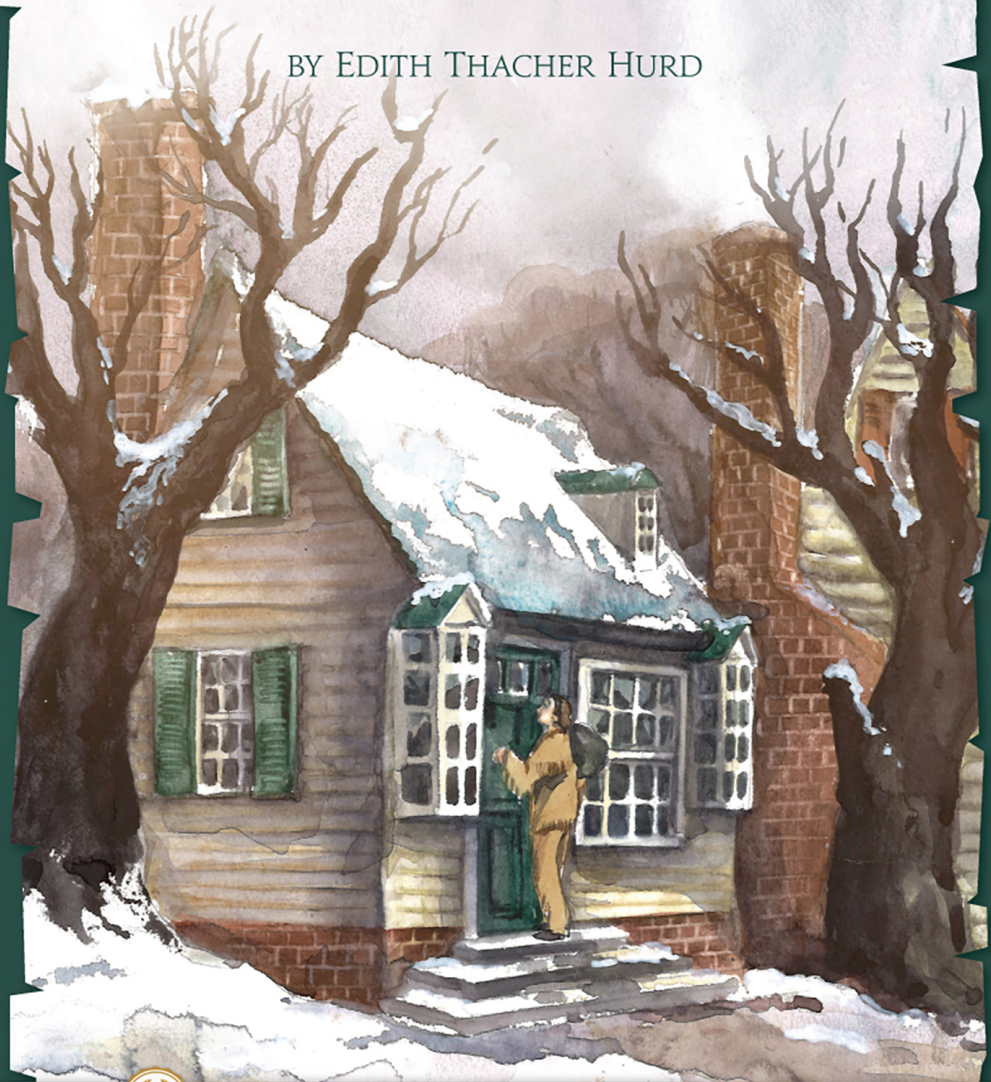
THE THREE GOLD DOUBLOONS

BY EDITH THACHER HURD



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THE THREE GOLD DOUBLOONS

This wonderful tale follows the adventures of a printer's apprentice, Tom Cartwright, in colonial Williamsburg. Not only is Tom caught up in an exciting historical time period, but also in an engaging plot. With skillful writing, the author weaves in inspiring messages, such as how kind actions to those who don't deserve them can come back to bless you in the most unexpected ways.

"When I read this book, I knew it was one that needed to be brought back to the world. It has everything that makes a worthy book: high literary, moral, educational, and entertainment value. If you are a parent that likes to feed your child's minds with literature that uplifts and teaches, this book is a wonderful choice."

Tom drew back into the shadow of the wall, for at that moment, the gate opened and two of the governor's black horses appeared pulling a large wagon behind them. Tom could just make out the dark forms of several men crouching low on the seat. The horses' hoofs must have been padded, for they scarcely made a sound even on the cobblestones of the courtyard.

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CHAPTER 1

Tom shivered a little as he walked. It was the first day of the new year, 1775, and even a buckskin jacket and long leather breeches offered little protection against the sharp January winds. The red clay of the road had frozen into thin ruts that made walking painful in soft leather moccasins.

Stopping a moment, Tom closed his eyes against a spat of white snow swirling out of the cold sky. As he stood, he listened. He listened to the endless sighing of the tall pines through which the road had been cut. He listened to the sound of the snow sputtering against the buckskin of his jacket, and he listened to the silence. Suddenly, now that he had only a little farther to go, Tom was afraid. Deep down inside of him was a new sort of fear that he had never known before, not the kind of fear that crept over you when you were lost in the woods at night and couldn't tell which way to turn. No, nor the kind of fear you had all alone in a cabin when the lightning tore out of the mountains and smashed across the valley, jabbing at the trees in great yellow streaks.

"I almost wish I hadn't come," he thought as he turned once more to face the cutting wind. "I wish I'd stayed home. How am I ever going to get used to living in a town, to wearing the funny clothes they do, to not carrying a gun, and those stiff shoes?"

Suddenly, Tom knew what was the matter. He knew all right, but he didn't like to admit it even to himself. He missed

his ma. He was homesick even though he was fifteen and had been away from home only four days. He couldn't help it. Right now Williamsburg seemed a mighty long way from Frederick County.

Wiping his cold hand across his mouth, Tom swallowed hard and took a firmer grip on the stick holding his little bundle of possessions. Then he broke into a dog-trot. He had gone barely a mile when suddenly, looking ahead, he saw it. There it was. He could just make out the shapes, the fences, and the already tiny spots of light showing through the gray winter darkness.

"Williamsburg!" Tom whispered aloud as he stopped. "Williamsburg." He said the name almost reverentially. Would it truly be his home from now on? Tom felt a heavy pounding inside of him as he hurried forward once more. It was not long before he came to a small sandy path running beside a wooden fence. Inside the fence stood several red brick buildings.

"Must be the college," thought Tom. "Must be William and Mary, 'cause Mr. Thruston told me that would be the first thing I'd come to. 'It's the college at one end of the town and the Capitol at the other, Tom,' he had said. 'And, coming in from the mountains as you will, you'll see the college buildings first.'"

Tom was soon at the gates. He stood looking in. Directly in front of him at the end of a long walk stood a large red brick building more beautiful than anything Tom had ever seen in his whole life. It was topped by a high cupola, and along the front ran a double row of windows, from each of which glimmered a small spot of yellow light. On either side of this main building were two others, smaller, but equally elegant, it seemed to Tom as he stood wondering which Mr. Thruston had told him was the school for the Indian boys.

Too lost in admiration and too absorbed trying to recall

all that he had read of the great men and students who were fortunate enough to study and teach here, Tom paid little heed to the hubbub of voices and clatter of horses' hoofs and carriage wheels that kept up continuously behind him on the main street of the town. Suddenly there came a "Holla. Clear the way."

Tom jumped and threw himself safely out of the way, waiting until the heavy, pounding hoofs had passed. Then he turned. Angrily he looked after the fast-disappearing carriage. Through the dusk he could just make out an arrogant figure sitting erect as a musket in the high seat, the reins held tightly in his hands, while the woman beside him looked neither to right nor left.

There came a whimper, a short growl, and Tom saw something white sprawled in the frozen road before him. Dropping his bundle, he ran forward. A small white dog lay on its side where the carriage had passed. Tom knelt down and, with strong, tender fingers, felt the little creature all over.

"You're not really hurt," he half whispered as he stroked the long white hair back from the little black eyes. "He may have hit you, but he did you no harm."

Then Tom lifted the dog in his arms, and as he stood up, he saw for the first time the large group of people gathered about him. There was anger and resentment in the faces, and Tom's unasked question was answered by a mountain of a man whom Tom took to be a blacksmith, for he wore a great leather apron over his jacket.

"It's our Governor, boy. You must have just come to Williamsburg, or else you'd know better than to be caught even on the sidewalk when His Lordship is out driving."

"Eh," a young dandy beside him agreed. "But what horses, my friend. Beautiful, beautiful! If one must be run down, at

least let us have the Governor's best."

There was a roar of laughter as the dandy stopped speaking. Tom stood bewildered. He did not understand the laughter. Was he being made the laughingstock of them all? Or was this just the manner in which city folk joked with each other? A hot flush of anger spread over his face. He felt his grip tighten on the small dog in his arms. But before he could think how to address the young man, the crowd seemed to melt into the darkness as abruptly and quietly as they had collected, leaving Tom angry and alone in the strange city.

CHAPTER 2

"Then you are a newcomer?"

Tom whirled, for he had not heard anyone come up to him. The man repeated his question as he saw the surprised look on Tom's face.

"Eh," Tom answered gruffly, determined not to allow himself to be laughed at again. "I've just come. A fine welcome your governor gave me, almost running me down and trampling on this little dog without even stopping to see what damage he'd done."

The man, who seemed to Tom to be standing almost too close to him now, smiled a queer, crooked smile that looked hardly a smile at all, more the mere twisting of the thin, pale lips.

"That's right, boy, Lord Dunmore doesn't care much for us, nor we for him, for that matter. The king sent him to whip our colony back into obedience, but he's not succeeding too well."

Once more the lips twisted, and this time Tom looked more closely at the sharp nose, the deep-set eyes, and the narrow little chin down which ran a deep cleft that looked as if it had been molded of soft clay. The man's clothes were elegant, but since he was standing so close, it was not hard for Tom to see that, despite their elegance, they were threadbare at the cuffs, and there were spots on the waistcoat.

After a moment of silence between the two, Tom, remembering that he had as yet no place to spend the night, asked questioningly:

"I wonder, sir, that is—do you by any chance know a certain Mr. Purdie? Mr. Alexander Purdie, sir. He is a printer. His business is with Mr. Hunter and Mr. Dixon, whom, I believe, are the printers of the Virginia Gazette."

"Indeed," the stranger said in a low, half-whispering voice. "We all know the good Mr. Purdie, but may I correct you. He is no longer in business with Hunter and Dixon, for scarcely a month ago he set up his own shop. I have heard it rumored that he did not agree with his two partners in this trouble we are having with the king."

Tom's heart sank. Perhaps now that he was in business for himself, Mr. Purdie would not want an apprentice. Perhaps his business would be too small to need any help. Or even more likely, he already had all the helpers he could employ. Tom had dreamed so long of becoming a printer and being allowed to work on the Virginia Gazette, and now—now perhaps there would be no place for him at all.

"He doesn't even publish the Gazette, then?" he burst out miserably.

"Not yet, boy," the stranger answered, somewhat puzzled by Tom's unhappiness. "But I have no doubt he will eventually. In fact, I believe he has already announced such an intention as soon as he gets himself squared away in the new shop. That will give us three Virginia gazettes here in Williamsburg, all blowing away as hard as they can every week."

Tom gasped. "Three gazettes!"

"Eh," the older man answered, cocking his three-cornered

hat well over his left eye. "There's Mr. Hunter and Dixon's; there's Mr. Pinkney's—he took over from Mrs. Rind—and soon there will be Mr. Purdie's."

As he spoke, the man made a motion to take Tom by the arm. There was a weak growl. Tom looked down in surprise. The little dog that had, up until this moment, lain quietly in his arms, moved uneasily. Tom could feel her body go tense now.

"Ugly rascal." The stranger withdrew his hand. Tom was puzzled. The man seemed friendly enough, and the dog had not objected to Tom picking her up and holding her, yet she would not let this stranger so much as touch Tom's arm. What did she sense that Tom did not? He puzzled over this as he walked back to pick up his small bundle of possessions that he had dropped at the edge of the street when he hurried to the little dog.

"Come, boy." The stranger followed after him. "I'll show you Mr. Purdie myself. I'll be going that way, for I've decided that the two of us must seal our friendship in a tankard of ale at the Raleigh. It is most opposite Mr. Purdie's at the other end of the Duke of Gloucester Street."

"You mean, sir"—Tom hesitated—"that you would like me to drink ale with you at the Raleigh Tavern?"

Tom remembered that the men who used to come from Williamsburg to talk to his father about the lands to the west spoke often of the Raleigh—the good food, fine company, and happy time to be had there. Indeed, many said it was the finest hostelry in all of Virginia.

"That's just what I mean, boy." The man chuckled hoarsely. "We'll stop there, you and I, and you can tell me more about yourself."

Tom was silent a moment, thinking. Indeed, he would have