie," is seated on the front porch of her home. He husband rides up, dismounts from his horse, whose bridle is taken by the Negro Cato.)

(He comes up on porch, kisses his wife, drops wearily into a chair.)

JEANIE

Tired, Honey?

ALEXANDER

I reckon that's it, Sweet, but --

JEANIE

But what?

ALEXANDER

There was bad news today in Charlottetown. Tryon and the Regulators had a big fight over on the Alamance. Tryon's soldiers killed a bunch of Regulators and they say he's carrying several of the leaders about over the middle settlements tied up in chains, and he'll likely hang 'em when he gets through showing them off.

JEANIE

(Frightened)

Do you reckon David and Jethro were in it and --

ALEXANDER

No, Sweet, not likely. They went towards Cross Creek by the south way. They didn't likely run into any trouble. Like as not, David's sitting right now in old McNeill's parlor.

JEANIE

I do hope so. She is such a sweet girl.

ALEXANDER

Yes, but her father's a confirmed King's man. And he'll be on the other side from us when trouble comes.

JEANIE

You think we'll have trouble -- in Mecklenburg, McKnitt?

ALEXANDER

(Looking forward, intent.)

We're bound to, Sweet. We just can't dodge it, unless Tryon changes, and he's too mean and stubborn to do that.

(With feeling.)

And it's a certain thing we folks in Mecklenburg won't submit.

(Relapsing into a gloomy attitude.)

Things are looking might bad. It's likely to be war before we know it, unless the King's crowd learns some sense, and who's there to teach 'em?

(Then noticing his wife's alarm, he gets up quickly, walks over to her, lifts her chin, looks straight into her eyes.)

But don't you worry your pretty head, Sweet. If we do out best, the good Lord will look after us. Hasn't he always done it?

(He bends over, -kisses her, as the light fades.)

NARRATOR

(As the light slowly comes up on him.)

And over beyond the Yadkin at Tryon's headquarters on the Alamance --

(The light fading on the Narrator comes up up slowly upon a lone figure standing in a high, two-wheeled cart. He is a young man, wearing coarse, pioneer type clothing, a hunting shirt open at the neck. The light

moving upward along his body reveals a rope around his neck. In the cart is a long pine box. The light, spreading outward now, shows a line of troops right, Governor Tryon just in front of them, and two or three other men, all dressed in the mode of the coast country aristocracy.)

TRYON

James Few, you have been found guilty of treason against your King. You were one of the leaders of the recent rebellion that has been crushed, as it will be crushed again if any other insolent and treasonable miscreants attempt it. And now, have you anything to say for yourself?

FEW

I got nothing to say. I wouldn't be heard did I say anything. But I am not guilty of anything except to fight for my rights as a free man.

(He leans forward, and his eyes are flashing.)

But I'll say one thing, Bill Tryon! You won this fight. You'll hang me and these others. But you ain't won for good. Your day'll come. The people of Carolina will be free of such dressed up scoundrels as the likes of you. We ain't guilty of any rebellion against the rightful government, because we got no rightful government. All we got is a bunch of crooks rubbin' and stealin' and ruinin' us. And you have refused to give us justice.

(He raises his fist, shakes it at the Governor.)

Your day is a-comin', Bill Tryon! The good Lord won't let you reign forever. We'll get deliverance, and we'll set up a new country. And the Devil take you and old George. You can break my neck, you dressed up peacock of a buzzard, but you can't scare me!

TRYON

(Furious.)

You can't talk like that to me, you insolent country jay!

FEW

The devil I can't, Bill Tryon. Look at you! Lace cuffs, pink coat, sniffin' snuff up'n your nose! Those fancy duds'll burn first-rate in hell. Hah-hah-hah!

(He throws back his head and laughs, a high, shrill, nervous unearthly screaming laugh.)

Hah-hah-hah-hah! You'll be there afore me, Bill Tryon. You'll be dancin' a jig for the Old Scratch in them fancy duds! Hah-hah-hah!

TRYON

(Yelling)

Push him off, men! Let him dance in thin air.

(One of the soldiers gives the horse a cut on the hindquarters. It plunges forward as the light goes out.)

FEW

Hah-hah-ha-ug-ug-g-g--g

(For a long monent there is utter silence, and the audience sits in complete darkness. Then slowly the light comes up again on the Narrator, who turns several leaves of his big book.)

NARRATOR

So in Carolina men die for freedom, but there is no freedom. And men gather and talk, in lonely backwoods churchyards after long fearsome sermons; in low-ceilinged living rooms of cabins in distant settlements women come together to quilt or to minister to their sisters in childbirth, or to prepare the tired bodies of their neighbors for the long rest. at the mustergrounds, in the taprooms of inns, on the porch of old

Pat Jack's Tavern in Charlottetown --

(The light fades and comes up on the porch of Jack's Tavern. Several men, among them Jethro and David, are lounging about.)

ONE OF MEN

Jethro, I heared tell that you fetched some of that there English tea from over at Salisbury. How 'bout it?

JETHRO

Yeh, I did. Been hearin' so much 'bout tea and them wimmen down at Edenton havin' a tea-party and such that I figured I better git me a mess.

MAN

How was it?

JETHRO

Nothin' to it. I can't see how come they's so much of a hullabaloo been raised about this tea business. Course, now, don't git me wrong. I'm agin payin' a tax on the stuff. The British got no right to tax us if'n we wants to buy hit. And I'll fight 'em 'bout that there tax, too. But as fer me --

(He laughs.)

I don't want no more o' hit.

MAN

How come, Jethro?

JETHRO

'Taint wu'th a dad-blamed ha'-pence with a hole in hit. Too bitter. Why, my old woman b'iled hit and b'iled hit and hit didn't never git done. The water off'n hit was bitter as gall, and hit didn't never git tender 'nough to eat. And my old woman she th'owed the stuff out the back door and the dad-gummed chickens wouldn't even eat hit!

(The light fades out as the men slap their legs and guffaw. Now the light comes up again on the Narrator, and he turns pages in his big book.)

NARRATOR

Weeks and months pass, and still there is no relief. Instead, conditions grow worse. The government of King George is in no mood to conciliate. In Philadelphia the members of the Continental Congress argue and pass resolutions and discuss among themselves means of forming an indissoluble union for preserving, by the best and most proper means, their common rights and liberties. In Massachusetts the government of King George and his subjects in that province are approaching an open break, and in the south, too, there is dissatisfaction and smouldering rebellion. Shortly after the battle with the Regulators, Governor Tryon was transferred to New York as Governor of that province and Josiah Martin succeeded him. Now Governor Martin, too, is highly unpopular, and the unrest in Mecklenburg has grown to such volume that the leading citizens, having met in Queen's Museum and frequently out at Alexandriana, determine to take action.

(The Narrator pauses, turns two more pages, reads now with quickened pace.)

So on May 19, 1775 in response to the call of Colonel Thomas Polk, two representatives from each of the militia companies of Mecklenburg assemble in Charlottetown to consider action for the preservation of their liberties. They examine the intolerable situation carefully, and opinions move with remarkable unanimity toward one inescapable conclusion: the Mother Country is not likely to change her course toward the colonies, and therefore, if we are to have freedom, we must with fortitude



and great courage, and with God as our only helper, move forward upon our own course independent of England and in defiance of her, if need be.

For hours the delegates have been in session, and now they are returning to the courthouse after an intermission for refreshment.