

SCENE IV

(The light dying upon the Narrator comes upon the front of the house at Alexandriana. John McKnitt Alexander and his wife Jeanie are standing at the uppin'-block in fore-front, left. Alexander is waiting for Cato to bring his horse for his trip to Charlotte-town.)

ALEXANDER

It's hot, Sweet, powerful hot. Rain's certainly needed. Look how the corn's twisting up.

(He points off to his right.)

JEANIE

There'll be rain before you're back, McKnitt. It's just bound to rain.

ALEXANDER

Maybe so. It's too hot to last much longer without rain. I'm afraid that when it comes there'll be a storm.

(He pauses.)

And in the same way it's too peaceful here at Alexandriana to last without war and bloodshed. It's been so happy here, Sweetheart, and living's been good. Maybe like the corn out there we have shriveled and twisted in our minds and been blind to the privileges of this land, to the blessings we have enjoyed. Now it may be that war is needed to teach us to appreciate our blessings--

JEANIE

(Speaking quickly)

No. McKnitt. War is never needed. War's an instrument of the devil---

ALEXANDER

Yes, but perhaps used of the Lord--

JEANIE

I think not, McKnitt. War is bad; war's never good.

ALEXANDER

You're right, Sweetheart, of course. But how about the Father's using war as a manner of punishing us for our shortcomings? Could it be that we have been spending our thoughts too much on prospering, on filling our storehouses--

(He points toward the granary, the barn, and the cribs off right.)

and have forgot to appreciate the riches that come with being an American and having freedom and the right to live our lives our own way?

JEANIE

But you haven't forgot that privilege, McKnitt. Have you not always been a good citizen, a good elder in Hopewell, a good husband and father?

ALEXANDER

(Lifting her to a sitting position on the uppin'-block.)

Bless your heart, Sweet; I've tried to, but oftentimes I have failed to appreciate my privileges. I've taken for granted such things like freedom and security and the right to go and come as I please and to worship in my own way, things that other persons in other lands--other good persons, Jeanie--have died to get, things that good people in this country are dying to keep. But now, as the British come closer, Jeanie, we are beginning more and more to realize the value of these things--

JEANIE

(Interrupting.)

I've a notion we'll be spared in Mecklenburg. I've a notion

our men will chase those old Britishers right back to Charles Town and drive them off into the sea. Soon General Gates will be at Camden, and he's a great general. You said so yourself, McKnitt.

ALEXANDER

Well, he won at Saratoga. The Continental Congress has great faith in him. They appointed him to command the southern army. But I've heard tell since that General Washington wanted Greene instead, and I have the greatest respect for General Washington, and that makes me a little doubtful now about Gates.

JEANIE

But there's Grif Rutherford and the militia, McKnitt, and Governor Caswell. And there's David and Jethro and Joe Graham and Humphrey Hunter and--

ALEXANDER

(Smiling, pinching her cheek.)

You've got plenty of faith in our Mecklenburg boys, haven't you, Sweet?

JEANIE

Well, I believe they'll stop the British down Camden way.

ALEXANDER

And if they don't? With our boys all down there, who'll be up here to fight the Redcoats?

JEANIE

I don't believe they'll get past Camden.

ALEXANDER

(His face very clouded.)

I'm afraid they will, Sweet. They do say Gates has more men than Cornwallis. But somehow I'm afraid.

(He sighs.)

No, Jeanie, we shall not escape the test. I feel it. The British are coming. John Davidson thinks so. So does Hezekiah, and Waightstill, and the others. That's what we are going to talk about today--what to do when they come. For they are coming, I'm bound. They'll be coming right here to Alexandriana.

(Suddenly he looks her straight in the eyes.)

Jeanie, when they come, do you want to take British protection?

JEANIE

(Jumping down from the uppin'-block.)

I-- I take protection!

(Heatedly.)

Never! McKnitt Alexander, why ask me such a question? I'll die first, and you know it!

ALEXANDER

(Happily, his eyes shining.)

Of course, my girl, I knew it. But I wanted to hear you say it.

(Suddenly he is serious again.)

Nor will I. Many of those big men in South Carolina did--good men, too. But I'll never ask their protection. They'll hang me first!

(Seeing Cato, who is leading the saddle horse toward him.)

Here, Cato, listen to me! I want you to remember this: If ever the British get into this community and you see them coming to Alexandriana to get our supplies to feed their men and horses, I want you to set fire to every barn and granary and crib on the place. Do you understand? They'll not get a grain from us, if I can help it.

CATO

Yes, suh, Marse McKnitt. It'd be a great pity, but I'll shore

see dat them Britishmen don't get none o' our stuff!

ALEXANDER

(Climbing into saddle, and bending down to kiss
Jeanie good-bye.)

Good, Cato. And don't you forget.

(To Jeanie)

Good-bye, Sweetheart; it'll likely be late when I get home
tonight.

(As he rides off, left, the light dies on the
set. Jeanie is waving to him as the set goes
dark.)