

If my mother's coldness was a cloud over my life, shadows hovered over the shipyards as well. British vessels were already forbidden entrance to our harbors. Late in 1807, fed up with "British disrespect, thievery, and kidnapping," as the *Gazette* declared, Congress passed the Embargo Act, forbidding our ships access to the seas. Really, these decisions taken to preserve honor and property by men far off in Washington. . . . Separating Lewis and George who'd fallen to fisticuffs one afternoon, I thought how often nations behaved like children. Costs ran

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high. Treasury receipts dwindled and agricultural prices plummeted. Seaports were the hardest hit. In Bowdoinham, as in Bath, waterfront life came to a halt. Ships lay docked in port for want of cargo, half-finished vessels rotted upon the stacks. The shipyard, the chandlery, the very life Josiah and I had built—all threatened. Josiah's buoyant spirits evaporated. More and more I found myself harboring concerns about his melancholy. He spoke little to me of his worries; perhaps he was sharing them with other men at Leonard's Tavern.

Fifteen months later the embargo lifted and so did Josiah's mood. Our men went back to building and operating ships. In boxes, casks, barrels, and hogsheads, amid hammering and shouts, the flour, grain, beef, pork, butter, and root vegetables were packed for travel to the far West Indies. All homely goods and useful—but our real profit lay in wood. Loaded one way with timbers, planks, and clapboards, even spars and masts to refit vessels in distant dockyards, our ships returned with vines and cane for rattan seats, with sugar, molasses, cotton, coffee, spices, and rum. A ship might repay its costs in one voyage (though such riches rarely stayed long in the Bath National Bank). Josiah seemed, again, one of the ambitious men fast turning profits into new ventures.

Only later, as rum from the islands flowed nightly at Leonard's Tavern, did I ask myself if this foreign commodity might alter for the worse the life we'd built. By then, the sky darkening with the clouds of war, something hard to name but worrisome had curled its way into our home.