

In 1702, Abigail loses both husband and home in a fire. Struggling to raise her infant son, she takes in Tilly a twelve-year-old orphan. They leave their cabin in West Jersey to help a young slave boy escape to freedom in New France. They can expect help from Tamaqua, a Lenape warrior, if they manage to make their way to the Hudson River.

Abigail's Tale
Book Two in the Bompeau Family Saga
by Brien Brown

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Book Two in The Bompeau Family Saga

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Brien Brown

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Prologue

**“Though the sex to which I belong is considered weak you
will nevertheless find me a rock.”**

Elizabeth I

After losing most of her possessions in a great fire, Abigail has to find a way to support her son. She has faced hardship before.

Abigail’s father had made a good living as a London wool merchant. His family should have lived in comfort. But Arthur loved the dogs. Every Thursday he went to the pit to watch massive dogs fight with bears or each other. He drank too much and wagered too much. When he no longer had any reasonable chance of paying his debts, his creditors brought him to the law. The judge gave him one month to pay his debts or go to prison until he did. He owed over a hundred pounds.

He sold his house and business for eighty-five pounds, his furniture and his wife’s pewter for seven. Still owing over ten pounds, he sold his surviving children into servitude. His two sons brought him four pounds each. Twelve-year-old Abigail sold for three.

The trip to Boston was grueling. Along with thirty-two other servants being taken to America for sale, Abigail was confined below deck for seven weeks. They had no blankets or sanitary facilities. They were fed wormy food.

In America, she was sold to a brewer for the remainder of her seven years. She would be free in 1695.

Almost four years later her master bought a young French boy. Abigail and Jean-Marc fell in love.

Their abusive owner beat family and servants alike. When he beat Abigail, Jean-Marc killed him.

They escaped to Philadelphia, then to the wilderness of Pennsylvania. They would have died that winter without help from Tamaqua, a Lenape warrior and now good friend.

The next spring, they moved to Burlington, West Jersey’s capital. Together they became respected members of Burlington’s society, until Jean-Marc, now known as John was discovered. Before he could

be sent to Boston for trial, he was lost in the fire, and presumed dead by everyone, except Abigail.

It is 1702. Abigail is twenty-six.

Chapter One A Home of Her Own

**“It is easy when we are in prosperity to give
advice to the afflicted.”**

Aeschylus

“‘Tis eight months. Time she’s wed. There be men who’d have her.”

“By what right have thee interest in whether Abigail’s wed or not?”

Will Tudor got off the sacks of barley he’d been sitting on and walked between sacks of flour to the one small window in the front of Henry’s mercantile. “She has a child and no income. The town’s no money for the support of indigents.”

A full head taller than any of the other members of Burlington’s Board of Freeholders, Henry walked to the window and looked down at Will. “And she’s not cost the town a penny.”

Will pointed a finger into the taller man’s face, moving it to emphasize his words, “Yet, Henry, yet. The Longstreets’ll not keep her forever.”

Henry raised his hand to match Will’s, “She’s not even sure John’s dead! How can she marry another?”

“She’s the only one who doubts him dead. How many saw the wall fall on him?” Will shook his finger again and took a small step forward.

Henry started to speak but stopped. If he said anything he would shout, which he considered a form of violence, a sin in his Quaker faith. He locked his teeth and looked away.

Back in the corner, by the bolts of cloth, old Tom Budd hammered his cane into the floor twice and leaned forward in his chair. The other four Freeholders turned toward him. “I’ve learned a few things over the years. A woman with children to feed will marry for support, but not if she’s already wed. So long as Abigail thinks John alive, she’ll have no other. But Will’s right, the town can ill afford to support her and the Longstreets won’t much longer. Henry,

will you come with me to see Abigail when we're done here? Such matters should be addressed with her, not by the Board. Meanwhile, we ought deal with such things as be, of right, our concerns."

Henry and Will nodded. Few dared disagree with Tom Budd, at least not while others could hear.

"Would thee like tea?" Elsie asked as she seated Henry and Tom at the table in her plain, white kitchen. Only the small shelf of books hinted at the Longstreets' wealth.

Henry said, "Thank thee, Elsie."

Tom nodded. Abigail nodded too, but didn't think she could drink. They sat in silence while Elsie poured the tea and put cream and honey on the table. When she left, Abigail lifted her mug with both hands and stared into it. *Naught good comes of this*, she thought.

Henry said, "Abigail, the freeholders be concerned."

"About?" she said just above a whisper, looking up from her mug.

Tom decided to go to the heart of the matter, "We know you still believe John alive."

"I do."

Tom nodded. "And your beliefs be no business of ours, but there's those on the Board concerned you'll become a burden to the town unless you marry. Even George and Elsie's generosity has limits. Have you any money?"

"John's agent sent our earnings from his last sales. I've near five pounds sterling."

"A considerable sum, but t'would not last long living on your own. Have you plans?" Tom asked.

"I've still our land—"

Henry looked up from his tea. "Five pounds would more than buy lumber for a cabin."

She shook her head. "But not pay a builder."

"The men in our meeting will build it for thee," Henry said.

Abigail's head snapped to the left to look at him. "I know I'm staying with George and Elsie, but I go to the English church. Why would Quakers do that for me?"

"Because John was our friend. If I was missing, he would do no less for Prudence."

Tom nodded. "Over the years I aided Edmund Little, the sawyer, and his father. He's a debt of conscience to me. With all the building since the fire, there's little dry wood, but I can see he brings new-felled wood enough to build a cabin, and enough dry to build a bed, table and bench. The cabin'd need chinking again next fall."

"Our meeting'd do it again," Henry said, nodding.

Tom looked at Henry, smiled and nodded, then turned to Abigail, "But how will you pay the head tax and taxes on the land and cabin? The Board'll not forgive those."

"That would be on me. I've served the rich before. I can again."

Henry said, "Our men's meeting be in two days. I'm certain they'll agree to raise thy cabin. Had we the wood, the cabin could be up by next week's end."

Tom looked at Abigail and said, "I've seen Edmund's yard. He's wood enough stacked. I'll see he delivers the wood at a price you can afford."

Abigail brought her hands to her face and started to cry. "I know not what to say."

"Say thank thee," Henry smiled. "John'd not allow Prudence to be without. We'll not allow thee."

The next week men from Henry's meeting, joined by friends of John's from the English church built a small log cabin for Abigail and Benny. Ten by fourteen feet with a pounded earth floor, field stone fireplace and shuttered, unglassed windows, it was more than Abigail hoped for. The men even built a small table, bench and, wood-frame bed. The women's meeting made a wool-stuffed mattress and two quilts for the bed. In the wood shed they built next to the cabin the sawyer loaded enough dry wood to last out the winter.

Elsie and Abigail had salvaged her cast iron pot, skillet, and cutlery from the burned-out shell of her house. George packed the rest of Abigail's few possessions into his sled and moved them to her cabin that night. Elsie poured hot coals from a small cast iron pot, and covered them with kindling. In a few minutes, a warming glow filled the small room. The smell from the fire and the scent of fresh-cut pine filled the cabin. Before everyone left, Father Farnsworth, from the English church, said a quick blessing over the new home. Abigail tucked Benny into the cradle Prudence Gaunt had given her, then crawled under the quilts on her new bed and cried herself to sleep.

Sometime after midnight, Abigail woke to the sound of her door opening. Struggling to see in the dim light cast by the low fire and disoriented by the strange surroundings, she saw the outline of a large man. "Stay!" she shouted. "I've a gun."

The man laughed. "I know you've no gun. You be safe Abigail."

"Tamaqua! Why be you here? How knew—"

"Do you not remember my vow to your son? None will harm either of you. My people be in this village every day. We watch over you."

She heard him drop something heavy on the table. "What's that?"

"The snows will last another moon. Two more moons will pass before planting and another three before harvest. Here's dried venison, bear, pemmican and corn enough for now."

"Why would you do that?"

"Do you not remember my vow?"

She did not know what to say. He turned to leave.

"Will you not stay a while?"

"It is not good for a Lenape alone with a white woman in her cabin. Nor is it good for a white woman alone with a Lenape." He closed the door behind him.

Abigail ran to the door, but even with the full moon reflecting off the snow she could not see Tamaqua. She picked up Benny, climbed back under her quilts with her sleeping baby, smiled, and fell asleep.

Chapter Two Self-Supporting

**“Though she be but little, she is fierce.”
William Shakespeare**

The servant girl opened the door to the Governor’s Mansion. “May I assist you?”

“Can Mrs. Hamilton be seen?”

The girl looked at Abigail’s plain, homespun clothing. “Whom shall I say calls?”

“Abigail Bumpo.”

“And the nature of your visit?”

“I wish to discuss something with your mistress.”

“Mrs. Hamilton has many duties. She’s not time to see every common Betty who calls.”

“Abigail, is that you?” The governor’s wife pushed past her servant. “I’d heard you were using Bumpo now.”

Abigail curtseyed. “Yes, Mum, ‘tis his name and now we’ve naught to hide.”

“You curtsey to me and call me Mum? You always called me Marie.” She pulled her woolen shawl tighter over her blue, brocade dress. “Tis cold. Come in.” She gestured to the sitting room on the left of the central hallway.

Abigail stepped inside the threshold, but not into the sitting room. The servant girl closed the door behind her and seemed to disappear. “T’would be not proper for a simple washwoman or seamstress to enter the Governor’s home or call his wife by her Christian name.”

“Abigail, we be friends. Your husband was a respected merchant.”

“Begging your pardon, Mum, but my husband’s business ‘twas lost and until he returns, I need support my child. I’m here to ask if you’ve wash or sewing needs doing.”

“My Betty does our wash and my seamstress sews my clothing. Need you money?”

“No, Mum, just employment. Thank you for your time.”

“Won’t you come in for some tea and biscuits?”

“Thanking you, Mum, but no. ‘T’would not be proper. If you or your friends ever need fine sewing, my work is finer than most’s. My cabin stands where my house once was. You can send a servant to fetch me.”

“Abigail...”

She turned to leave. The servant seemed to appear from nowhere to see her out.

It was already dark as Abigail walked past the inn onto the green. Moments later, Jedediah Parker staggered out. He headed down the narrow street toward the river, then saw her, turned, and doubled his pace. He reached her near the center of the common. “Tis not right for a woman to be alone. I could be a husband to you, and a father to your boy. The fire missed my place.”

Abigail looked around in the dark. There were no houses on the green and no one else was on the street. “I thank you Mr. Parker, but I have a husband. The law frowns on women who give themselves to two men.” She looked over her shoulder at the inn. *Please, someone come out.*

“We both know John’s dead. Pretending’ll not bring him back. You need a protector.” He grabbed her arm and pulled her against his body. “And you need a man.”

Abigail swung to slap him, but he knocked her arm away, pressing his body against hers. “How many times have I asked you? For a murderer’s widow, seems you think to be pretty high and mighty. A wench like you needs a lesson.”

He grabbed her hair and pushed his lips against hers, forcing his tongue into her mouth. Abigail tried to scream, but could only make muffled grunts. He pulled back and punched her face, knocking her to the ground. She screamed, but no one seemed to hear. Grabbing her hair, he dragged her behind the livery stable, slammed her into the wall and threw himself on her. Shoving his hand inside her coat, he forced his tongue into her mouth again.

Then Abigail bit.

Now Parker tried to scream. She bit harder. He thrashed his arms about and tried to break free. Abigail could taste his warm blood. She released his tongue and reached for his face, shoving a thumb deep into his eye. He whimpered as he groveled on the manure-covered ground.

Abigail spit out a mouthful of blood then climbed to her feet. She could feel her left eye closing. She wanted to run, but was afraid Parker would follow her. Looking around, she saw a shovel next to the manure pile. She grabbed it and swung with both hands, slamming it into the big man's face. He fell silent. Abigail dropped the shovel and hurried away.

Looking over her shoulder, she sprinted past the skeletons of burnt-out houses for the Meadow's home. *What have I done? He'll come for me in the night. I'll never be safe.*

She stopped a few yards from their cabin to catch her breath and tried to calm herself. The left side of her face throbbed. She could not see out of her left eye. For several minutes, she gasped for air before walking to their door and knocking.

Twelve-year-old Tilly opened. "Dear Lord, what's happened? Papa!"

Like Abigail, the Meadows had lost their home in the fire and now lived in a one room cabin, albeit over twice the size of hers. Edward Meadow was at his daughter's side in an instant. "Who did this to you?"

Abigail tried to pretend a laugh. "I did it to myself." She winced as she touched her eye. "I was walking along the river after sunset and slipped on ice. I fell down the bank and hit my face on the frozen river."

"The devil you did!" Edward didn't realize he was shouting. "What man struck you?"

"I've told you, none."

Elizabeth reached the door. "Come, sit by the fire. Tilly, get some ice for Mrs. Rider's eye."

Tilly grabbed a cloth and headed for the door. "She's Mrs. Bumppo, Mama."

Elizabeth led her to their only chair. "I'm sorry. After so long, I forget. Here, sit." Abigail winced when Elizabeth touched her eye. "I'll not believe you did this to yourself."

Abigail looked down, then said, "Of course I did. See my clothes are soiled from my fall."

"Or from being knocked to the ground. Who hurt you?"

"None. I feel the fool. I just need to get Benny and go home." The baby was crawling to her from the far side of the room.

Elizabeth straightened and said, "Edward, do something!"

"What would you have me do? She says she was hurt on the river's ice. Should I beat the river?"

"Men! Can't you see she's shamed?" She knelt beside Abigail and whispered, "Did he ravish you?"

Tears ran down Abigail's face. "Please, just let me take my son and go."

Elizabeth put her hand to her face and shuddered. Tilly rushed in with the cloth filled with ice. Abigail stood. "I have to go."

"But your face," Tilly said.

Edward put his hand on his daughter's shoulder and whispered, "Leave her, Tilly. She has to go. Dress Benny for her."

Tilly looked confused. Her eyes shot from one adult to another as she dressed the boy in his buckskin pants and coat. "Should I come with you, Mrs. Bumpo?"

"No, you're staying here." Her father's firm tone made it clear there would be no discussion, "Abigail, be you sure you'll not stay?"

"I am."

Benny was fussing when she took him from Tilly. Without another word, she hurried into the night. Abigail knew Edward was watching her from the front of his cabin. She walked away, trying to look calm. Once she was sure he could no longer see her, she ran, looking right then left. She couldn't escape the feeling she was being followed through the abandoned street. Often, she spun around, but saw no one in the cold February air.

Bouncing about in his mother's arms upset the baby. He started to cry.

“Don’t cry ... None have ... hurt us,” Abigail said, gasping for air. “All’s well,” but Benny cried all the way home.

In her cabin, she put the baby in his cradle without undressing him, then spun and pushed her table against the closed door, tried to wedge her chair against it, then dragged her bed across the floor and pushed it against the table before stoking the fire.

Benny was still crying when she undressed and changed him. He didn’t stop until she snuggled him beside her in bed to nurse. He fell asleep at her breast.

Abigail eased out of bed, went to her cutlery by the fire and grabbed her big butcher knife. She stared at the door all night. Every sound startled her. She kept the fire, her only light, blazing. She prayed. She wished John was with her. What she did not do was cry. Her jaw ached. She tried to unclench her teeth and relax, but could not. She was sure Parker would come after her, and she was determined to fight back.

Benny began to fuss. Abigail changed and nursed him. By now the pale winter sun was melting the ice on dark surfaces around town.

There’s wash and sewing to deliver. I have to go out. She loaded her baskets of folded laundry and sewing around Benny, in the hand cart Henry had given her, hiding her knife under a cloth against the cart’s side.

Abigail’s third delivery brought her near the town green. She heard shouting coming from a group of men at the green’s north end.

“The savages what did this’ll have to pay.”

“I always said they’re too free amongst us. We ought not let ‘em in.”

“Quakers say they’ll not fight, but they’d sure fight you on that.”

“Then damn the Quakers, too.”

Jedediah Parker stood in the middle of the group, trying to talk. His mangled tongue made him almost incomprehensible. Blood oozed from deep cuts around his closed left eye. Bruises covered his face and extended down his neck.

Two Lenape men crouched low in the alley between the livery and blacksmiths. They knew if the men saw them, they would be attacked.

Abigail tried to turn the right side of her face toward the crowd.

One of the men shouted, "Look there's another they got. The red bastards attacked a woman."

"Her good fortune she's alive. They might've ravished her."

Abigail tried to hurry away but was soon surrounded by a crowd of shouting men who didn't want to hear what she had to say. After some minutes, things quieted enough for one of the men to shout, "What'd the red bastards do to you?"

"None hurt me. I fell down the river bank in the dark and hit my face on the ice."

This launched another round of shouting. No one believed her. Parker tried to say something. Another shouted, "Hush, Jed's got something to say." The men quieted to hear the victim.

"I thaw them go afther ha. Whe I ran ta help, they chumped on me," he managed to say around his cut and swollen tongue.

"Why didn't you tell us that before?"

Another shouted, "The man can scarce talk. Probable he tried."

Abigail said, "None hurt me. I fell." She lowered her head and hurried away to finish her deliveries, repeating her story to every client.

She returned to her cabin by midday, changed and nursed the baby then tried to eat some pemmican. She couldn't force herself to swallow.

She tried to work on her sewing but couldn't steady her hands. While Benny slept, she brought in wood for the long night ahead and paced in the bright sunlight of the cool, late-winter afternoon, her knife stuck in the apron strings behind her back. *This'll not do. The sewing needs doing or I'll not be paid.* She shook her head and paced in front of the woodshed.

It was dark when Benny woke again. She saw to him, then tried to eat but still could not swallow. She tried to sit on the earthen floor and entertain her baby with a stuffed doll, but couldn't sit still. She put him on her hip and paced the cabin's tiny floor. It seemed like hours passed. She put him down for the night. Then she pushed the table and bed against the door and climbed into bed, knife in hand.

Exhausted, she slept.

The baby woke her early the next morning.

I have to work today or I'll lose the few customers I have. She tried to sew, but was still too nervous. I need some notions. I'll go to Henry's for them. The walk'll do me good.

Henry's store was crowded with angry men. Even though he was a Quaker, as head of the Board of Freeholders, he was the town sheriff.

"I tell you Henry, none've seen him today. I looked to find him on his farm. T'wasn't there. The animals wanted for feed and water. A fool can see the reds went and finished him."

Henry held his hands up for calm, "Thee don't know that. None have seen Jed, but neither have any found his body. For all we know, he's gone to Philadelphia."

Will Tudor pointed out the door and shouted, "If a bee stings, a man needs to destroy the hive."

"It would help if we knew someone'd been stung," Henry said, trying to stay calm.

One of the men turned and saw Abigail, "She'll tell you. Jed pulled five o' them off her. See how they mistreated her."

Everyone turned to Abigail. She reached for her swollen eye. The whole left side of her face was bruised. She took a step back and said, "I've told any who'll listen. None attacked me. In the dark I fell down the riverbank and hit my face on the ice."

Will shouted, "She's just too shamed to say they attacked her. But for Jed, who knows what they'd a done!"

"None harmed me and Mr. Parker did naught to protect me." *That much, at least's true.*

"I'll close here and look around. The rest of thee do the same. If Jed's been hurt, we should find something. 'Til then, leave the Lenape be. Far as we know, none of them've injured any."

"What's done's obvious! You Quakers'll believe anything to avoid a fight. If the reds didn't beat him, who did? I say they came back and finished what they started."

Henry came from behind the counter. "If they did, someone should find something."

While the men argued, Abigail slipped away. She managed to sew the next few days, avoiding the commotion roiling the town.

But every night she dragged her bed back across her cabin to block the door, so she could sleep.

Three nights later, near midnight, she heard someone push against the door. She grabbed her knife.

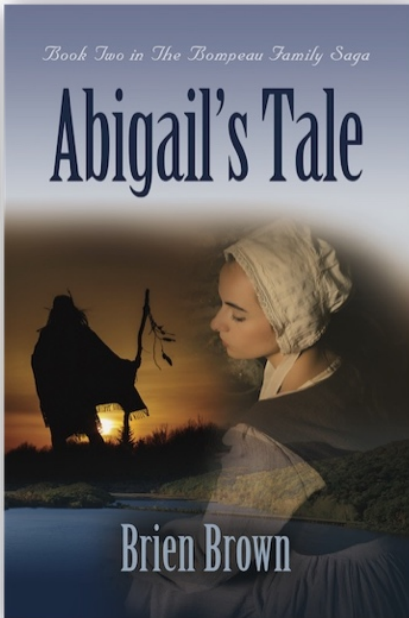
The voice from outside said, "You be safe, Abigail."

She jumped from bed, and shouted, "Tamaqua what have you done," pulling the bed back to let him in.

"I have been shamed." He pointed at her still swollen eye, "I said none would hurt you. You be hurt. But on my word, I did him no harm. Here is more food." He put a heavy package on the table and turned to go.

"Do you know who hurt him?"

Tamaqua was gone.



In 1702, Abigail loses both husband and home in a fire. Struggling to raise her infant son, she takes in Tilly a twelve-year-old orphan. They leave their cabin in West Jersey to help a young slave boy escape to freedom in New France. They can expect help from Tamaqua, a Lenape warrior, if they manage to make their way to the Hudson River.

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