

MARCH 10, 1776 9:18 AM

Ben Shaw closed in on the man-o'-war. The immense 84-gun ship left a broad wake that caused his own one-man sailboat to sway violently. Shaw tightened the mainsail to draw level with the larger ship, determined to sink it.

If the man-o'-war reached Boston then thousands of people would die.

A creaking sound emitted from the behemoth's side as 42 portholes swung open and 42 cannons simultaneously protruded from the starboard hull. The cannons erupted as one, sending a first deadly volley towards the pursuing sailboat.

Through deft maneuvering Shaw managed to evade the cannonballs – even one direct hit would capsize him – but his escapes were fast growing narrower as the gunning crews found their range. He tacked towards the enemy ship. The gunners couldn't aim at a target directly below them.

Ten yards above them, three men stood against the ship's starboard railing. One towered to an imposing six

feet two inches, one wore the gold epaulettes of a rear admiral in the Royal Navy, and one was Edward Sinclair.

The ship's chief gunner scrambled up the aft hatch and approached the men. After a routine salute, he reported, "Only a sailboat. But it's so small it's avoiding our cannon fire."

"He can't hope to single-handedly sink a man-o'-war," sputtered the admiral, "that's impossible!"

The gunner shrugged. "We're not accustomed to targeting such small vessels."

Sinclair snapped, "I am." He drew a flintlock pistol, leaned out over the railing, and fired at the boat below.

Shaw ducked behind the sailboat's lone mast for cover. Sinclair's gunshot struck the place his enemy had just vacated, puncturing a hole in the mainsail. The sail began to deflate. The man-o'-war began to pull ahead.

Shaw drew his own pistol and held it up against the mast. He tensed himself, adjusted the brim of his tricorner hat, then whipped around the mast and fired. Sinclair's black peak cap flew off his head – a ridiculous sight, though none dared laugh. Shaw shouted up at him.

"You're going under, Sinclair!"

Clenching his teeth in suppressed fury, Sinclair nonetheless looked down on his adversary with a sense of bemusement. The colonial simply had no chance. None at all. With a wave of his hand, Sinclair summoned the man-o'-war's contingent of Royal Marines.

A dozen Marines lined the railing, leveled their muskets, and opened fire. A hail of bullets swept the sailboat. Not long afterwards, a lucky cannon shot blew it to bits.

Shaw and his sailboat disappeared behind a large wave less than two feet from the ship's hull. The three men

watched the wreckage drift back into view – empty. The admiral triumphantly exclaimed, “We got him!”

A small explosion ripped through the man-o’-war’s hull, rocking it from stem to stern. The great ship shuddered and began to sink.

AGENT OF FREEDOM

Dan Barclay

Prologue

JULY 9, 1755 1:52 PM

A faint ray of sunlight pierced the canopy of a deciduous forest in western Pennsylvania. The semidarkness on the forest floor engendered an eerie atmosphere when coupled with the pervasive silence.

Near silence. A column of British soldiers wound its way through the woods, crunching leaves underfoot, using hatchets to clear away undergrowth to form a road for the trailing supply wagons and artillery. The soldiers sweated in the summer afternoon's oppressive heat. Their bright red uniforms formed a prominent contrast with the lush greenery, a fault to which they seemed oblivious.

A tall man in colonial dress blended in more easily. He walked behind the lead column, musket slung easily over his shoulders, moccasined feet traversing the ground without a sound. He was accompanied by a young boy of about eight. He himself had recently reached thirty-two years of age.

Two British soldiers peeled away from the lead column to approach the colonials. The man shifted the musket on his back, and the boy tensed.

One of the soldiers said in a friendly manner, "Good day, Shaw." The year was 1755, and Britain's colonies in America were the most loyal in the empire.

"Good day. See any French?" Thomas Shaw spoke with a light Scottish accent, having immigrated in the wake of the Jacobite rising a mere ten years ago.

"Not a sign."

The two soldiers nodded farewell and took their leave, continuing onwards towards a pair of officers mounted on horseback. The boy stared after them.

Shaw told him by way of explanation, "We'll arrive at Fort Duquesne this evening, Ben, and set up a siege. You know what a siege is?"

"Yes, papa." The boy remained stubbornly preoccupied with the two horsemen, now engaged in conversation with the soldiers. "Who's that?"

Shaw saw that he must provide a suitable response to induce the lad to resume walking. "That's General Braddock, our leader. He's come from far away, across the sea, to help us drive the French off our lands."

"No, papa, I meant the man next to him."

Shaw seemed distracted. He observed a faint rustling in the brush up ahead, several feet off the road. "Oh," he said, while perceptibly inching forward, "Braddock's aide, I suppose; forget his name."

"Do you –"

The boy was cut off by a terrifying war cry. Dozens of uniformed French and leather-clad Indians materialized from the undergrowth to descend upon the exposed British column. Musket fire rattled the treetops and several British

soldiers fell, victim to the their uniforms' white cloth bands that formed a perfect target across their hearts. A nameless, terrified voice shouted, "It's an ambush!"

Nearer to the two colonials, one British soldier murmured to another, "We've been ambushed."

Perusing the bedlam, Shaw said wryly, "Looks like it might be an ambush. Do you know what an ambush is?"

The automatic reply: "Yes, papa." The boy frowned, furrowing his small brow, then reluctantly corrected to a "No, papa."

Shaw was unslinging his musket. "It means those clever Frenchmen have surprised us. Papa's gonna do everything he can to hold them off, but he'll need some help." Shaw lowered himself on one knee, placed a hand upon the boy's shoulder, and looked into his brown eyes. "*Your* help."

The boy nodded and gulped. Shaw swiftly stood upright, becoming businesslike. He continued rapidly, "I need you to fetch the rear guard – that's a group of our British friends marching behind the main column. Tell them to hurry forward as fast as they can."

Smoke billowed from the road ahead. A British artillery piece fired hastily, missed its target by yards, and was soon overrun by French troops to be turned against its former owners. Charged with a formidable responsibility, the boy seemed to vacillate; a look of panic flashed across his face. Shaw frowned. "Ben. Do you understand?"

"Yes, papa."

Shaw gave his son a final pat on the shoulder, saying, "That's my boy." Then he was gone.

* * *

The boy hurried through the woods, stumbling across pebbles and over tree roots and through shrubbery. While he didn't fully grasp what was transpiring on the road behind him, it made him uncomfortable to think that he was heading away from the scene of action. He nevertheless pressed on.

He rounded a large tree to see a column of red-coated soldiers walking leisurely across a clearing below him. At last! The boy ran wildly down a small hill towards the men, waving his arms in an effort to attract their attention.

Preoccupied with cajoling their sole horse to ford a creek, the soldiers were thoroughly oblivious to the peril that awaited on the road ahead. The boy burst out upon them – his small lungs short of air, he had difficulty forming words.

The column's leader, a shortish lieutenant whose prematurely lined face rendered his appearance older than his twenty-two years, regarded this intruder with a twisted sneer. He motioned his men forward in a signal to ignore the boy.

The boy waved and gasped, "Stop! Stop!"

The soldiers stopped out of sheer puzzlement. The boy suddenly remembered his father's instructions and blurted, "I mean, keep going! Faster!"

"What have we here." The lieutenant, irritated that his men had given the commands of a child precedence over those of his own, said perhaps a bit more sharply than he might have, "Soldiers of His Majesty's Royal Army being ordered about by a mere child – and a colonial child, at that."

"There's been an am-bush," said the boy, stumbling over the word. "You've got to hurry forward as fast as you can."

The lieutenant chuckled in faint amusement. “A child who also tells falsehoods. Hasn’t your father taught you any manners?”

“Don’t you speak that way about papa!” The boy flared in anger. He’d lost sight of his goal; all he could see was this awful man in front of him.

Brimming with smug self-confidence, the lieutenant concluded, “I shall speak any way I like. My sincere apologies, but you’ll have to seek notice elsewhere, from those more gullible than I.”

An explosion echoed over the treetops. The entire congregation started in alarm. As he glanced nervously at the smoke wafting over the road ahead, the lieutenant’s demeanor became not unlike that of a cornered rabbit.

“See!” exclaimed the boy happily. “I’m not lying, I’m not, I told you! You must move forward!”

An aged, weathered-looking soldier pushed his way forward. “With all respect, Lieutenant Sinclair, the lad may be right. If there’s been an ambush, the main column will need our help.”

“Nonsense!” said Sinclair, a shade too loudly. “This little urchin is simply after attention; don’t tell me you’ve fallen victim to his lies.”

“But, sir, surely moving forward can result in little harm –”

Sinclair edged away from his persistent subordinate, attempting to shake the man off. “Outrageous. I absolutely forbid it. The rear guard stays.” He motioned his men forward in a signal to ignore the boy. This time it was obeyed.

The boy looked plaintively, forlornly, desperately at the rear guard which ambled leisurely along the road. While passing by, the weathered soldier slowed still further

to mumble in genuine sympathy: “Sorry, lad, but orders are orders.”

Dejected, the boy left the soldiers to begin climbing back towards the distant sound of the guns. He tripped over a tree root. He’d failed.

Atop the small hill, he cast a final look back at the worthless rear guard. Their horse was gone. So was their lieutenant. The boy narrowed his eyes to see a cloud of dust surrounding a mounted figure galloping into the distance.

So Sinclair had believed his story after all. That coward.

* * *

The British soldiers and their colonial guides fought bravely, yet the skirmish had not developed in their favor; they simply had no answer to the enemy’s dishonorable tactics of taking cover behind trees. Having suffered heavy initial casualties, they were forced to fall back into a narrow, rocky ravine where French fire from muskets and captured artillery poured down upon them.

The only thing preventing a complete British rout was a river – called “Monongahela” in the native tongue – that bisected the ravine, shielding them from their attackers. Yet the dry season left the river too feeble for much more than delaying the inevitable defeat.

Shaw was in the midst of battle. Dodging an enemy gunshot, he ducked behind a boulder, swiftly emerged from the other side, and swung his musket butt to connect with the offending Frenchman’s skull. Seconds later, a cannonball struck the boulder dead-on, blasting the once-mighty monolith into so many shards of rock. Shaw set his

jaw and charged up the ravine's slope towards the captured cannon.

A gunner pointed at the approaching colonial – “*Zut alors!*” – while a nearby Indian brave dropped a cannonball in favor of his musket. Still running, Shaw calmly leveled his own musket to shoot the brave first. Now he was upon the cannon. His first punch dispatched the gunner; his second, a cannoneer lurking behind the artillery carriage. Two more cannoneers fled.

Having cleared the immediate area of Frenchmen, Shaw leaned against the artillery carriage, breathing heavily, taking a brief rest. All too brief; he heard the soft crunch of a branch in the undergrowth ahead of him, and snapped back to attention.

It was only his son. Exhaling in relief, Shaw waved in greeting: “Hallo, Ben.” Ben waved back – the pervasive musket fire made it too loud to talk.

It was *only* his son. Shaw's initial relief gave way to apprehension. He called out, “Where's the rear guard?”

The boy sadly shook his head. No rear guard, no reinforcements, no hope of victory. Shaw was crestfallen. His shoulders slumped and he suddenly looked very old. “I must not have explained it properly –”

And he slumped to the ground. A red stain slowly spread over the front of Shaw's shirt. He'd been shot in the back.

The boy was horrified. Heedless of the danger, he rushed across the rocky clearing to be at his father's side. He fell to the ground and took hold of the fallen man's hand.

“Ben.” Not much more than a whisper.

Ben cried desperately, “What's wrong, papa, what's wrong –”

Shaw weakly patted his son's hand. "Shh. Nothing's wrong. I need you to tell your mother –" and he involuntarily began coughing up blood. His time run out, he collected himself and with a mighty effort managed to reach into his coat to extract a battered hunting knife.

"Take this. It's served my father well, and his father, and I'm sure you'll put it to good use."

A final spasm. "Ben..."

* * *

The hand went limp. Ben tenderly set it down in favor of his father's knife, which he gingerly took. He was mindful to unsheathe the weapon and charge the French lines then and there, but a fresh volley of musket fire – one round of which narrowly missed him – dissuaded him from such a reckless course of action.

The French had almost forded the river; once they did so, they would have the British at their mercy. "Fall back! Fall back, or we face complete annihilation!" came the faint shout of a British officer over the din. The glum reply: "They're advancing too fast, there's not enough time."

Ben slipped away from the bloody cannon to make his way cautiously along the rim of the ravine. The sounds of battle faded to a pleasant background murmur. As it gained elevation the ravine tapered to a point and vanished.

The river had not vanished. It had given way to a large pond, trapped atop the ravine wall by a mighty dam of twigs cemented with river mud. As Ben walked towards the beaver dam he heard the quiet burble of trickling water, the drone of dragonflies, the chirping of bluebirds: utter tranquility not a stone's throw from chaos.

Ben's eight-year-old mind was awlirl with thoughts and emotions. *If I can but destroy this dam*, he reasoned, *this water would flood the ravine, stopping the bad people's attack and letting the good people escape*. His moccasined foot scuffed the top of the dam, dislodging a twig.

It would take all day at that rate. Ben backtracked, moving beyond the beaver dam to approach an ancient tree that towered over the pond's bank, looming unsteadily over the dam as if threatening to topple at any moment.

Ben shoved the thin tree trunk, which groaned in protest. He looked up, seeing a long branch reaching out like a giant arm, and had an idea. He bent to pick up a forest creeper.

The creeper was fastened firmly to the forest floor; Ben tugged at it to no avail. Angered, he unsheathed his father's knife and slashed at the base of the woody vine. It detached to come loose in his hands.

Gratified, Ben took hold of one end of the vine and threw the other skyward. It dipped and fluttered back down to earth, landing embarrassingly atop his head.

He needed a heavy object to tie to the end of the vine. With no rocks at hand, Ben made do with his knife, attempting to loop the vine around it – a process that would have been greatly simplified had he been proficient at tying knots, which he was not. Wishing that he'd spent more time heeding his father's requests to teach him pioneering skills, Ben at last formed a crude knot that held the knife in place, then flung it aloft.

The knife sailed over the branch, trailing a length of vine that nestled securely into a bough. When Ben foolishly grabbed for the knife upon its descent the weapon cut his hand; although he winced, inwardly he felt delighted. His plan had worked!

So far, at least. Ben's initial tug on the two loose ends of vine failed to budge the tree branch.

He tensed himself and tried again, straining until his feet actually lifted up off the ground. The tree teetered, its roots loosening.

He jumped upwards, throwing his whole weight into the vine, hoping, praying that the Lord might see fit to make this final effort succeed.

Its roots tearing through the moist soil one by one, the old tree creaked and at last fell, landing squarely atop the beaver dam. The dam burst, its constituent logs disintegrating to be swept away by gallons upon gallons of water. The resident beavers scurried for cover as their life's work was destroyed around them.

While he watched the torrent of water flood the ravine, Ben recalled a passage from the Bible which his mother read to him every night. He stared fiercely downwards towards his father's killers and said, "Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

* * *

The mighty stream interposed itself between the embattled British soldiers and their French attackers. Their movements now shielded, the British began to withdraw safely down the ravine towards the road from which they had come. It was left to Braddock's aide Washington to lead the orderly if hasty retreat, for the general himself had been shot from his horse and lay dying. Although nearly one in three men lay dead, a catastrophic defeat had been averted.

Ben didn't care. Along with the water came a flood of emotions unleashed all at once: grief, despair, and

foremost, rage. He ran down the ravine towards the former battlefield, clenching his father's knife, which still boasted a bit of vine clinging to the handle owing to his inability to untie it.

Ben arrived at the bloody battlefield in a state of disorientation, unsure if he stood on the French or British side. He gazed across the swelling stream in an attempt to identify landmarks. There – a cannon, his father's body. There – a British soldier retreating from the stream, now eighty yards across and growing wider by the second.

The soldier recognized him and shouted, "Swim across, lad. Before it's too late!" Ben eyed the opposite bank with distrust... no vengeance was to be had there. He turned away.

"You've got spirit, lad, but you can't fight the whole French army by yourself," called out the bemused soldier. "Fall back like the rest of us!"

Ben turned back to stare at the soldier with a vicious intensity. The man instinctively quailed in the presence of what he recognized to be a stronger personality, notwithstanding its less than advanced age. After a moment of paralysis he shrugged, muttered "His funeral," and seemed ready to depart.

Then the soldier's eyes widened in alarm and he pointed across the ravine in a shouted warning: "Look out, there!" Ben whirled around to see two blue-coated French soldiers advancing upon him.

"*Un enfant,*" one Frenchman laughed to the other. He regarded Ben with a smirk. "*Il n'y a aucune fuite. Il est nécessaire de se rendre.*"

Indeed, the stream had widened to nearly one hundred yards, no longer feasible to swim – Ben's avenue of retreat was cut off. Tentatively, due to the child's sharp-

looking knife, the French soldier reached out a hand to apprehend his prisoner.

Ben bit it. “Aargh!” bellowed the wounded man, recoiling backwards. Ben kicked the man’s groin and lunged forward with the knife and the Frenchman grew genuinely frightened.

“*Au secours!*” The knife flashed towards the man’s chest.

But Ben’s eight-year-old arm proved insufficient to drive the weapon home. The second soldier came to his comrade’s aid, pulling the struggling child off his intended victim. Ben struggled furiously and tried to bite his captor, who held him distastefully at arm’s length.

“*Un prisonnier de guerre si jeune,*” said the second soldier. “*Que pensera-t’il Capitaine Dumas?*”

Ben was not about to surrender to any Frenchman. His eyes darted towards the swollen stream, along with the branches from the ruined beaver dam borne by its current. A large log was floating past. While the first soldier faintly replied “*Que penserait-il Capitaine Beaujeu,*” Ben wriggled loose from his captor’s grasp and jumped off the bank into the river.

The two Frenchmen looked on in amazement as their former prisoner swam towards the log, battered by the swift current. They each fired a belated musket shot, and each missed. Clinging to the log, the child was swept out of sight by the stream of water he had created.

Having at last recovered from his attack at the hands of this unusual child, the first French soldier said somberly, “*Prisonnier de guerre? Je dirais un prisonnier de rivière.*”

* * *

The river was still. It trickled through a humid wood, silent but for the chatter of crickets, the gurgle of once-turgid waters, and the soft padding of moccasins against the forest floor.

The moccasins' owner, a Shawnee Indian, paused when he saw an unusually-shaped log trapped in the Monongahela river – it had become ensnared by a protruding tree root to be repeatedly batted against the shore by the slow current. Lying atop the log was a child!

The Shawnee hurried down the slope of the riverbank, moccasins pounding against its carpet of pine needles. The child's prostrate form was limp; either unconscious or dead.

The Shawnee pulled the log to shore and peeled off the waterlogged child and pounded him on the back. No reaction. Then, thankfully, he began to cough up water. He was alive.

But was he friend or foe? The Shawnee's eyes narrowed, fearing the potential retribution from France's soldiers if they found his tribe to have aided a British child.

Ben's eyes flickered open, looking up into the dark craggy face of his savior. He weakly gasped, "*Il n'y a aucune fuite,*" not even knowing what the words meant.

Recognizing the language as French, the Indian broke into a broad smile and gently rested the bedraggled child against his shoulder. He put two fingers in his mouth and whistled. Several fellow tribesmen melted out of the forest, approaching the spectacle with curiosity; the first Shawnee prepared to hand his discovery to a woman for care.

Before he did so, he noticed that the child's fingers were tightly wrapped around some manner of object. He opened the clenched fingers to find a knife.

Chapter 1
THE FARMER

The knife glinted in the morning sunlight. Its owner's sure hand weighed it and sent it sailing through the air. In a flash it had embedded itself in a tree, and a rabbit.

Twenty years had passed. The rabbit wouldn't live to see another. Ben Shaw nodded in satisfaction, stepped around his dying campfire in the backwoods of Pennsylvania, and approached his kill, leaves crunching beneath his feet.

Not just *his* feet. Already bent down to reach for the rabbit, Shaw tensed, his ears pricked. He whirled around just in time to throw up his arms against the charge of an enormous black bear.

A swipe of the bear's mighty front paw batted him against the tree – a slender oak – which groaned and dropped an ancient bird's nest on his head. While Shaw struggled to untangle himself from the nest, the bear knocked him down with a heavy *oof*... his outstretched arm inches short of the precious knife.

No time to make a second try for the knife; the creature was right behind him. Shaw scrambled to his feet and sought refuge behind the oak tree. “A bear, huh?” he muttered, picking up a nearby rock. “Trying to ambush *me*?”

Shaw fainted with the rock; his ambusher flinched away in fright. He grinned.

“It won’t work.”

The bear clawed his hand. Shaw dropped the rock amid a flash of searing pain – and then another blow from the bear’s sinewy paw threw him over the dying embers of his campfire. He landed heavily atop his canvas tent, collapsing the tent poles and shattering a looking glass within.

Shaw angrily brushed the remnants of the looking glass off his formerly immaculate white shirt. He seized a smoldering branch from the campfire, growling, “That was my Christmas present.”

Shaw shook the branch, which gratefully received the influx of additional oxygen and converted it into a fierce flame. While the bear shied away from the blaze, it easily deflected Shaw’s lunge. The ensuing standoff saw the two combatants warily circling one another around the campfire.

In an effort to gain the upper hand, Shaw slowly reached behind him for one of the tent poles – although mere wood, he’d whittled the ends into points nearly as sharp as his inaccessible knife. Groping blindly, he brushed against something with his stinging left hand... and then the bear swatted the branch out of his right.

Bad idea.

The bear advanced upon Shaw, triumphant, malice in its gleaming red eyes. It became startled by a sudden whistle. Both combatants turned to see a young woman

standing atop a rise near the late rabbit, examining the scene through pale gray eyes that were offset by a linen cap and faded muslin dress.

The bear decided to ignore her. It switched its attention back to Shaw, who shouted, "Sarah! The knife!"

Sarah Stoltzfus spotted the rabbit, and the knife still pinning it to an oak tree. She gingerly retrieved the knife, making a face of disgust when the bloody corpse fell to the ground. After a moment of uncertainty, she thought better of attempting to throw the weapon, instead gritting her teeth and holding it to the inside of her white forearm. A droplet of blood seeped out.

The bear's nose twitched – sniffing the enticing scent of wounded prey, it rotated its furry bulk and charged.

Sarah scrambled backwards. Shaw scrambled for his sharpened tent pole and wielded it as a javelin, preparing to throw. But he was too late....

The bear vanished from view, plummeting straight through the carpet of leaves that covered the forest floor. Sarah smiled nervously from just beyond a newly-formed hole.

Bruised and battered, his clothes ripped and torn, Shaw walked unsteadily forward to see the bear impaled upon the wooden stakes of his pit trap. He let his sharpened tent pole slip to the ground, slumped wearily against the oak tree, and said, "Now what do you call that?"

"Dinner."

* * *

Steaming roast bear graced a platter that a matronly woman carried into the dining room of a clean wooden farmhouse. She set the platter down on a table already

creaking with dozens of dishes, brushed her hands against her worn lace apron, and said, “It’s no Christmas turkey, but it’ll do.”

“‘It’ll do?’ This is more than we normally eat in a week!” Shaw surveyed the vast expanse of food cooked by his mother: delicious scrapple, steaming souse, stewed cabbage, pease porridge, corn porridge, corn fritters, corn pie, rhubarb jelly, apple butter, and of course the pickled beet eggs. Not quite the seven sweets and seven sourd customary among their Amish neighbors, but close enough.

At the far end of the long table, faintly visible through a filmy windowpane, came the first glimmerings of snow. Sarah, who had been looking out the window, began to drift towards the door. There she lingered, one hand on the doorframe.

“Won’t you stay, dear?” asked Shaw’s mother, engaged in carving strips of bear. “We have plenty.”

“No thank you, Mrs. Shaw. My family has also assembled for the holiday, and my absence would disappoint them.” With that, Sarah slipped out of the room.

Shaw mumbled, “Excuse me,” slid back his chair, and followed. Still nominally preoccupied with the bear, his mother made a knowing smile.

Shaw caught up with Sarah on the front porch. Although he’d hastily pulled on his knee-length blue coat before rushing outside, he still fought back an intense chill as he called out, “Wait a minute –”

Sarah paused, turned around. Beyond her was the sun, already setting in the late afternoon through a blanket of grey clouds, dimly illuminating her circle of auburn hair as well as a tiny snowman below the porch that Shaw had built that morning.

Behind Shaw's back he fingered a small crumpled box, still covered in tiny looking-glass shards. "Uh, I've gotten you a gift."

"Why don't you wait until tomorrow when it actually is Christmas."

"Tomorrow I have to go to market. Look, Sarah –"

Sarah smiled softly and touched his arm, effectively ending the discussion. "I'll go with you."

She hopped off the porch steps and started down the frozen road to the neighboring Stoltzfus farm. When she briefly turned to wave farewell, Shaw emitted an exasperated sigh, shoved the battered box back in his coat pocket, and slammed the front door behind him.

His mother pretended not to notice the jarring blow that shook the table and the many dishes with it. Far more food than the two of them could eat alone.

While Shaw moved past the crackling fireplace towards his chair, withdrawing his knife for imminent use against the roast bear, he noticed in passing his mother seated quietly alone amidst the sea of plenty. *She must be ancient – nearly fifty.*

She broke the silence by remarking, "Nice girl, that Sarah. Why don't you ask her to marry you?"

"I intend to," said Shaw, somewhat taken aback by his mother's bluntness. Hastily improvising a more resolute response, he added, "When I take that load of cabbages into York tomorrow."

"Oh, yes. Do try to get at least tuppence a head, will you, dear? Last time I think they took advantage of you." She fiddled with a bowl of stewed cabbage. Just when Shaw thought she had forgotten all about the subject of marriage, she remarked, "Are you sure it's the right thing to do?"

Shaw, who had been eyeing the aromatic roast bear, drew back. “Of course it’s the right thing to do,” he said. “I’m a farmer. I’m nearly thirty years old. I need to settle down and raise a family.”

“Parroting my own words back at me,” chuckled his mother. “Farming’s an ancient profession; the profession of Cain. Still, it isn’t for everyone. You don’t have to marry on my account.”

“Don’t talk like that. It’s already settled. Practically.” Shaw viciously reached for a haunch of bear.

His hand was stayed by his mother’s, who had drawn her chair closer out of concern. “What’s the matter?” she asked. “Are you still troubled by Tom’s death?”

Shaw looked stricken. He sat frozen, eyes staring blankly ahead.

“You know,” his mother continued. “Just last week.”

Shaw blinked rapidly and the table came back into focus. “Oh... the dog! Yeah, I’ve gotten over it.” He reached for the enticing bear once more – it was getting cold.

His mother’s amiable countenance abruptly hardened as she snapped, “Benjamin. How kind of you to volunteer to say grace.”

Shaw gritted his teeth and carefully set down his knife. He clasped together his hands, intoning, “For the food we are about to receive on this day, we thank you, O Lord.”

He plunged into his meal, adding under his breath: “And that bear trap.”

* * *

Christmas Day. Two oxen trudged through the muddy slush covering the York Road, dragging a cabbage-laden cart that bumped and rattled from the country path's many potholes. Shaw held the reins loosely to allow the mellow creatures to brush away flies; *no matter how bitterly early one awakes, Shaw reflected, the flies wake up earlier.* Ahead of him the sun was just starting to rise.

Beside him Sarah shivered against the cold. Shaw absent-mindedly removed his blue coat and draped it about her shoulders. He was wondering if the Continental Army's oxen also attracted flies. Although, come to think of it, the army probably used horses.

Sarah broke the silence by saying, "I've also gotten you a gift."

Shaw gathered his thoughts, determined that which he currently most wanted in the world, and replied, "What, a canvas to mask the smell of those cabbages?"

"No, silly," she laughed, producing a rectangular package from beneath the cart's seat. "Open it."

He turned his attention away from the oxen – slow, ponderous creatures with sagging jowls whose horns were worn and dulled with age – to shift the reins to his left hand, while fumbling to unwrap the package with his right.

At last he wrested the thing open. It contained a hat, one of those broad-brimmed tricorner models. "It's the latest fashion among patriotic types – like you," Sarah added in reluctant acknowledgement of this distasteful obstacle to their relationship. "I'd have waited until we arrive in York, but what with that sunrise it looked like you'd want it now."

He placed the hat on his head, where it immediately began shielding his eyes. It fit perfectly, as though it were

a natural extension of his body. "It's wonderful," he said sincerely. "I love it."

Silence threatened to return. Not hearing the hoped-for continuation – *I love you* – Sarah adopted a more confidential tone and asked, "By the way, last night... didn't you also have a present?"

He almost asked her then... yet whether due to his inner uncertainties, his mother's odd words of caution from yesterday's dinner, or simply the unromantic ambience of those cud-chewing oxen, he held back. Sarah pressed on: "Wasn't there something you wanted to tell me?"

At last Shaw adjusted his hat, flicked the reins, and said, "I'll tell you when we get to town."

The oxen sped up along the road to York. Although the lumbering creatures nearly doubled their speed, at that moment they were still left behind by a passing horse.

* * *

The oxcart swung in a broad arc around a tree in the town center, coming to a halt outside a tidy building labeled "Andreas Althaus General Store". Shaw had to navigate past a troop of horses milling about an unfamiliar stage coach, which he regarded with brief curiosity before returning his attention to matters agricultural. He passed the reins to Sarah: "Hold these a minute, will ya?" then jumped off the cart.

Shaw's feet crunched against the frozen grass as he trudged towards the general store. A pair of hands emerged from the store's doorway, hastily erected a handwritten sign, then retreated behind the closing door. Once Shaw had ascended the front steps he could make out the words of the still-swinging sign: it read, "CLOSED".

Shaw banged on the solid oak door, shouting, “All right, Althaus, I know you’re in there.”

Through the door came a muffled voice in broken English: “No one is here. We are closed for the Christmas.”

“What do you mean you’re closed? You never close.”

Silence – then, a hopeful, “One and a half pence a head?”

“Forget it!”

“We’re closed.”

Momentarily beaten, Shaw removed his tricorner hat in frustration, on the verge of giving up. Then he felt Sarah watching him, replaced the hat, and resumed the attack, dealing the stolid door another blow.

“Open the damn door!” In a lower voice Shaw hastened to add, “Please, I’ve gotta sell these cabbages. My mother needs the money.”

The door opened a crack. The storekeeper, Althaus, peered out through spectacles and a thick mustache.

“Listen, Shaw, I like your mother. And I like you. But I must tell you something: you are an arrogant –” he struggled for words – “an arrogant *arschloch*, and if you don’t watch yourself it will get you in a lot of trouble.”

Shaw didn’t miss a beat. “One and three quarters?”

A brief hesitation flickered across Althaus’s face... then the door slammed in Shaw’s. Dejected, he descended the steps back towards the oxcart – though she was politely pretending otherwise, Sarah had doubtless seen and heard everything.

Shaw rested his hands on the vertical wood panel that held in the cart’s cargo of precious cabbages. *Damn*

the cabbages. He mumbled, “You stop by Kellemen’s shop, it might be open. I’ll try the, uh, Central Market.”

“The Central Market?” She formed a quizzical expression. “But that’s in Lancaster –”

Upon seeing the hard determination in Shaw’s eyes, she knew better than to press the point. Sarah flicked the reins and the oxcart heaved into motion, passing around the mysterious stage coach to lose itself in the streets of York.

* * *

The Central Market differed from the bustling center of trade that most area farmers would have recognized. It boasted its share of pans and cured meats lining the rafter beams, to be sure, but below them stood little more than a collection of shabby tables dimly lit by sparsely placed candles. A stained wooden counter barricaded one end of the cramped room, flanked by several large oak barrels.

Shaw sat on a stool at the darker end of the counter, hunched over a glass of whiskey. Needless to say, he hadn’t been forthright with Sarah about his destination.

Although he’d had two shots already, this one went untouched; Shaw preferred merely to stare at the drink, glassy-eyed. The tavernkeeper spotted his patron’s odd behavior and sidled over in hopes of instigating a provocation.

“Whatsa matter, Shaw, can’t hold yer liquor?”

Shaw remained immobile, unresponsive. The tavernkeeper shrugged and left to wait on his other patrons – if this was all the reaction he’d get, he had better things to do.

Shaw's mind was elsewhere – it drifted through a flurry of emotions until at last it settled upon the man seated next to him. A tall stranger, nursing a small flagon of ale, with a weathered yet still strong face framed by a mane of whitening hair. A stern face that betrayed a hint of kindness. About his father's age, if his father were still alive.

Shaw had never seen the man before, somewhat improbably since York was not a large town. Curiosity got the better of him.

“Say, who are you?”

The man regarded him for a moment, then looked away, dismissing the intrusion in gravelly tones. “My name is not important.”

“I'm Ben Shaw.”

The introduction fell on deaf ears. Striving for a means with which to engage this strange character in conversation, Shaw dimly made a connection between the man and the horses outside: “Say, are you mixed up with that carriage and crowd of horses in the town square? Some peculiar business, I tell you.”

The man gave Shaw a second look, an odd expression lighting his piercing gray eyes. From his coat pocket he produced a quantity of Virginia tobacco, with which he began packing a short-stemmed clay pipe. “An interesting deduction,” he said. “That carriage is unfamiliar to you, and I am unfamiliar to you – so, therefore, that carriage must belong to me. Hmm.”

“Well... does it?”

The man was now gazing squarely at him. “Ye-es. It does. A lucky guess.”

“With all that lot,” slurred Shaw, “you're headed to Philadelphia, I imagine.”

“Boston.”

The word was out before the man could stop himself, and he instantly regretted it – in annoyance he resumed packing his pipe at a furious pace.

“If your hat’s anything to go by, you consider yourself a patriot – of sorts,” the man quickly added upon smelling the whiskey-laden fumes of his companion’s breath. He cast a wary glance about the tavern. “Keep this quiet?”

Shaw nodded, a shade too vigorously. Since the mention of Boston – that epicenter of colonial resistance against British occupation – his enthusiasm had been all too evident.

The man shot a final stare at the neighboring patrons, those poor souls who lacked a family with whom to spend Christmas Day. He distastefully eyed a slovenly obese fellow that Shaw recognized as the town drunkard.

Satisfied that they weren’t being overheard, the man confided, “I’m leading a party of volunteers up there to help with the siege.”

“It’s about time! Those Yankees have had to bear the burden alone – it’s not right, I tell you. Not right.”

It *wasn’t* right. Even so, Shaw hadn’t volunteered – he couldn’t, he had obligations. And yet... how could this fortuitous meeting with an army commander be anything less than a sign from God?

Shaw took a deep breath and asked, “Can I join you?”

* * *

“No,” the man said instantly. “I’m afraid that’s completely out of the question.”

Shaw looked crestfallen. “Well, why not? All the current soldiers’ enlistment contracts are due to expire at the end of the year, and you’ll have a hell of a time finding replacements. I’m fit, I’m young – well, not as young as I once was, but –”

“We’re a highly selective group of volunteers,” said the man, gathering up his pipe in preparation to rise from his stool. He added in a note of clear finality, “Good day.”

No. In matters such as this Shaw refused to entertain defeat as a possibility. Ignoring standard rules of decorum, he seized hold of the man’s arm and said, “Listen. Whatever your ‘volunteer party’ is up to, I can handle it.... trust me.”

Taken aback, the man hesitated for a long moment, then at last resumed his seat. Against his better judgment he asked, “Do you have a weapon?”

Now it was Shaw’s turn to hesitate. The man was plainly asking whether he owned a gun, which he did not – he and his mother could not afford the bullets.

I’m better with a knife than a dozen men with guns. Shaw produced his knife and said, “Of course.”

The man coolly surveyed the small weapon, his gaze soon shifting to the tavern’s dining area where the tavernkeeper was weaving between the tables waiting on their occupants. The tavernkeeper’s left hand balanced a prominent wooden tray, on which precariously rested several empty glasses and a whiskey bottle. Confident that the jiggling tray presented such a dangerous target that Shaw could not help but see reason, the man said, “Break that bottle.”

“Not a whiskey drinker, huh?” The confidence in Shaw’s words was not matched by his thoughts. Drunk as he was, he recognized the enormous risk in attempting such

a throw; the slightest error could kill one of the tavern's patrons.

He also recognized that this man fully expected him to back down, and would not have any of it. He weighed the knife in his hand and threw.

The knife sailed across the tavern to strike its target – a frying pan, pinned to the room's main rafter beam! The pan dislodged upon impact, falling directly atop the tavernkeeper's tray to send it flying from his grasp. The glasses shattered against the floor, and so did the whiskey bottle.

A murmur swept through the tavern, whose owner indignantly approached the source of the trouble. Shaw spoke first: "Can't hold your liquor?"

Vanquished, the fuming tavernkeeper stormed off to clean up the mess. The stranger, despite himself, wore a huge grin. He shifted his unlit pipe to the side of his mouth and began scribbling on a slip of paper while saying, "All right, son, I'll give you a chance. My volunteer party's lodging tonight at the Four Mile Inn in Wilmington – it's making a detour through Delaware to rendezvous with some Southern recruits. If you ride hard you'll catch up with them. They leave the inn at dawn tomorrow, so don't dawdle."

It all happened so fast. Shaw's initial sense of elation soon gave way to the pressures of practical concerns; he protested, "I don't have a horse. Can I travel with you?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm riding directly to Boston... special assignment. If you're a committed volunteer, son, you'll find a way."

A fierce objection: "Don't call me that."

"What?"

"Son."

“Very well,” the man said uneasily, beginning to regret his rash decision already. “What was your name, again?”

“Ben.”

“Very well, Ben,” the man repeated, completing his scribbling with a final flourish; “this note will grant you permission to join the volunteer party. Knowing Dr. Van Dyke, you’ll need it.”

A brief glance at the slip of paper revealed a nearly-illegible scrawl addressed to one “Dr. Karel Van Dyke, c/o Ben.” The group’s temporary leader, no doubt.

“And now,” concluded the man, rising from his stool, “good day.”

The tavernkeeper rushed over. Still smarting from his recent humiliation, he looked determined to exact revenge. He accosted the stranger: “Your bill, sir.”

“It’s on him.” The stranger pointed at Shaw, who after a moment’s confusion flipped the note over to see a whopping bill of 2sh 11d. Shaw smiled in grudging admiration – with this clever a maneuver to land him with the bill, how could he help but pay it.

“Say,” he called after the departing stranger, “who are you?”

The man paused in the doorway, making a strange half-smile. He withdrew his pipe from the pocket of his greatcoat and at last lit it from a neighboring candle. After a luxurious puff he said, “Tallmadge.”

And with that he was gone.

* * *

Shaw shuffled slowly out of the tavern, peering at Tallmadge's note in confusion. Aside from the address and the date, the letters were jumbled in a confusing mess:

25 December, the Year of Our Lord 1775

Dr. Karel Van Dyke, c/o Ben

KLEB PBCLHK,

AWLERL RLL TVET TVCR WEK ONCHR NIB
YBNIA.

C EJ,

RCHULBLWS,

A. TEWWJEKYL

Probably the whiskey. Shaw blinked twice, then stuffed the note into his coat pocket.

A more pressing matter had diverted his attention.... the visiting horses were gone! Shaw clutched the railing in panic and stumbled down the tavern steps, horrified that the other volunteers had left York without him.

Ahead of him, a freshly-emptied oxcart rolled several feet forward to reveal a most welcome sight: that visiting stage coach, complete with a magnificent team of intrepid horses, parked on the opposite side of the street. Shaw's heart leaped in his chest and he made straight for the coach.

Sarah leaped down from the oxcart, blocking his path. "Ben!" Jubilant, she ran heedlessly across the potholed street towards him before throwing herself into his

arms. “Wonderful news. You were right – Kellemen’s shop was open, and he happened to be suffering from a cabbage shortage. He’s agreed to purchase the entire lot!”

Shaw extricated himself from the embrace. He stuttered, “Sarah –”

She asked demurely, “You had something to tell me?”

“Yes.” He felt something catch in his throat and instinctively hugged her again. “Goodbye.”

“What...?” Flabbergasted – her would-be fiancé had whiskey on his breath but could usually tolerate it better than this – Sarah pulled away, gazing into Shaw’s eyes for confirmation that his statement was some sort of terrible joke.

They offered none. Shaw averted his gaze to the stage coach beyond her, which an elegantly-clothed, wolf-faced man was approaching with the aid of a knobbed walking stick.

On the verge of tears, Sarah cried, “You’re leaving me... how... why...”

Shaw’s attention snapped back to the well-meaning obstacle in front of him. “I’ve finally volunteered to fight,” he said, adjusting the brim of his tricorner hat. “I leave for Boston this afternoon.”

“Have you any way to get there?”

“Of course,” Shaw said with wholly unwarranted confidence. He cast a worried glance at the wolf-faced man, who appeared to be delivering final instructions to his coach driver via punctuated jabs of his walking stick. The team of horses impatiently snorted and stamped on the ground.

“Far be it for a soldier to have an Amish wife,” Sarah said bitterly. The sheer magnitude of Shaw’s

pronouncement had just begun to dawn on her; she gulped in revulsion, disgust. “You will fight... kill.”

“Sometimes it’s necessary to fight. For the sake of freedom.”

“And there we must part ways.” Sarah hesitated. “If not for me, what of your mother?”

The wolf-faced man had climbed into the stage coach’s passenger compartment – a small rat-like dog hopped in after him, then a bony hand reached out to slam the coach door shut.

“I’m of little help during the winter months, regardless. She’d approve. Please send her my farewells, and my promise to return for the spring planting.”

Then Shaw was serious. All too serious. Sarah turned away to climb back into the oxcart. She settled herself in the driver’s seat and said petulantly, “Very well then, I shall marry Alfred the cooper.”

“Not Alfred,” exclaimed Shaw in mock alarm, “he’s a frightful bore.”

“After you, maybe boredom’s what I’m after.” She took hold of the reins.

Shaw called out, “Sarah.”

She looked over her shoulder.

“Alfred’s a lucky man.”

Sarah Stoltzfus flushed, then righted herself, flicked the reins and was off.

“Haah!” The coach driver called to his team of horses, which upon a simultaneous flick of the reins began to trot in the opposite direction.

Shaw was left in the middle. As the thankfully cabbage-free oxcart barreled past, he snatched from it a discarded length of rope, then whirled eastward to sprint after the departing stage coach.

The horses had not yet built up speed. With the rear platform just beyond his grasp, Shaw lunged forward and rolled across the snow-covered road to land beneath the moving coach.

His tricorner hat fell off during the leap and he reached back for it, leaving just enough time to seize hold of the undercarriage before the coach had traveled beyond reach. He used the rope to lash himself to the undercarriage's thick leather thoroughbraces: first his feet, then his chest.

As the stage coach's horses settled into a steady trot, Ben Shaw hunkered down for the long ride to Wilmington.

Chapter 2

THE SERVANT

The stage coach traveled all day. Shaw realized only too late the purpose of the leather thoroughbraces to which he'd lashed himself – they served as the coach's suspension system, absorbing the full brunt of each and every bump and jolt. He soon acquired a throbbing headache, both from the constant rattling and from the lingering effects of that whiskey. *Shouldn't have been drinking so early in the day.* It was 9:30 AM.

As the snowfall succumbed to the midday sun, the road's white shroud melted away to expose the dirt beneath. The horses began to kick up immense quantities of dust. Shaw coughed softly – careful not to attract unwanted attention from the legitimate passenger in the cabin just above him – and strained to cover his face with his shirt collar. It was forty past noon.

The sun passed its apex and began to set beyond the western horizon, placing it square across Shaw's field of vision. He had strapped himself in facing backwards, and dared not shift his position – that would weaken the knots,

and given his longstanding lack of pioneering skills they were already none too strong. Shaw squinted to keep out the blinding rays of light, luminous blobs swimming before his watering eyes. If it were not for Sarah's tricorn hat, he would surely have gone blind. It was 4 PM.

A better man than Shaw could be forgiven for developing second thoughts about volunteering – if a mere day's journey presented him with such challenges, was he truly prepared for the day of battle? Yet it felt as if that day would never come. The road and sweat and dust all blended together and stretched into a seeming eternity.

The coach jerked to a halt outside the Four Mile Inn, and at long last Shaw's ordeal drew to a close.

It was dusk. The wolf-faced man stepped out of the stage coach, preceded by his faithful walking stick and followed by his dog. A small group of youths streamed out of the inn, shouting greetings to their temporary leader: "Ho, Dr. Van Dyke!"

Shaw craned his neck and counted ten recruits in all, most in their early twenties. A shortish, sharp-featured youth contorted his features into an uncomfortable smile and greeted his superior with a "Hello, sir." A young woman, clothed in a gingham dress concealing a corset that her figure didn't need, waved in a competing bid for attention: "Welcome to Wilmington!"

Both failed. Ignoring the crowd of well-wishers, Dr. Van Dyke turned away to accost the coach driver.

"Driver," Van Dyke said sibilantly, "I was quite disappointed with the arduous duration of our journey; we shall be weeks to Boston at this rate. Do be more expeditious in future."

Lounging against his seat, the coach driver said through a chewed hayseed, "Aye, guv'ner."

"Doctor," came the swift correction.

From his vantage point beneath the stage coach, Shaw thought that Van Dyke had concluded the rebuke. Yet the doctor continued speaking in condescending tones, emphasizing each point with a wave of his walking stick: “Thirty miles per day. Do you understand, driver?”

The coach driver stopped chewing his hayseed. “Aye... doctor.”

Shaw shifted himself to a more comfortable position, confident that this time Van Dyke had finally finished. But the stubborn fellow had taken a mere two steps away when he whirled around to berate the driver once more.

“And avoid those nasty potholes,” said Van Dyke, stooping to stroke the mangy belly of his pet dog, “they’ve unsettled poor Fido’s stomach.” Indeed, Fido appeared quite ill.

At long last Van Dyke had satisfied himself with the unfortunate driver. He approached the patiently waiting crowd of recruits, his walking stick compensating for a slight limp in his left leg.

He stumbled upon a pebble. The young woman rushed forward to help him, only to be cruelly brushed aside – Van Dyke’s gray eyes had become fixated upon Fido, who despite a lingering bout of motion sickness had become fixated upon the coach’s undercarriage.

The scrawny dog sniffed about the undercarriage and yipped. Van Dyke extended his walking stick and prodded the carriage’s leather thoroughbraces.

Nothing.

“Come on, Dr. Van Dyke,” whined the sharp-featured youth, “your dog must have smelled a rat. Let’s enter the inn, it’s got heaps of food and ale –”

Van Dyke held up his walking stick in a threatening manner; the youth instantly fell silent. The stick slowly descended to prod the undercarriage once more.

Shaw's poorly-tied knots gave way, spilling him in humiliating fashion into the dust. Ten pairs of eyes turned to stare at him.

"A stowaway?" Van Dyke asked rhetorically.

Shaw clumsily rose to his feet and brushed himself free of dust. "I'm quite sorry, sir –"

"Doctor."

"– doctor – but this was the only way I could get here." Before Van Dyke could interrupt again, Shaw continued, "I'm a volunteer for your group."

Van Dyke acquired a cynical sneer and said, "That's very interesting. I'm presently in command of this group, and I've never seen you before."

Shaw suddenly reached into his coat pocket. The surrounding recruits tensed – several leaned forward, hands moving to their weapons. For his part, the sharp-featured youth quailed in fear.

Shaw presented Tallmadge's note. Not a weapon; the recruits breathed a collective sigh of relief.

"Here's a note a man gave me back in York. He said I was to join."

Van Dyke accepted the note and perused it through a pair of spectacles that had seemingly materialized out of thin air. He pursed his lips, his face maintaining its unhealthy reddish pallor. He concealed his surprise well.

"Well!" sniffed Van Dyke. "I should hardly think as estimable an individual as Patrick Tallmadge would preoccupy himself with a bounder like you. Thus you are a forger as well as a liar."

The sharp-featured youth displayed a sneer at Shaw's expense. Shaw was being baited, and knew it; he struggled to keep his temper under control. "Who exactly is this Tallmadge?" he asked through clenched teeth.

"His identity is not important."

"And where is he now?"

"Ah... about a day's ride behind us last I checked..." Struggling to stand firm in spite of the evidence, Van Dyke's voice hardened: "– but I refuse to believe he recruited a stowaway!"

The surrounding recruits observed their leader's intransigence with a degree of unease. The young woman tentatively broke in: "Dr. Van Dyke, if the note's encrypted properly there's no denying it's really from Tallmadge."

Van Dyke grew annoyed at the interruption, but his stubborn resolve seemed to be wavering – Shaw hoped against hope that the doctor would see reason and back down.

The sharp-featured youth took the opportunity to curry favor with his superior. "Even *if* it's from Tallmadge," allowed the youth, "sneaking aboard Dr. Van Dyke's carriage is behavior hardly becoming of a proper recruit, Mr. – I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name –"

"Shaw. Ben Shaw."

"Well, Mr. Shaw," said Van Dyke, having recovered from his momentary bout with good sense, "being of a generous and forgiving nature, I would like to propose a deal. This note – forged though it may well be – does indeed say you are to join us, but does not specify in what capacity. Therefore, should you choose to accompany us... as a *servant* –" he cracked a craggy smile, and the sharp-featured youth took the cue to begin sniggering – "you are perfectly free to do so."

“Until then,” concluded Van Dyke, turning towards the inn, “goodbye.” The onlooking crowd began to disperse, moving up the stone path leading to the inn’s front door.

That old fool. He knows there’s not a chance I’ll accept. Still... with free transport to Boston, I could seek out Tallmadge... he would surely fix everything...

He had to act now or the moment was lost. Shaw said impulsively, “I’ll do it.”

Van Dyke frowned, his brow furrowing. Alongside him, the sharp-featured youth slowly acquired a wicked smile.

* * *

That night the Four Mile Inn filled with festivities. The young recruits commandeered the inn’s dining hall to engage in revelry; some drank ale at two long tables that framed a roaring fireplace, while others danced a more sloppy than merry jig to the strands of inexpert fiddle tunes:

*Nature made all alike, no distinction she craves;
So we laugh at the great world its fools and its knaves;
For we are all Servants, but they are all Slaves.*

In all, about as lively a party as one could expect, given the paucity of recruits – a mere dozen, including Shaw.

Shaw stood alone, observing the festivities without partaking. Then he resumed walking. Upon arriving at the near dining table he set down two serving platters – one piled high with greasy pork scraps, the other bearing

flagons of fresh ale, which the sharp-featured youth eagerly snatched.

“Ho, servant!” the youth bellowed, taking a huge gulp. “More ale!”

Though two neighboring recruits had relieved the platter of several additional flagons, one still remained. Shaw calmly pointed this out: “There’s still plenty.”

“No more.” The youth’s elbow jerked outwards, connecting with the remaining flagon to spill it over the front of Shaw’s homespun shirt. The two neighboring recruits burst into raucous laughter: “Outstanding, Silas!”

Shaw almost erupted in fury and only with immense willpower checked his fist, which had begun to instinctively lash out. Instead, he glared at the youth while menacingly reaching into his coat pocket. *It scared him last time....*

Sure enough, Silas once again shrank back in fear. He had no defense against a knife!

Shaw calmly withdrew a rag with which he wiped his shirt dry. The mess on the table – clumps of pork grease, rancid head cheese, half-gnawed chicken bones carelessly strewn about and smeared into the tabletop – he abandoned as hopeless. He walked away, leaving Silas to exhale with relief.

Shaw knew enough of Silas’s kind to sense that this respite was temporary; though cowards’ memories are short, that reach-for-the-coat-pocket trick would only work so many times. Absent intervention the harassment would continue.

*The fat shining Glutton looks up to his shelf,
The wrinkled lean Miser bows down to his pelf,
And the curl-pated beau is a slave to himself.*

Dr. Van Dyke was seated at the adjacent table, hunched over a bowl of broth which he noisily slurped up with a wooden spoon. Shaw negotiated around a tipsy recruit to approach him.

“Excuse me, sir. That kid over there is making a real mess. If he could be told to keep better manners –”

Van Dyke studiously ignored his servant, preferring to wolf down his broth. He held the bowl to his thin lips to allow most of the remaining liquid to trickle down his gullet, then slammed it back down on the tabletop.

No use arguing with him about manners. Shaw changed tack: “The innkeeper may bill us an extra three shillings if we leave his room like this.”

“Then it shall be your duty as a servant to ensure that the room is left clean.” Van Dyke broke his silence, though he continued to consciously avoid eye contact. He cast a distasteful eye over the merriment and mused, “Silas Deane, Jr., is one of the most promising recruits of this sorry lot. I would not cross him.”

With that, Van Dyke turned his attention back to his broth. Evidently deciding that the dregs were unworthy of his attention, he shoved the bowl aside.

Shaw perked up. He forced a smile and asked, “May I? I’m surrounded by food, but of course on your orders can’t have any myself.”

Van Dyke must not have heard the request – in his defense, the fiddle music was quite loud – for he tipped the bowl onto the floor, whereupon the scrawny dog eagerly leapt off its master’s lap to lap up the remains.

*The gay sparkling belle who the whole Town alarms,
And with eyes, lips and neck, sets the smarts all in arms,*

Is a Vassal herself, a mere drudge to her charms.

Shaw scowled and left the two animals to wallow in their misery. He slowed while passing the other table, for Silas's cronies had moved aside to make room for a young woman. Shaw recognized her as the recruit who had (however tentatively) spoken in his defense upon his arrival.

Now she did so in stronger terms: "You're really being a bit rough on him, Silas."

"He's a forger and a stowaway. Who's more important to you, him or me?"

The young woman edged backward in her seat, looking uncomfortable. "You."

Silas suddenly draped an arm around the woman's neck, grease-stained fingers dangling from her shoulder. "Then why don't you act that way."

Silas rose from his seat – overturning a platter in the process – to lead the young woman away from the table and towards the dancing floor, where the fiddlers were striking up a new tune. His two cronies moved as if to follow, but he waved them back, signaling that he did not desire their companionship at this time. The cronies shrugged and happily returned to gorging themselves.

Quietly despairing, Shaw gathered up the overturned platter – not without some effort, for it was glued by some sticky substance to the tabletop – and made for the kitchen. He had almost escaped when he collided with a recruit.

"Pardon me," said the recruit, a needless apology given that Shaw's inattentiveness was to blame for the collision.

“Sorry.” Harried, Shaw gave the recruit only a cursory glance: thin, pale, an undistinguished face framed by round spectacles.

“Why aren’t you joining the fun?” Shaw asked bitterly. He almost spat the last word.

“Why ain’t you?”

Shaw laughed nervously while trying to conceal the empty serving platter behind his back. “I don’t think we *recruits* –” he said the word a shade too loudly – “should be partying. We should be training.”

The recruit nodded and said, “Well, I’ve nothing against parties myself. In my case, I’ve just joined this outfit and don’t yet know anyone.”

Shaw suddenly realized that his companion spoke with a light drawl. “Oh, you’re one of the Southern recruits!” he exclaimed, extending the hand that didn’t carry the platter. “Pleased to meet you. My name’s Ben.”

“Arthur.” A weak handshake. “*The* Southern recruit.”

Upon seeing the puzzled look on Shaw’s face, Arthur explained, “There was a low turnout. I’m afraid this is still perceived as a Yankee fight.”

“I know what you mean. So why are you an exception?”

“I’ve read a great deal about the British treatment of Boston; it seems our very liberties are at stake. One can only do so much within the Georgia Committee of Correspondence, so I decided to head north where the action is.” A pause. “Why’d you join?”

Because I met a man in a tavern. Recognizing how frivolous any explanation would sound, Shaw hastily changed the subject: “Liberties, you said. Do you think it might go so far as –” he said the words in hushed tones – “separation from England?”

“No question. In fact,” said Arthur, as his mild demeanor unexpectedly transformed into a cunning leer, “I’d wager two shillings that we declare independence before the year is out.”

“You mean in the next week?”

The cunning leer briefly faded, then returned. “Ah, yes. By the end of next year, that is.”

“Done.” Shaw confidently extended his free hand once more, which Arthur shook. “By then we’ll both be officers.”

“Servant! More ale!” Silas bellowed while stumbling back from the dancing floor, his young woman in tow. He belched and disappeared into the mass of victuals.

His attempt at deception shattered, Shaw shamefully showed Arthur the serving platter. His eyes were downcast. He would never be an officer.

Arthur broke the awkward silence by smiling, “Ain’t he a blockhead?”

Realizing that Arthur could care less about his formal status within the Continental Army, Shaw released his tension through a genuine laugh. At least he could count one decent individual in this group.

Arthur drew closer to whisper conspiratorially, “Here’s a chemical solution I’ve concocted for just such occasions – a blend of magnesium hydroxide and castor oil.” He pressed a small glass vial into Shaw’s hand. “It induces acute diarrhea.”

“What’s that?” Shaw, lost amidst this scientific wizardry, examined the vial with trepidation. Such a pleasant fellow couldn’t mean to *kill* Silas – could he?

Arthur flushed in obvious embarrassment. He seemed about to pantomime the word's meaning when he thought better of it and instead whispered, "The runs."

A broad grin crept across Shaw's face. "You won't want to miss this." He tucked the precious vial into his coat pocket and entered the kitchen.

He returned a minute later with a new platter loaded with flagons of ale. His back to the dining tables, Shaw carefully poured the contents of Arthur's vial into the leftmost flagon. Then he approached Silas's table, attempting to exude the greatest possible aura of subservience.

While Shaw was lowering the platter to the tabletop, the young woman reached for the doctored flagon – Shaw managed to whisk it out of her reach by rotating the platter, placing it directly in front of Silas.

Now Silas's hand crept towards the flagon. Shaw's hopes soared... only to be dashed an instant later when one of Silas's cronies grabbed the flagon first, and drained it.

Silas's entire demeanor changed, his boisterousness draining away like a whole keg of spilt ale. His eyes narrowed, and he turned to stare at the offending crony. The ambient sounds of revelry faded as neighboring recruits, in turn, stopped to stare at Silas.

"I am astonished, Caleb," he said slowly. "You have disappointed me."

"But I was thirsty," protested the crony.

Silas punched him in the face. Caleb shrieked and clutched his bleeding nose. A murmur of surprise arose from the growing number of onlooking recruits, and the lively fiddle music abruptly died.

The young woman, having recovered from her initial shock, interposed herself between the drunken Silas

and his lackey. She exclaimed, “Just what do you think you’re doing?”

“He’s mine,” slurred Silas. “I’ll do with him as I will.”

“He’s not ‘yours’ – he’s a volunteer, like any one of us.” She turned to face the trembling Caleb. “What’s the matter, you won’t stand up for yourself?”

Caleb, ashen-faced and pale, emitted a soft moan and slumped to the floor. Hushed whispers swept through the crowd of onlooking recruits: “Silas must’ve hit him hard.” “Poor fellow.”

But Silas regarded his fallen crony with bemusement. Alone among the recruits, he knew that he hadn’t punched Caleb very hard. He idly fingered the empty flagon, found a stray droplet, touched it to his lips – and, though thinking through a haze of ale, managed to draw the appropriate conclusion. Silas whirled around to see Shaw escaping into the kitchen.

Drugs. Drugs intended for him. Silas stared after the departing servant with sheer hatred in his eyes.

His reverie ended with the sharp *rat-tat-tat* of a walking stick against the adjacent dining table. Dr. Van Dyke, having obtained his group’s attention, proceeded to announce: “I am now walking upstairs to sleep, and as I do not wish to be disturbed, I hereby declare these festivities concluded. We ride north at dawn tomorrow.” With that, Van Dyke departed up the inn’s front stairwell, followed as always by his dog.

The party concluded with minimal protest. The musicians packed up their fiddles, the few remaining dancers rejoined the crowd, and the assembled recruits all began filing up the stairwell to occupy their rooms.

All except Shaw; as a servant, he had no room. He slipped out the inn's side door into the encroaching darkness.

* * *

The darkness faded to morning light. The rays of the sun streamed through the windowpanes to reveal a room in utter disarray. Chairs upturned on the floor, serving platters upturned on the chairs, a crust of rancid grease clinging to each platter, with the musty scent of stale alcohol permeating all. As recruits drifted downstairs from their rooms, rubbing the lingering vestiges of sleep from their eyes, they tried to ignore the dining hall's miserable state.

For his part, Van Dyke was outraged. He bellowed, "Who is responsible for this epic mess?"

Shaw, oblivious to the mess and indeed anything in the conscious world, reclined against a bed of hay in the inn's stable, shivering in his sleep. The torrents of water that pervaded his dreams contained an icy chill... a deathly chill... A hand reached out and shook him.

"Ben. Ben." His soft whisper ineffective, Arthur shook his friend again. Shaw started in alarm, his eyes snapping open.

"You've got to come immediately – Van Dyke's quite angry with you."

Shaw threw off his thin ragged blanket and sat wearily upright. "He's always angry about something."

However, upon Shaw's entrance into the dining hall, Van Dyke seemed less angry than gleeful – gleeful at this opportunity to humiliate one of his recruits, and thereby mete out a valuable lesson to them all.

“It is my understanding,” hissed Van Dyke, “that servants *customarily* engage in – shall we say – servile duties. Such as cleaning.”

“I –”

“Sadly, we lack the time to hear any more of your eloquent discourse. The innkeeper will no doubt bill us an extra three shillings for leaving his establishment in such a disreputable state – three shillings which shall come out of your pay. Should the good innkeeper forget, I shall remind him.”

Van Dyke cleared his raspy throat and addressed the crowd at large. “We are needed in Boston and must depart post-haste. If the Good Lord smiles upon us we may reach Camden, New Jersey, before nightfall.”

The young woman looked crestfallen. She said, “But that means we’ll bypass Philadelphia.”

“Sad,” remarked Van Dyke, not looking very sad at all. “Yet necessary.”

The woman wasn’t about to give up that easily. “I’m from Philadelphia – it’s a lovely city. My family owns a house there. They’d be happy to put us up for the night.” Murmurs of agreement sounded from the crowd.

“They might,” broke in Silas, “if they weren’t infamous Tories.” He and Van Dyke exchanged smirks. As the crowd’s resolve faltered, Anna shrank away from her paramour as if he were made of stewed cabbage.

Van Dyke had made up his mind. He raised his walking stick in a quieting yet mildly conciliatory gesture and said, “This is a democratic country – or, at least, it will be – so let us have a vote. All those in favor of my route, show your hands.”

Van Dyke flipped his walking stick above his head to serve as an example; Silas, his two cronies, and two other recruits followed suit. The walking stick pointed at

Silas: (“One...”) then slowly moved on to each adjacent assenting recruit (“...two, three, four, five...”) before finally returning to Silas. “...Six.”

Blatant double-counting. Shaw struggled to hold his tongue, knowing that it would be dangerous to cross this man.

“All opposed.” Shaw, Arthur, and five other recruits raised their hands, the young woman’s held highest of all. This time the walking stick moved lightning-fast, darting from target to target. “One, two, three, four, five, six. We do not seem to have reached a verdict.”

He’d omitted Shaw. The young woman objected, “What about, uh –” she struggled to recall the name – “Ben? This is a democracy!”

“Except for those who serve us.” Van Dyke raised his voice and continued, “In the absence of a decision, I shall break the tie myself. We don’t go to Philadelphia.”

The recruits, accepting their leader’s decision, began to disperse. They drifted towards the inn’s front door, weaving around heaps of spilled food en route. Shaw fell alongside Arthur and whispered, “He’s just as bad as King George.”

One of King George’s loyal subjects stood at that very moment outside the side window, observing the proceedings unbeknownst to the inn’s occupants. A dark cloak concealed his thickset shoulders and a dark hat, his face. A puff of smoke wafted from beneath the hat, whereupon a hand reached up, took hold of the smoldering Spanish cigar, and powerfully crushed it against the painted windowframe.

* * *

Four days later, the same hand lifted up from a painted desktop, where it had just disposed of another cigar. The desk was 300 miles away – in Boston – and was the property of one Capt. Edward Sinclair.

The cigar belonged to his trusted assistant, Sgt. Victor McClintock of the Royal Marines. The hulking McClintock towered over his superior yet showed nothing but deference. He lit a third cigar and said in even tones, “Twelve of the little traitors. Thirteen with Van Dyke. Near New Haven and heading north by side roads. What shall we do with them.”

Sinclair adjusted some papers on his desk. It was a fine piece of craftsmanship, really – requisitioned from the sixth-wealthiest citizen of Boston, for use by His Majesty’s armed forces during their occupation of the city – and well able to accommodate the captain’s somewhat short stature. His weathered forty-two-year-old face betrayed the hint of a smile.

“Well done, McClintock, well done. Kindly proceed with the plan we discussed. I expect you to lead the detachment personally.”

“Aye.”

“And –” Sinclair hesitated, girding himself up to speak the name he both loathed and feared – “any word from Tallmadge?”

“None, sir.”

A soft patter of footsteps echoed outside the doorway to Sinclair’s office; a twinge of panic flashed across the captain’s face. He hastily buried his sheaf of papers in a desk drawer mere moments before a uniformed grey-haired gentleman stepped into the room. “Major Martigan!” Sinclair exclaimed. “How very nice to see you.”

A reedy voice: "The feeling is mutual." For his part, the elderly major looked somewhat put out by the towering sergeant, who regarded him with a cool sneer. Martigan paced forward to stand before Sinclair's desk, whose owner he acknowledged with evident discomfort.

Sinclair pursed his thin lips and casually gestured towards the door. "You are dismissed, McClintock."

McClintock waited to finish his cigar – the spent remains of which he tossed out the office's lone window into an alleyway – before delivering a smooth half-salute to his superior officer and departing into the shadows, carelessly brushing past Martigan in the process.

Martigan steadied himself and asked, "Who was that fellow? What's this business all about?"

"Nothing," Sinclair lied.

Martigan waited expectantly.

"Nothing, *sir*."

"I should remind you," said Martigan, peering at Sinclair through a stern set of bifocals, "that if you're up to your old tricks again, you will face immediate court-martial."

Silence. Sinclair's icy blue eyes stared straight ahead. Martigan blinked.

"Now, where was I. Oh, yes. R.N. intelligence has reported a potential rebel plot to infiltrate our defenses at Boston Neck. Your usual contact, I believe."

Sinclair maintained his studied silence. Martigan concluded awkwardly, "Do look into it," and turned to take his leave – a downcast leave, for after a lifetime of erect posture, the old man's shoulders were starting to stoop. The office door clicked closed.

As if on cue, McClintock reappeared from the shadows. Sinclair said in a mocking high-pitched mimicry, “Do look into it.”

Sgt. McClintock made a sinister smile.

* * *

Van Dyke’s recruits had moved north in record time, due in part to the results of a second vote – equally as democratic as the first – in which the group freely chose to bypass the city of New York. On the cold afternoon of December 31, Dr. Van Dyke determined that they had made good enough time to warrant a stop. He poked his head out the moving coach’s door and shouted, “Only two hours to New Haven. Everyone halt.”

The recruits slowed their horses and steered them to the side of the snow-covered road, near a bleak frozen field that in its better days had grown barley or onions. After dismounting they congregated by their leader’s coach, stamping their feet and huddling into their coats in a futile effort to keep warm. Cloudy puffs of air formed with each breath.

Van Dyke stepped out of his coach, directed a brief glare at the driver on general principle, then said, “A lot of good a pack of raw recruits will do to end the occupation of Boston. We’ll take an hour for training.”

Within minutes Van Dyke and his scrawny dog were barking orders at the recruits, who had assembled in line formation across the frozen field.

“First, musketry. In position!”

The eleven recruits – and there were but eleven, for Shaw hung back tending the horses – unevenly unslung their hunting muskets. They struggled to keep up with their

leader's rapid-fire commands: "Face left! Face right! I said right! Face left again!"

Then Van Dyke fell silent. He fumbled in his coat, eventually emerging with a red apple. During the odd delay Arthur toyed with his black powder pouch, assuming that target practice would be next on the agenda; he and several other recruits fell to loading their muskets.

Van Dyke sprang to life, brandishing the apple with fury. "In a time when the citizens of Boston are made to undergo such scarcity, you would so blithely waste shot and powder? For shame. To wage our fight against the wicked, wicked Englishmen, we must watch our resources wisely. Bring out your knives."

The recruits meekly returned their muskets to their backs, and brought out their knives – invaluable tools for all manner of occasions, whether hunting or fighting or slicing vegetables in the kitchen. They awaited an explanation of the particular use Van Dyke had in mind. Yet none came: a distracted "Carry on" indicated that their leader had become preoccupied with attending to his dog, who had taken a keen interest in the shiny apple.

In the absence of any instruction Arthur contented himself with whittling a twig, while Silas began repeatedly tossing his knife in the air and catching it. Shaw looked on in disgust: *This is no way to train an army.*

At last the young woman mustered the courage to ask, "Dr. Van Dyke, what exactly is it we're supposed to be doing?"

Van Dyke reluctantly returned his attention to non-canine matters. "Hmm? Oh, yes. For your lesson we will seek to emulate that great warrior against oppression and tyranny: William Tell. A shiny new guinea to whomever first strikes this apple off a person's head." With that, he took a bite from the apple and flung it across the field.

Silas elbowed aside a weaker recruit and caught the prize. He hesitated, casting about for some hapless victim; Caleb asked, “Who should we pick?”

Silas’s gaze fell across Arthur, and his uncertainty vanished. He whooped, “That friend of the servant’s!”

Shaw could hardly believe his eyes. If this was Van Dyke’s twisted idea of a joke, Silas certainly wasn’t interpreting it as one – the little thug, eyes gleaming at the thought of a whole guinea, dispatched his two cronies to grab Arthur and drag him against a nearby tree. A wide-eyed Arthur mouthed the word, “Egad!”

Shaw left the horses and rushed over to Van Dyke, who had returned to tending his beloved pet pooch with careless indifference. “You can’t let this happen,” exclaimed Shaw, “Arthur’s going to get hurt!”

Van Dyke snapped, “Nonsense. Despite the pretensions of certain servants, it is I who am trained in military affairs, just as it is I who am in command.

“Besides,” he added primly, “I am, after all, a doctor, and on hand to treat any potential injury.” The good doctor emitted a light cough while pointedly looking over Shaw’s shoulder.

Shaw whirled around to behold a horrifying sight... Caleb winding back to throw his knife at the apple, which balanced atop the head of a pinioned Arthur, who trembled in fear....

He needn’t have worried; Caleb’s knife missed the tree completely. Silas burst into raucous laughter: “Drink too much ale last night, Caleb?”

Shaw allowed himself a sigh of relief – momentary relief, for Silas, who was up next, made a show of sharpening his knife against a small grinding stone. All concerned were certain that Silas would miss the apple, whether by accident or design. The recruits looked on with

trepidation. Van Dyke's scrawny dog licked its chops in anticipation of an imminent feast of fresh meat.

Silas wound back to throw, and a sharp cry of pain echoed over the frozen field. When Silas weakly clutched his throwing hand, it became apparent that the cry was his!

Shaw stood poised in the aftermath of a remarkable incredible knife throw, one that had soared clear across the field to strike Silas's knife out of his hand. A stunned silence settled over the field, its inhabitants momentarily stricken in a frozen tableau.

"I've been injured," whimpered Silas, his hand trembling. "That servant is a menace, he's trying to kill us all –"

Studying Silas's untouched hand, the young woman scornfully replied, "He didn't leave a scratch."

Van Dyke, annoyed at the turn of events, intervened: "I will examine Mr. Deane's injuries personally and determine the course of action to be taken. The hour grows late and we must seek lodging for the night. Your training is over; return to your horses."

The rattled recruits were only too happy to comply. Freed from the cronies' clutches, Arthur bolted for the road as though it contained a magic elixir that would restore his dignity.

"And let there be no more knife-throwing," concluded Van Dyke with an accompanying glare at Shaw, "under *any* circumstances."

* * *

Two hours later the recruits were checking into the New Haven inn. They huddled in the cold foyer, stamping off snow from their boots. Van Dyke, at the front desk,

was gesticulating with his walking stick at the mute innkeeper – “Twelve rooms,” he requested, for the thirteen of them.

Arthur whispered sympathetically to Shaw, “Looks like you’ve got the stable again.”

Silas elbowed his way past Shaw to the front desk and loudly corrected the order to “Eleven rooms.” He grasped the young woman by the arm, winking over her shoulder to his two cronies. But she primly shook off his hand and said, “Twelve.”

The innkeeper perused the situation, walked to his rack of room keys, and slowly took down twelve.

“Well, don’t be all day about it, man!” exclaimed Van Dyke in irritation. He bent to pick up his dog while muttering, “One might expect more expeditious service at these prices.”

Silas, looking to recover from his rebuke, shrewdly recognized another opportunity to ingratiate himself with his superior – an opportunity which he was not wont to forego.

“My family lives a short ways away in Wethersfield,” he piped up. “They could provide us free lodging tomorrow. It’s a very large house... since my father’s very rich and influential. And not a Tory,” Silas concluded, leering at the young woman in retaliatory triumph.

“Wethersfield, eh?” said Van Dyke, stroking his dog with rapt interest. “That’s near Hartford. A minor detour.”

Arthur broke in. “Sir, this proposed detour is nearly thirty-five miles out of our way and would add two days to the journey. You’ve said yourself that we must reach Boston as soon as possible, our help is needed –”

“So it is,” snapped Van Dyke. “Rest assured I shall make a decision that is well-considered and –” he smirked at Silas – “completely impartial.”

* * *

That night Shaw shivered in his usual stable, despondent. His best efforts at rest had been stymied by the group’s horses, who were peacefully but insistently whinnying in their sleep.

Aside from his equine companionship, Shaw felt utterly alone. He had suffered through trials and tribulations that no self-respecting individual should have to endure. He had seen a leader of the Continental Army recklessly endanger the life of a friend, while showing blatant favoritism to a rival. He had lost his faith in the basic justness of the colonial cause, and in his own ability to fight for it.

Above all, he had lost his freedom. *At least as a farmer I could be my own man.*

He had little left to lose. Shaw shifted in his bed of straw, tugging his ragged blanket over himself. He could see his breath.

Maybe in the morning he’d quit. Upon thinking of the warm, sunny, horse-free fields of Pennsylvania, he began to feel better already. He’d accepted this demeaning servitude in part to make Van Dyke take him seriously... but now that he no longer cared what Van Dyke thought... or anyone thought...

Shaw’s own thoughts were interrupted by a shrill whinny. He yelled at the horses, “Ah, shut up already!”

“Ben?”

A whisper from the stable door. Shaw propped himself upright to see Arthur, holding aloft a candle that cast a shadow of his tricorner hat against the far wall. Faintly embarrassed – both by his unwittingly rude outburst and by having been caught bareheaded – Shaw put the hat on while responding, “Yeah.”

Arthur moved closer, negotiating his way past a recalcitrant horse to set his candle down atop a bale of hay. The candle teetered precariously, threatening to tip over and start a deadly fire; Arthur fumbled to steady it atop its perch. “I just wanted to see if you’re all right. You’ve seemed distraught.”

“I can’t believe what Van Dyke did back there.”

The candle at last settled into a stable position. “Likewise. I can’t believe that old fool – he wouldn’t stop at Philadelphia or New York but is hell-bent on visiting this backwater in Connecticut.”

“I meant with the knives.”

“Oh.” Arthur paused awkwardly. “I’m not sure if I ever thanked you.”

“Don’t mention it. If Silas had sliced you open, I was next.” Shaw added on impulse, “I didn’t know his father was influential.”

“Silas Deane, Sr. A delegate to the Continental Congress. Very respected, and very rich.”

A new voice: “My father’s an infamous Tory.”

The stable door slammed shut, sending forth an air current that caused the candle to flicker and expire. The stable plunged into semidarkness. Arthur’s eyes widened in panic as he whispered, “Egad. If Van Dyke catches me here, we’re in for it.”

The young woman entered the stable, carrying a new candle. She was alone; Arthur heaved a sigh of relief.

Shaw said wryly, “Could be worse. My father’s dead.”

The young woman’s feisty attitude vanished and she said, “Oh – I’m sorry –”

“*I’m* sorry I still don’t know your name.”

“Anna. Sullivan.” Anna divulged her last name only reluctantly, hastening to add: “It’s Scotch, not Irish.”

Shaw suspected she was lying, but could care less. He reclined on one elbow and said, “So – Anna – you don’t look like the sort who fancies spending time in stables, so why are you here?”

“Well,” said Anna, setting down her candle alongside Arthur’s expired one, “while Van Dyke may not be serious about training, I am.”

“So am I!” blurted Arthur.

Anna ignored him, seating herself on a bale of hay below the ledge containing Shaw’s bed. “And you seem good with a knife.”

Shaw raised an eyebrow. “I certainly am.” He unsheathed his knife and began lightly weighing it in his hand. “It’s a powerful tool, in the right hands. Otherwise deadly.”

Still reclining on one elbow, in a lightning-fast motion he flipped the knife around and tossed it at Anna. Startled, Anna scrambled to catch the knife. Had the blade pointed towards her she would be dead.

Shaw jumped down from his bed and said in a passable impersonation of Van Dyke, “For your first lesson, I instruct you to split one of the hairs on Arthur’s head.”

Anna laughed. Arthur looked horrified – then, upon realizing that Shaw’s order was of questionable sincerity, joined in the laughter with distinct unease.

“The real lesson,” said Shaw, improvising as he went along, “is to conceal one’s weapon, so the enemy is taken by surprise.” He extended his left hand towards Anna, motioning for her to return his knife, which she did. The knife vanished.

A puzzled Anna asked, “Where did it go?” She forced Shaw to show his other hand, which had been hiding suspiciously behind his back – but it too was empty. Shaw grinned.

Arthur exclaimed, “You’ve hidden it in your boot!” He triumphantly watched Shaw lift his knee-length breeches to reveal... two quite ordinary leather boots.

“Nor in my coat.” Shaw turned out his coat pockets to prove their state of vacancy. In doing so he edged closer to Anna, while subtly moving his right hand behind his back. “I would say the knife is actually... here!”

Shaw’s right hand flashed forward and produced the knife from Anna’s dress sleeve, presenting it to her as though a gift. She giggled and accepted the offering.

Arthur seemed bemused. “Very clever,” he said dubiously. “Perhaps next time you can teach us how to actually use a knife. Until then, we should get some sleep.” He yawned, took Anna’s candle, and trundled off towards the stable door.

As the stable descended into semidarkness, Anna turned to leave as well. Faced with the prospect of returning to respectable company, her smile abruptly faded and she said, “Don’t tell anyone I was here.”

“On one condition.”

Anna’s demeanor became coy, circumspect. “What?”

“You give me my knife back.”

Anna looked down at the knife she still held in her hand. A brief smile flashed across her face and she returned it.

Satisfied, Shaw returned the knife to its sheath. “Any soldier’s best friend,” he reflected.

He hesitated – though he hated to risk ruining this enjoyable evening, a question had been on his mind for some time. He plunged ahead: “You’ll forgive me for asking, but I didn’t know women are allowed in the army.”

“Oh. Well, you know it’s not really the army.”

“Of course.” *Technically, no doubt, a volunteer militia of some kind.*

“Women are perfectly capable of doing this sort of work – maybe even better, since we avoid suspicion.”

Shaw could no longer conceal his confusion. “Excuse me?”

“I thought you knew.” Anna’s surprise soon gave way to suppressed amusement at her fellow recruit’s unaccountable ignorance. “We’re spies.”

Chapter 3

THE SPY

New Year's Day. The recruits filled their inn's dining hall, whose windows were fogged with cold gray mist, and whose tables were covered with the remnants of that morning's breakfast.

As a servant, Shaw had not yet found a chance to eat; he hungrily eyed a half-gnawed crust of bread. In the meantime, he said to Arthur, "Spies. Who would've guessed."

"I'm sorry – I would have told you, but I thought you knew."

"Hmph." Shaw surveyed the group of recruits. "So I don't even have the dignity of serving an honorable group."

"Spies are honorable! Just like servants."

"Wrong on both counts," said Shaw, inching closer to the bread. "No matter, I've made my peace with it – until the minute we get to Boston, when I quit to join a regular army unit. If Van Dyke doesn't expel me first."

Shaw snatched up the leftover crust of bread. Arthur, on the verge of protesting his friend's pessimism, reached for a crust of his own – only to be shoved aside by Caleb. Munching on the crust – his sixth – Caleb loudly remarked, "It's New Year's. All the enlistment contracts have expired. That means Colonel Arnold must have attacked Quebec last night."

Silas's other crony asked, "You think he took the city?"

Silas himself stepped in and swept all the remaining bread into his arms. "Benedict Arnold is a good man. He's from Connecticut, like me and my father. I trust he's done a fine job."

Anna added, "He's already journeyed four hundred miles through the Canadian wilderness." She briefly glanced at Shaw, then averted eye contact and drew closer to Silas's side. As far as she was concerned, they'd never spoken.

Van Dyke's gouty bulk filled the inn's front entryway. He said, "The time draws near to make a journey of our own. We ride north, to Wethersfield."

He left as abruptly as he had come. Silas and his cronies followed their leader out the door towards the stable, loudly munching their bread and cheese.

Arthur looked at the empty dining table like a sad puppy dog. Shaw sighed – he looked at his crust of bread, then broke off half to give to his friend.

"Thanksh," said Arthur through a mouthful of bread. Despite the gnawing pains of his stomach, Shaw reluctantly put his own bread in his coat pocket to save for later. He had, of course, taken care to reserve the slightly larger half for himself. The two spies-in-training followed the rest of the group out the door.

Not long afterwards, a column of horses snaked out of the inn's stable. Dark clouds loomed overhead – heralding rain, for the temperature was 33 degrees. The horses snorted and discharged jets of cold air from their nostrils.

Only Van Dyke stayed warm, snug within the confines of his stage coach. The coach took up position at the head of the column as it wound its way through the streets of New Haven, soon leaving the small town behind to proceed northeast along a coastal road.

A thickset man watched them depart. Sgt. Victor McClintock, standing behind the town's brick almshouse alongside a magnificent white stallion, directed a gesture at a waiting horseman. The horseman saluted, revealing a flash of red beneath his cloak.

McClintock mounted his own horse and trotted north.

* * *

The recruits rode east, the gray countryside to their north, the gray cliffs of Long Island Sound beyond a barren field to their south. Silas and his cronies now led the column, followed by Van Dyke's coach, then the main body of agents, then Arthur, and finally Shaw, who was saddled with a small pony.

Arthur turned in his saddle and shouted, "Dust is pretty bad, ain't it?"

"Yep." Shaw coughed. The dust kicked up from the horses' hooves was horrendous – especially from Arthur's, which was being inexpertly ridden. "Don't worry, looks like rain."

Shaw squinted through the haze to make out an unwelcome sight: Silas and his cronies had slowed their

horses to drop back through the column, presumably to harass the servant. "Looks like company."

"Servant!" shouted Silas, who had drawn his horse level with Shaw's. "I've been informed that you have an eye on Anna. Back off; she's mine."

Shaw made no response, placidly staring forward as if he hadn't heard the challenge. Silas coughed; the dust was catching up with him. He drew his horse closer so that its flank almost collided with Shaw's, and raised his voice: "Did you hear me? I said to keep your distance!"

Summoning all his self-restraint, Shaw continued to ignore his tormentor, though he did shift the reins to his left hand. Silas threw a punch, which fell short when its target dodged out of the way. Shaw straightened back up in the saddle.

Silas swung again and missed pathetically. "What's the matter, you a coward? Too weak to fight?" His cronies attempted to support this assertion by making taunting noises like those of a chicken. Some neighboring recruits took notice of this promising source of entertainment, and slowed their horses to watch.

Silas swung a third time and connected, drawing blood on Shaw's left temple. In a flash Shaw punched him clean off his horse. Silas sailed several feet through the air before landing on the road with a heavy *thud*.

Van Dyke's coach stopped. Arthur murmured, "Now you've gone and done it."

Their apprehension growing, the onlooking recruits began to dismount. Shaw heaved a sigh of vexation and followed suit, walking towards the fallen Silas to help the bully back to his feet.

A knobbed walking stick exited the halted stage coach and swiftly hobbled over to the scene of the

disturbance. The veins in Van Dyke's forehead throbbed with purple fury.

"Don't think I didn't see that!" he bellowed at Shaw. "Forging a note, stowing away on my carriage, disrupting my training sessions, and now inciting violence. This has been the final straw for you, my boy. You have proven yourself unfit to be even a servant. You are hereby expelled from this group and any further association with the Continental Army."

Van Dyke glowered with an air of suppressed triumph. Shaw opened his mouth to reply, only to be silenced by a terrific thunderclap.

A lightning bolt descended from the storm-darkened skies to herald a terrible sight: a wooden barricade blocking the road sixty yards ahead of them, manned by several red-coated British soldiers. Shaw whirled around to see that the British had erected an identical barricade astride the road behind them. The skies broke and rain poured from the heavens.

Arthur said timorously, "Redcoats."

* * *

This was Shaw's first encounter with the British in twenty years, and his first with them as an enemy. He hadn't been expecting their reunion to take place so soon – why would the Royal Army have an interest in a small group of young recruits?

"What are they doing in Connecticut?" he asked Arthur, but Arthur was petrified with shock.

Motivations aside, the British had learned their lesson from the French and Indian War – they seemed resolved that in matters of ambushes, it was better to give than to receive. A cannon shot from the barricades

exploded amongst the recruits, tearing up the moistening ground and spooking the horses. Shaw briefly chased after his pony, but to no avail; driven to panic by the terrific noise, it along with the faster horses galloped off into the countryside.

This being their first encounter with real combat conditions, the recruits scurried about in disarray. Many looked to their leader for guidance. Yet Van Dyke seemed as helpless as the rest of them – he stood transfixed next to his now-useless carriage, a peculiar expression on his face.

So the recruits did the only logical thing: they ran.

Away from the cannon fire, off the road, across the field of grass that squished beneath their feet as the rain flowed downwards. Mildly disgusted by their instinctive flight, Shaw slowed to take a glance behind him.

A detachment of soldiers had left the barricades to give pursuit. They were approaching unusually rapidly – Shaw's heart sank. He resumed running and shouted to the other fleeing recruits, "Cavalry."

Seconds later, five horsemen galloped past Van Dyke's abandoned coach. They were led by none other than Sgt. McClintock of the Royal Army.

Surveying his fleeing quarry with a grim smile, McClintock hefted his musket like a lance while remarking to his second-in-command, "Just like a fox hunt." They spurred their horses forward across the open field.

* * *

Silas was in the lead, as he'd been the first to flee. He was making a comprehensive mess of the retreat – failing to zigzag, throw up obstacles, or even move to less exposed ground.

At this rate they'd be caught in seconds. Shaw slackened his pace, beginning to fall behind the rest of the group.

Van Dyke – who did not appear to require his walking stick when properly motivated – noticed Shaw's lagging and sneered, "What's the matter, boy? Can't keep up?"

Ignoring the man, Shaw stooped to pick up a small rock. The sneer on Van Dyke's face flickered, then faded. "You can't fight horsemen on foot," he sputtered, "that's impossible!"

Shaw had already opened up a 20-foot gap between him and the rest of the group. He continued to jog laterally, towards a patch of ground so barren that even grass dared not grow.

"What's that crazy bloke doing?" asked McClintock's second-in-command.

"Don't know. Dispose of him."

"Hey," protested a third horseman, "why do you give him all the easy assignments?"

McClintock's second-in-command gave a dashing salute with his sword and peeled off from the cavalry unit. Arthur paused to watch in morbid anticipation as the horseman bore down upon Shaw, who drew back his rock-holding arm in readiness to throw.

The horse stumbled; McClintock's second-in-command realized only too late that in the absence of grass, this ground had been made unstable by the torrential rain. Shaw had lured the horseman into a mud patch! Having decisively lost its footing, the horse reared up in a final mighty effort to extricate itself from the morass, which failed. Its rider was thrown headlong into the muck.

Shaw allowed himself a smile and tossed aside the rock – nothing more than a decoy. The other recruits cheered him from afar.

Then Shaw saw the remaining four horsemen bearing down upon him. He gulped, and ran.

* * *

Silas could run no more; he'd reached the cliffs along the shore, a full fifty feet above the turbulent sea. Panicked, he looked down, looked sideways, looked behind him, found no way out. "Should we try to climb down?" he asked uneasily.

Shaw ran up to rejoin the group, breathing heavily. He said, "We've done enough running."

With that, Shaw began to climb up a large boulder perched on the edge of the craggy cliffs.

The group looked on in puzzlement. Silas regained his composure and sneered, "Giving up so soon?" Turning to the other recruits, he explained in a voice just loudly enough for Shaw to hear, "He's going to jump."

Shaw jumped. He sailed north off the rocky outcrop to land on a fine black horse.

The horse's rider turned around in bewilderment and began a scuffle with the intruder. Shaw dodged the weak blows and returned a few of his own. He reached for his knife, but it had slipped from its sheath during the jump.

The horseman landed a punch on Shaw's shoulder. The horse galloped onwards out of control – heading straight for the cliff! Shaw frantically motioned at his adversary to attend to the reins, but the dull fellow didn't understand.

Exasperated, Shaw gritted his teeth and at last punched the man off his horse. He scrambled forward across the saddle, grabbed the reins and forced the horse to a halt – so near to the cliff that its hooves knocked a few pebbles over the edge.

Shaw's victory was short-lived, for another horseman took this opportunity to charge him. Brandishing a small sword, the British soldier galloped uphill across the rocky field to bear down upon the unarmed horse and rider.

The black horse saw the incoming attack and shifted uneasily, its nostrils flaring. Its rider was unperturbed. Shaw leaned down to whisper in mock anxiety, "Whatever will we do, horse?"

Then the soldier was upon them, raising his sword to deal his first blow – and in all likelihood, his last.

Shaw flicked the reins and his horse stepped nimbly out of the way.

For the first time the soldier saw the great void that lay before him. Panicked, he yanked on the reins and skidded to a halt just at the edge of the cliff, his horse's hooves scrabbling for traction against the slippery rocks but ultimately finding a stable footing.

The soldier's sense of relief soon gave way to blind terror – his pale horse whinnied in pain and rushed over the edge!

Anna lowered her arm, her thrown knife having embedded itself in the horse's calf. Shaw was grinning broadly for the first time in weeks. The two exchanged smiles.

McClintock and the other remaining horseman exchanged scowls. They were occupied with menacing the main body of recruits – since their main opposition was Arthur trying to fend them off with a tree branch, they were

having an easy time of it – but broke off their engagement upon seeing Shaw's success.

“This brat has disturbed us long enough,” rasped McClintock. He and his subordinate abandoned Arthur to advance upon Shaw, carefully maintaining just enough intervening distance to allow them to flank their quarry without being picked off individually. The subordinate produced a cavalry pistol; for his part, McClintock drew an enormous saber.

Shaw withdrew the bit of bread he had saved from that morning's breakfast. He apologized to his horse – “Sorry, I'm sure you'd like this” – and flung the bread aside. McClintock's chestnut horse swerved to intercept the food, causing the sergeant's outstretched saber to narrowly miss its target.

As Shaw felt the rush of air from the passing saber, he felt something land in his left hand. Arthur had tossed him the tree branch. Shaw saluted his friend with the branch and held it horizontally like a lance, ousting McClintock's subordinate from his saddle before he could get off a shot.

McClintock had wheeled his horse around for another pass – only to find himself alone, facing a united front of angry recruits. He appraised the situation, wheeled his horse around once more, and fled.

* * *

Arthur mopped his brow in relief, while Anna hugged him. All the recruits let out an exultant cheer.

All except Shaw, who galloped off in pursuit. As the recruits' cries of victory gave way to expressions of disbelief, Shaw spurred his captured horse across the wet grass field, ignoring Van Dyke's shouted command to

“Come back! We’re safe now”. He leaned down in the saddle and confided to his horse, “We’re not really safe until we know why that man followed us, are we?”

Sensing that Shaw was gaining, McClintock changed course to follow a narrow deer trail into the woods. Shaw responded by cutting diagonally across the soggy field, jumping his horse down a six-foot ledge to make up additional ground. He galloped into the dark forest only seconds after McClintock.

At least here there’s some cover from the rain. Shaw slowed his horse to a walk to avoid plowing into the gnarled trees. He called into the disorienting mist, “Okay, why are you attacking us? Who sent you?”

A shot rang out, and a hole appeared in Shaw’s left arm.

Shaw emitted a silent gasp and toppled from the saddle, hitting his head against a thick tree root. Dark blood moistened the soil below him. From the mists ahead of him emerged the grim visage of the cavalry leader, dismounted, holstering a still-smoking flintlock pistol.

“Ambushed twice in ten minutes,” said McClintock, “how careless.”

Shaw lay still, clutching his arm in apparent pain.

“Although,” added McClintock, slowly drawing his enormous saber, “you won’t be making such mistakes again. *Ever* again.”

The saber glinted in the faint rays of sunlight. Through the obscuring mist and rain, Shaw saw a jagged scar gracing McClintock’s right cheek – a scar which grew ever larger as the sergeant drew nearer.

The saber flashed. Shaw dropped his exaggerated pretense of pain and rolled out of the way, grabbing for the sergeant’s coat while dealing a blow to his torso. A weak

blow – McClintock, whose saber had glanced harmlessly off the tree root, soon recovered.

McClintock snarled and cast aside his loosened coat. He realized only an instant too late that Shaw's desperate lunge had likewise knocked loose his pistol.

Shaw rushed for the dropped pistol, scrambling to reach it before his adversary. He seized the weapon, whirled around – and saw that McClintock had already fled.

* * *

Amazed that McClintock would flee from a wounded man, Shaw raised the pistol to fire. He took aim at McClintock's back and pulled the trigger.

Click.

Another pull of the trigger, another hollow click. The pistol's bullet was spent, and it would take twenty seconds at least to load another. McClintock disappeared into the mist.

Shaw shrugged, placing the pistol in his coat pocket while mumbling, "Think I'll keep it anyway."

So I've won. With his enemies vanquished, the adrenaline ebbed from Shaw's body and the full brunt of his pain finally began to make itself felt. Shaw clutched his wounded arm and dragged himself upright and began limping out of the damned forest.

He didn't get far. He almost stumbled upon McClintock's coat – there, lying invitingly on the ground – and was about to kick it aside, when he thought better of it. Kneeling, Shaw used his good right arm to fumble through the coat's pockets, in the vague hope of useful information. Or money. *Preferably money.*

Nothing useful – just a packet of ancient papers that crumbled at the touch. A book. Shaw stuffed the book into his own coat before dripping rain caused its ink to blur any further.

A voice came from behind him. “What’s that?”

Shaw started in surprise. As he turned around he instinctively hid the captured goods behind his back.

It was only Anna. “I followed your trail,” she said, walking closer. “The others tried, but they got lost – looks like they’re twenty minutes behind me at least.” Shaw smiled, and the pain in his arm began to subside.

“Ben!”

Arthur. The pain in Shaw’s arm returned. He heaved a sigh, concealed the wounded arm behind his back so as not to look weak, and struggled forward. Arthur scrambled over the wet carpet of leaves to join his two friends.

Above them, for the first time in days the skies had begun to clear.

* * *

Shaw had his own room now, and was savoring it. His coat, hat, and bloodstained shirt lay draped across the back of a chair next to the bed, where his captured pistol occupied pride of place. The inn was the finest in Guilford – they’d thankfully bypassed Wethersfield after all – and provided the room with a bucket of water and even a Perret razor.

Shaw finished shaving and set the razor aside. Gritting his teeth in anticipation of the ordeal to come, he scooped up a handful of water and rubbed it over his bare

left arm. Where the cold liquid touched the wound it gave rise to an exquisite pain.

A knock on the door. Shaw winced and said, "Not right now, Arthur."

"It's Anna."

Shaw gave a jolt of surprise, almost banging his head against a low rafter beam. He hastily wiped away the residual blood and jogged across the room to lie down on his bed. He folded a corner of the sheet over his left arm, sending his pistol clattering off the bed and across the floor.

After successfully acting like a complete idiot, Shaw began to have second thoughts. He impulsively flipped the sheet back to give his gunshot wound prominent exposure – then, with a sly smile creeping over his face, said, "Come in."

"I see Van Dyke's finally let you have a room," came Anna's voice from behind the opening door. "Not even he can pretend you're a servant any longer – oh, you're hurt!"

It worked! She rushed to the bedside. Shaw feebly protested "No, no," but Anna would have nothing of it – she cast about for a suitable bandage, found none, and therefore tore a piece of cloth off her gingham dress. After dipping it in the water she applied it to Shaw's wound.

Her right elbow jostled Shaw's coat, dislodging that old book. Shaw fumbled to hide the thing, but Anna reached it first.

"What's this?" she asked. "It looks so old."

"That's, ah, a gift from a British friend of mine. Don't tell anyone."

"*Wonders of the Invisible World*," she said, reading off the front cover. "Most peculiar."

“Look,” Shaw said on impulse, “how do you think those redcoats found us, anyhow? I think someone must’ve tipped them off.”

Anna made a slight frown. She drew away from the bedside, fingering her dress as though she were already regretting having torn it. “Maybe.”

“Maybe Si –”

“Well, you seem well enough,” said Anna hastily. “I’ve got to tend to Silas – the poor dear bruised his toe in all the fighting.”

She moved towards the door. Shaw called out, “Should I not tell anyone you were here?”

Framed by the doorway, Anna turned, made a small half-smile, and said, “That won’t be necessary.” She hesitated, then added, “I’ll see you in Boston.”

The door gently closed behind her.

* * *

The door to Sinclair’s office swung open, admitting one Major Martigan of the British secret service. The grey-haired officer opened his mouth to speak, but was beaten to the punch by his subordinate.

“Our defenses at Boston Neck are secure,” said Sinclair. “I have ensured it.”

Martigan looked momentarily confused, then recalled the orders he’d issued a week earlier and said, “Ah, splendid. That will secure our rear during our withdrawal.”

Now it was Sinclair’s turn to feel confusion, though he struggled successfully to maintain an unaffected demeanor by toying with a quill pen atop his desk. “Withdrawal, sir?”

“The siege around Boston is tightening. Within weeks the rebels will boast fresh cannon from Ticonderoga that will have our garrison at their mercy. Retreat seems to be our only option; we must evacuate or be obliterated.”

Sinclair’s face hardened, revealing unmistakable hatred in the deep recesses of his eyes. The quill pen crumpled in his clenched fist. “And leave this city to vice and chaos?”

“Our position is growing untenable,” repeated Martigan. “Instruct your agents to prepare for a withdrawal. Including that tall hulking fellow.”

“Yes,” snarled Sinclair, smoothing out the damaged pen and viciously plunging it into his inkwell to begin writing a note.

Martigan waited expectantly. Sinclair ceased his furious scribbling, looked up from his desk, and performed an exaggerated, mocking salute: “Yes, *sir*.”

The older man departed. Sgt. McClintock materialized from the shadows, somewhat the worse for wear from his recent skirmish with Van Dyke’s recruits. His white breeches were torn and smeared with mud, and his coat was gone.

“‘Tall hulking fellow’?” said McClintock. “I don’t know if I should feel offended.”

“*I* am offended, McClintock,” Sinclair said sharply, folding his completed note and stuffing it into a formerly-sealed envelope he’d ripped open with the point of his sword. “For you have failed me.”

McClintock looked uncharacteristically rattled. His hands fumbled to light a cigar as he protested, “We failed to stop Tallmadge’s recruits, that is true. But there was nothing we could do – they had an expert, a professional soldier with them –”

Rising from his seat, Sinclair held up a hand to staunch the flow of excuses. He seemed to have lost all interest in the subject, focusing instead upon McClintock's right cheek. "That scar is from the small pox, is it not?"

"Yes..."

"A pity it's left your face asymmetrical." In a flash Sinclair raised his sword and sliced open a bloody gash on McClintock's left cheek.

McClintock endured the terrible pain without a sign of distress. Blood trickled down his face and onto his red uniform, but he made no effort to staunch it.

Sinclair held a grudging respect – if not envy – for the sergeant's stoicism. Satisfied for the time being, he sat back down while returning his glistening wet sword to its sheath. He said through gritted teeth, "And if you don't find me that map before that blackguard Tallmadge, you'll soon have a third scar – where people *won't* see it."

* * *

The recruits arrived at their destination on the fifth day of the new year. A column of freshly-captured horses proceeded into a snowy field rimmed by brick buildings and covered with tents – the square of a local college, and the site of the main Continental Army camp. Clusters of soldiers dotted the square, huddled around small fires on which they cooked their breakfasts.

A ramshackle lean-to played host to a silent but intense game of whist. These cardplayers uniformly ignored the new arrivals, remaining fixated upon the gameplay or a half-emptied bottle of rum, as the case may be.

Shaw, who had expected a more exuberant welcome, remained in high spirits nonetheless. From some

unknown quarter a fife piped that merriest of tunes, "Successful Campaign." Shaw turned to Arthur, riding alongside him at the head of the column, and airily said, "Boston."

"No, Cambridge." When Shaw looked quizzical Arthur clarified, "Technically. Boston's the city to which we're laying siege."

"To which?"

Shaw refrained from mocking his friend's stilted language any further, for he noticed a soldier standing astride the street ahead of them. He hastily pulled back on his horse's reins so as not to trample the man, though there was no need; the horse stopped on its own in response to the soldier's upraised hand.

"Are you the – er – special recruits?"

Special... so that's what they're calling us. Shaw answered, "Yes."

"We've been expecting you," said the soldier, uncomfortably averting eye contact from the spies. "Come this way."

The soldier abruptly turned his back, shifted his musket to his other shoulder, and strode off towards a spacious tent that flew a red and white striped flag.

Shaw took it that they were to follow. He directed his horse after their meager welcoming committee, while whispering to Arthur: "You don't think we'll be greeted by General Washington himself?"

Examining a particularly bored-looking soldier, Arthur whispered back, "If this camp were intending to give us a hearty welcome, I think it would have signaled its intentions earlier."

Indeed, their guide led them straight past Washington's presumed headquarters to a run-down area tucked away behind them, where he stopped in front of a

much smaller tent. He ducked beneath the tent flap, saying, “Just wait outside.”

The recruits dismounted, passing their horses off to a servant for watering, and gathered outside the tent to anxiously await their guide’s return. Van Dyke stumbled out of his stage coach, which had struggled to plow its way through the snowy terrain. His dog took poorly to the snow. It burrowed itself for warmth against Silas’s leg, only to be kicked aside.

For the first time Shaw felt some semblance of pity for the miserable creature, a fellow victim of Silas’s cruelty. He whispered to Arthur, “I’ve been wondering. Back in Connecticut, when Silas suggested we make that detour –”

Arthur shrank away in distinct discomfort. “Are you seriously accusing the fellow of treachery?”

Shaw hastily backtracked, whispering, “You’re right. I shouldn’t let personal feelings cloud my judgment.” He shot a pained smile at Van Dyke, who was passing by en route to the tent.

The tent flap remained still; they watched Silas violently scuff the grass in boredom. By way of placating his friend Arthur whispered, “Still, *someone* tipped off the British, unquestionably.”

The tent flap rustled and a figure emerged, ending their discussion and instantly commanding the attention of the assembled recruits. Shaw gave a mild start of surprise, though upon a moment’s reflection he recognized his surprise was unwarranted.

Who else would greet them but Patrick Tallmadge? The other recruits were awestruck by the man’s air of command, imposing visage, and flowing white hair, which had ever so slightly whitened further since Shaw had seen

him last. Shaw tried to catch his eye, but the old spymaster didn't appear to take notice.

Tallmadge raised his weathered arms and spoke: "Welcome, everyone. If you were expecting General Washington you'll have to make do with a poor substitute."

A few recruits chuckled, but most were too intimidated to laugh. Tallmadge rested an arm on the tent pole and continued, "I understand that you've been subject to the excellent care of Dr. Van Dyke during your journey up from the Middle Colonies."

Van Dyke, far from intimidated, coughed and preened in pleasure.

"I am taking responsibility for your training now. The good doctor will be my second in command; of course, I expect you to obey him as you would me." For reasons of his own, Tallmadge chose to emphasize the point by looking directly at Shaw. Shaw reddened, trying to contain his disappointment: *Regardless, it's still a great improvement.*

Tallmadge shot a wary look at a group of passing militiamen, tensely waited for them to move out of earshot, then directed a warm smile at his assembled recruits. "Only a dozen of you. I'm sure you're quite cold, so please, step inside."

With that, he disappeared within the tent. The recruits tentatively moved towards the vacated entrance.

"What a queer old man," Silas hissed to Anna, who proceeded to duck inside the tent in evident disagreement. Silas frowned and followed, as did Van Dyke, who only reluctantly deigned to lower himself by entering the tent. For its part, the dog looked grateful at this chance to escape the cold.

The tent's most prominent feature was a large map of the city of Boston and its environs, fastened by leather

straps to the front canvas. A cluttered field desk stood below the map, boasting a musket propped up against the side and a chair shoved up against the rear, upon which Tallmadge was seated with his back turned. All the tent's remaining space stood vacant, featuring nothing but a wide expanse of dead grass only partly covered by a frayed carpet near the front.

Shaw lost no time in staking out a seat on the carpet. He saw Arthur standing nervously near the entrance, and practically dragged him forward to take a front-row seat. Van Dyke, Silas, and the other recruits took seats upon the grass further back. They all eyed their leader with mounting anticipation.

Tallmadge was preoccupied with a small object he held in his hands. He turned around while lighting his freshly-filled clay pipe, and gave it a puff. Shaw, receiving the brunt of the smoke, contorted his features in disgust.

"I've recruited you all," Tallmadge began, "to address a problem of the highest magnitude. Between the valiant efforts of our soldiers and the imminent arrival of siege artillery from New York, the British occupation of Boston is drawing to a close. They have no choice but to withdraw within weeks."

"This is a problem?" cracked Silas. His cronies sniggered.

"Some factions within the British leadership are greatly disappointed – embittered – by their impending defeat," continued Tallmadge as if he had not heard a thing. "One officer has suggested that immediately prior to the evacuation, the city of Boston be destroyed... and all its inhabitants with it."

That was enough to silence Silas, along with almost everyone else. "Egad," Arthur whispered in awe.

“To their credit, the British high command has refused to consider the proposal. Yet this officer – their second-in-command of intelligence operations, a Captain Sinclair – is determined to press ahead and devastate Boston against his orders.”

Tallmadge paced across the front of the tent, interrupting his discourse to attend to his pipe. A brief silence ensued, one which no recruit felt courageous enough to break.

At last Shaw ventured, “By burning the city?”

“No,” came the reply, prompting Silas to cast Shaw a mocking sneer. “By flooding it. A network of tunnels has long been rumored to exist below Boston, dug by the early Indians to serve as their burial grounds. Then, for whatever reason, they were lost to time. If Sinclair can rediscover the location of the entrance, he could fill the tunnels with seawater... at best, poisoning the water supply... at worst, sinking the entire city into the sea.”

Tallmadge gestured at the map. Boston sat precariously upon a peninsula, almost completely surrounded by water.

“The tunnels’ location is believed to be given by a map. We must find the map and these tunnels before Sinclair, so we can fill them in with earth and render them unusable.”

“I’m sorry, Patrick,” said Van Dyke, not sounding very sorry at all, “but it’s time we were going. I – and the recruits,” he added hastily, “haven’t eaten since this morning.”

Amid murmurs of assent the recruits began lifting themselves off the tent floor, brushing tufts of dead grass off their trousers. As they filed out of the tent, Tallmadge called after them, “We’ll be making our entrance into Boston tonight. Oh, and there’s been an outbreak of

smallpox within the city – be careful.” He extinguished his pipe in the palm of his hand.

Safely outside the tent, Arthur remarked to Shaw, “Digging tunnels beneath Boston? Whoever heard of such an absurd idea?”

Shaw didn’t reply. Arthur continued, “I mean, an earthen tunnel of any substantial size would lack the requisite structural integrity, it would collapse inwards of its own weight –”

Arthur still received no reply. He looked beside him to where his friend should be – but Shaw had vanished.

* * *

Shaw had doubled back. He enjoyed an invigorating breath of cold air as he traversed the gravel path around the back of Washington’s presumed headquarters. The wind had picked up, unfurling the striped flag to reveal a Union Jack in the upper left corner. The fife player was still at it – strains of “Road to Boston” now wafted over the army camp.

Shaw approached the tent he was interested in, and found that a guard had taken up position outside the entrance. He frowned. He impulsively dug his hand into the ground to emerge with a handful of pebbles, which he threw against Washington’s tent. Amid the ensuing hubbub the guard left to investigate and Shaw slipped inside the smaller tent.

Tallmadge was again seated at his desk. From a vantage point over the man’s shoulder, Shaw saw the chief of rebel intelligence operations rustle a sheaf of papers, then toss them aside in disinterest. Shaw anxiously tapped on the tent pole to attract his attention.

“Excuse me, sir – how exactly will we gain entrance to Boston? It seems a difficult proposition.”

Tallmadge slowly turned around in his chair. Shaw had expected him to show some sign of surprise, but the spymaster almost seemed to have been expecting his return. He fixed his piercing gray eyes upon Shaw’s and said ironically, “Indeed. Most people are trying to get out.

“A good question,” Tallmadge continued, heaving a deep sigh, “one I had deliberately avoided to avoid frightening the recruits. We shall have to reconnoiter the British defenses at Boston Neck and slip past them during the night.”

“Who will lead the operation? It won’t be Van Dyke, will it?”

“Oh, no. I will.”

Shaw’s heart leapt. “Well, feel free to call on me for help.”

Tallmadge eyed his visitor skeptically. “Unusual that a raw recruit like yourself is so confident in his abilities. You were the lad who saved the party during its ambush in Connecticut, am I right?”

Shaw puffed with pride at this recognition of his exploits. “That’s right. Van Dyke wasn’t impressed, if you can believe it. He said I got lucky.”

“You did get lucky.” Tallmadge ignored Shaw’s look of surprise, preferring to relight his pipe at a candle on his desk. “Your admittedly great potential should not be confused with ability. Acts of heroism are all well and good, but if you let them go to your head then they’re soon no longer heroic at all. That kind of self-control will come with time... until then, don’t take needless risks.”

“Don’t take needless risks?” flared Shaw. “Then why do you smoke tobacco?”

Tallmadge sighed heavily, taking a deep draw on his pipe. "Because I am old and set in my ways."

"Don't say that. You're our best hope to save the people of Boston." Shaw's instinctive reply soon gave way to a gradual recognition that the man seated before him possessed the same human flaws as any other. He blinked and turned to leave. With one hand on the tent pole, he paused for a final remark.

"Say, you never said who will be conducting the reconnaissance."

Tallmadge's pipe received a final puff, a glowing ember at its tip flaring to a bright red hue. "You will."

Chapter 4
THE MENTOR

Several hours later, Shaw crept forward through the blackness of the clear winter night. His silhouette blocked the full moon. A wire fence spanned the width of Boston Neck, blocking his path.

Just beyond the fence there loomed a large barn that the British had converted into their primary redoubt. The barn dominated the isthmus, which at this point was only four hundred feet across – so narrow that when the turbulent waves lapped at either side, they threatened to overwhelm the ground completely and turn Boston into an island.

From the barn's windows flashed piercing beams of lantern light, periodically sweeping the terrain in front of the wire fence to detect potential intruders.

A beam of light moved past. Still in a crouch, Shaw scurried forward and used his knife to cut the lowest wire of the fence. He crawled through, then looked back over his shoulder and waved a hand. Arthur, whom Shaw had

brought along as a lookout, began to venture forward to join him.

Shaw's encouraging hand suddenly became an uplifted palm. Arthur froze. A beam of light glided between them, passing within an inch of Arthur's face.

Shaw's hand again gave the go-ahead. A nervous Arthur puffed forward, squeezed through the gap, and sat with his back against the fence, gasping. The white clouds of his breath hung in the still night air.

A loud whisper from Shaw: "We can't all crawl through that hole. It looks like the British command post's inside that converted barn – to find a way around this place, we'll have to find a way inside." Arthur nodded.

"Follow me." Shaw ran across an abandoned wheatfield to reach the barn's side wall. Arthur followed with somewhat more difficulty. Here in the building's shadow, they were safe from those lantern lights for the time being.

The moonlight illuminated a tuft of hay protruding from the wall about seven feet up. An opening. Shaw jumped and pulled himself through the window slit onto a small ledge inside the barn, then helped Arthur up after him.

A rotting bale of hay occupied the ledge, placed there by the British in a futile attempt to seal off the window slit. Shaw cautiously peered around the hay and took a sharp intake of breath.

The barn's spacious interior contained a British command center in miniature: desks and weapons incongruously shared space with rusty tools and musty hay. Shaw extracted a paper and quill pen from his coat pocket and eagerly began jotting down notes.

The front double doors stood invitingly open; a British soldier stood in the entrance, shining a lantern

outside. Above him were two additional lantern-wielding soldiers, perched atop ledges behind window slits cut into the barn's front wall, flanking the doorway on either side. Another dozen soldiers reclined on the floor, plainly bored, fidgeting with hay.

These soldiers didn't concern Shaw so much as a desk in the back of the barn. Behind the desk sat a moustached lieutenant – while beyond the lieutenant, lurking in the shadows, loomed a familiar figure. Sgt. Victor McClintock.

“As you can see,” said McClintock, “my commanding officer has taken a personal interest in the Boston Neck defenses. I have brought you his specific instructions to remain on the alert against rebel intruders – intruders whom he has reason to believe will soon be making an attempt to bypass this redoubt.”

Shaw made a final flourish with his quill pen and returned his notes to his pocket. He whispered to Arthur, “It's that sergeant who ambushed us in Connecticut. We need to get closer.”

Shaw withdrew a length of rope and lobbed one end up towards a diagonal rafter beam – the rope sailed over the beam and fell back to land in Shaw's waiting hands. Shaw tugged on the rope to make sure it was secure, set his jaw against the inevitable pain to his left arm, and began climbing hand-over-hand.

The lieutenant's hand toyed with a tin whistle which dangled around his neck on a string. He was a study in nonchalance, idly reclining against his chair while keeping his feet propped on the desk alongside a lantern. To McClintock he said, “Which is exactly which I've had my soldiers take up these lanterns.”

McClintock said nothing. The lieutenant felt a sense of unease at his visitor's insistence on remaining in

the shadows, preventing eye contact. He leaned further back in his chair, tilting it to balance upon its hind legs, and said, "Listen, Boston Neck is only four hundred feet wide – no one's getting through here. Tell your commanding officer not to worry."

Shaw listened intently, motionless aside from absent-mindedly rubbing his sore arm. He'd finished climbing into the rafters and now crouched atop a narrow suspended catwalk, a planked affair lined with hay that ran the length of the barn. He suddenly remembered Arthur and reached down to give his friend a hand.

Arthur struggled over the top and released Shaw's hand, gasping. Shaw wordlessly pointed at the catwalk. Without giving Arthur time to rest, he began crawling towards the voices.

Twenty feet below him, McClintock stepped out of the shadows. The lantern illuminated a terrible jagged scar across his left cheek. A fresh scar.

"Perhaps you do not fully understand the... *devotion* of my commanding officer to crushing this rebellion," whispered McClintock in rasping tones. "If you fail to do your duty, you will face the full wrath of Captain Sinclair."

After passing the main rafter beam Shaw came across a gap in the catwalk, a full six feet of thin air. "Well, that's it," whispered Arthur sounding distinctly undisappointed. "Looks like we've got to head back."

Shaw hissed, "We can jump it."

"We can't."

"We can."

"We can't."

"Maybe *you* can't." Shaw tensed himself and jumped....

At McClintock's latest pronouncement the lieutenant was sufficiently taken aback to stop fidgeting with the whistle. He removed his feet from his desk.

"Honestly," he told McClintock, his moustache bristling with indignation, "I shall have to take issue with this Captain Sinclair of yours telling me how to run my redoubt. There is absolutely no sign of any intruders."

Shaw fell short, barely managing to grab the far edge of the catwalk with his left arm. The force of impact loosened the vertical supports that suspended the catwalk from the ceiling, causing the whole apparatus to jerk downwards.

He frantically strained to pull himself up to safety, but the pain was too intense; he couldn't hold on. The entire section of catwalk collapsed, landing on the barn floor with a tremendous *crash* and sending Shaw and Arthur sprawling in a pathetic heap.... not two yards away from the British officers!

* * *

The lieutenant whirled around, his chair overturning, his eyes wide in shock. He thrust his whistle to his lips and let loose a piercing blow that filled the barn's every cranny. While Shaw struggled to his feet, the steady stamping of feet through the doorway heralded the entrance of an additional dozen British soldiers into the barn.

Shaw heaved a weary sigh as the wicked bayonets inched towards him. He reluctantly raised his arms in surrender. Two burly soldiers moved forward to take hold of him by either arm; Arthur they deemed harmless enough to let be.

McClintock calmly approached the two captives. He homed in on the taller one, his dark eyes narrowing. "I

recognize you,” he said slowly, “you’re that little brat who stopped my ambush in Connecticut. Even after I’d been informed of your company’s whereabouts.”

Shaw flashed a triumphant sidelong look at Arthur, as if to say, *I told you so*. The bayonets jerked closer.

“An impressive feat,” continued McClintock, fingering the hilt of his saber. “Highly impressive. But one that will not be repeated!” In a flash the saber was drawn and pointed directly at Shaw’s chest.

Shaw’s air of cockiness faded. His eyes darted anxiously from side to side, seeking a means of escape, finding none. A horrified Arthur moved to Shaw’s aid, and was promptly blocked by a soldier; he contented himself with a breathless “Egad!”

McClintock’s saber slowly rose towards Shaw’s head. As the weapon hung suspended in midair, it briefly reflected the moonlight shining in through the open barn doorway – then, with a sudden flick of his wrist, McClintock brought it downwards.

A gunshot rang out. The saber flew out of the sergeant’s hand to go clattering across the barn floor. McClintock, clutching his hand in pain, whirled around to see a silhouette in the doorway.

Patrick Tallmadge brandished a smoking musket in dramatic form. At his side, Anna and Silas and the other recruits stood in a frozen tableau.

Tallmadge said, “Maybe you should spend less time trying to disembowel youngsters and more time guarding the front entrance.”

McClintock had already recovered. He growled, “Get them.”

Before the soldiers could comply, Shaw used the opening to spring into action. He wriggled loose from his

two distracted captors, punching one and kicking a musket from the arms of the other.

As the recruits charged forward to engage the soldiers in melee combat, Shaw caught the musket and swung the butt around to catch its former owner full in the face.

The recruits had the momentum. Anna used her knife to slash a rope fastening a stack of powder barrels, sending them bouncing across the barn floor to flatten three soldiers. She waved at Shaw, who waved back.

Shaw hastily lowered his arm – upon seeing Arthur struggling weakly with a soldier, he fired a shot from the musket to free up his friend. Then he casually cast the spent musket aside, hitting a soldier square in the face.

The twelve familiar faces were uplifting his spirits – *I'm glad to see all of them. Even Van Dyke.*

Van Dyke was repeatedly rapping a soldier over the head with his walking stick. Even Van Dyke's dog pitched in by latching onto the soldier's arm. Only Silas stood removed from the action, near-paralyzed with fear.

Tallmadge seemed fearless. Sword in hand, he mowed down British soldiers like an unstoppable whirlwind, fighting his way towards the far end of the barn. There Shaw had become locked in a standoff, struggling to keep a soldier's bayonet away from his chest.

Tallmadge sliced the bayonet in half and grabbed Shaw's wrist, leading them back towards the doorway. He looked distinctly annoyed, muttering over the sounds of combat, "Next time try to stay out of trouble."

"But I made a diversion!"

Tallmadge ignored the weak excuse – he overturned the British lieutenant's desk to clear the way, sending papers flying. Though the desk no longer obstructed their path, it also no longer provided cover. A soldier popped up

from behind a bale of hay to aim a musket at them from point-blank range.

The gunshot missed, embedding itself harmlessly in the barn wall. Shaw breathed a sigh of relief: “He couldn’t hit the broad side of a barn.”

Then the soldier drew a second musket, and Shaw’s smile faded. His eyes flicked nervously from side to side.

Tallmadge bashed the soldier over the head with a lantern, directed another irritated look at Shaw, and steered them towards the doorway to rejoin the others. McClintock’s soldiers had fled to the left half of the barn; the recruits were milling about the right half in triumph. Anna exclaimed, “We’ve driven them back!”

“No. They’re regrouping and preparing a counterattack.” Indeed, several soldiers were working their way through the rear of the barn – Tallmadge motioned the recruits forward to intercept them.

The soldiers abruptly changed course and left through the doorway. “A feint,” shouted Tallmadge. “They want to leave this place. So should we.”

On their leader’s instructions, the recruits began filing out the doorway. If their opponents were intent on retreating, their path to Boston was clear.

Shaw was making his exit when he stumbled across Arthur, sitting motionless on a bale of hay.

“Arthur.”

No reply.

“*Arthur.*”

When Shaw passed his hand in front of his friend’s face and again failed to elicit a response, he jogged towards the doorway and the departing Tallmadge.

“Sir, it’s Arthur, he’s not well –”

Tallmadge turned in the doorway, appraised the situation, and hurried to Arthur's side. When he held a handkerchief to his recruit's temple it came back spotted with blood.

"A blow to the head," said Tallmadge. "He'll be all right. We'll just have to carry him out of here."

Tallmadge moistened his handkerchief with a canteen and wrapped it around Arthur's head. He lifted Arthur under the left shoulder. Shaw needed no instruction to attend to the other.

Shaw and Tallmadge walked backwards towards the doorway, dragging Arthur before them. They were halfway there when Shaw felt an uneasy sensation in the pit of his stomach.

He froze, and the hairs on his neck stood up on end. Behind him he heard the ominous sound of a throat clearing.

* * *

Astride the barn doorway stood none other than Capt. Sinclair! A lantern which Sinclair held aloft illuminated his stocky shoulders and sharp blue eyes.

"Tallmadge," he said, ignoring the trivial recruit. "A valiant rescue for your little friend. But I'm afraid it has come at a high cost."

Sinclair took a step backwards, menacingly lowering his lantern towards a stack of dry hay. Above his words came the harsh scraping sound of the barn doors closing.

"You see, Tallmadge... I've always warned you to stop smoking."

Sinclair's intentions could not be plainer: to set the entire barn afire, with his longtime enemy locked inside. Shaw dropped Arthur and looked at his leader in sheer panic. Tallmadge looked back, firmly. It was almost as if he expected Shaw to be the one to act.

Shaw took a deep breath and slowly unsheathed his knife, concealing it behind his back. *The real lesson is to conceal one's weapon, so the enemy is taken by surprise.* Should he throw the knife at Sinclair? No – the wily captain might dodge or deflect it.

Shaw's attention shifted to a ledge above the doorway, which contained a large bale of hay wrapped in twine. He threw. The knife soared across the barn to strike the twine, neatly severing it.

Hay cascaded down upon Sinclair. Sinclair sputtered, coughing out tufts of dry hay, arms flailing to brush the stuff off him. A second wave of hay submerged him and the lantern slipped from his hands.

As the hay made contact with the spilled lantern oil, the front barn wall burst into flames. The double doors finished sliding shut – McClintock's loyalty to his master evidently didn't extend to being trapped within burning buildings.

Sinclair at last extricated himself from the deluge of hay, only to find via a look back that he now faced an even worse predicament. He stepped out of the flames and began to draw his sword.

Shaw charged him. Sinclair's sword was only halfway out of its scabbard when Shaw struck its owner squarely in the chest, flinging him onto his back, attempting to land punches as they rolled through glowing tufts of hay.

The attempts failed – while Sinclair was the older man, he was by far the more experienced fighter, and

required only a few blows to beat back the impetuous challenge. Sinclair delivered the coup de grâce by deftly wrenching Shaw's arm behind his back and slamming him against the barn wall. Shaw crumpled to the ground, groaning as blood trickled from his lower lip.

Sinclair straightened himself, brushing his hands together as if having ridden himself of a minor pest. "Now. Where was I."

Above him, a rafter beam became weakened by fire and collapsed in a cloud of smoke and dust. He casually dodged it.

"Ah, yes." In one brisk motion Sinclair's sword left the scabbard and pointed across the barn at Tallmadge.

The lines in Tallmadge's face hardened, his eyes burning with an inner fire, his normally genial demeanor a thing of the past. He unsheathed his own weapon and slowly moved his lips while running his fingertips down the smooth blade. Then he stepped forward. Shaw watched the two combatants close the distance between them, then clash swords.

The duel proved intense, even vicious. Sinclair lunged forward only to be stopped by an elementary block, which he withdrew from in order to initiate a thrust aimed at deliberately locking their swords; he took advantage of this brief deadlock to elbow Tallmadge in the face. Tallmadge fought on, undaunted.

I've got to help him. Slumped against the smoldering barn wall, Shaw remembered his freshly-acquired pistol and drew it from his coat pocket. He aimed it at Sinclair – or tried to, for the two combatants were circling so rapidly that he ran a real risk of hitting Tallmadge.

Sinclair jumped atop a bale of hay, presenting a target. Shaw fired....

...and the bullet missed by yards. Cursing his inexperience with firearms, Shaw began thinking of other ways to tip the scales in Tallmadge's favor.

Then his attention turned to a horrifying sight. A flaming rafter beam was slowly working itself loose from the roof, in imminent collapse... directly above the prostrate figure of Arthur!

Shaw staggered forward towards his fallen friend, dragging him several feet to safety just before the rafter beam collapsed. *I've gotta get Arthur out of here. But how...?*

Shaw's gaze drifted away from the swordfight to the window slit through which they'd entered the barn not ten minutes earlier. The answer came to him. He dragged the unconscious Arthur to the ledge and wedged him past the rotting bale of hay and shoved him through. Arthur landed with a heavy *thud* in the abandoned wheatfield outside, safe.

Shaw felt a light breeze waft in through the window slit. Unusually refreshing. A dire thought occurred to him; he whirled around to see how the duel was progressing.

Though the two combatants were evenly matched in terms of skill, Tallmadge showed increasing signs of fatigue, dripping sweat and wheezing heavily. Shaw's suspicions were confirmed: the fire was consuming the barn's air! Tallmadge's smoke-weakened lungs couldn't hold out much longer.

"He needs air," Shaw murmured.

Tallmadge slowly retreated across the barn floor, faltering when he stumbled backwards into the lieutenant's overturned desk; Sinclair took advantage of the opening to initiate a thrust that fell short and merely knocked over a lantern onto a scattered heap of paperwork, setting it ablaze and adding to the enveloping smoke and fire.

Sinclair followed up with a feint, pausing briefly upon seeing Tallmadge draw back his wrist for an attack, before abandoning the defensive stance to lean forward in mezzo tempo and strike Tallmadge before the attack could be initiated – Tallmadge moved to parry the blow, but a trickle of blood on his forearm showed that he was too late.

“You haven’t a chance,” said Sinclair. “Since our last meeting I’ve studied under the great Angelo.”

Tallmadge grimaced and replied, “I taught Angelo that move.”

Behind Sinclair, a tongue of flame licked through the scattered papers towards a loose heap of powder barrels. The explosion rocked Sinclair almost off his feet and forced him to flail his arms to keep his balance, a task complicated by Tallmadge’s well-timed counteroffensive.

Tallmadge forced Sinclair back across the barn towards the double doors, which emitted a faint but distinct thumping sound from the exterior – undoubtedly the recruits’ attempt to force an entrance, though the crafty McClintock must have jammed the doors shut.

Shaw made his way to the doors and tried to force them open, without success. Frustrated, he stared up at the veritable inferno that was the barn’s roof – as luck would have it, every part of the barn seemed to be aflame *except* the doors. The walls, the catwalk, the main rafter beam slipping loose from the roof across from the doorway... a look of serious determination crossed Shaw’s face.

He knew what he had to do.

Shaw backtracked to the window slit. Not to escape – though he could easily have followed Arthur outside to safety, the thought hadn’t crossed his mind – but to climb back up into the rafters. He pulled on the now-singed rope... but the charred remnants came down in his hand.

With a mighty effort he jumped upwards, just managing to pull himself onto the catwalk.

When Shaw stared ahead at the treacherous, flaming planked catwalk, his eyes watered. He took a deep breath – provoking an involuntary cough – and started forward.

Shaw crawled through the inferno, retracing the path that he and Arthur had taken earlier. Blackened planks cracked and fell from beneath him, so he moved quickly. Soon he arrived at the precarious main rafter beam.

Twenty feet below him, Tallmadge had managed to overcome his lung condition and get the better of Sinclair, his sword held to his enemy's throat. Gasping for breath, sweat streaming down his face, Tallmadge croaked, "Where's the map? Do you know where to find it?"

"No," said Sinclair sweetly, "but I know where they'll be finding you." He suddenly kicked outwards, catching Tallmadge full in the chest. The older man toppled backwards against a bale of hay.

Sinclair advanced with quiet menace. "Why must you insist on attacking your fellow countrymen?" he demanded of the rebel. "We're not your enemy!"

"You're right; Englishmen aren't the enemy. You are."

Incensed, Sinclair flicked his wrist and swatted aside the opposing sword, placing Tallmadge at his mercy.

"Only at your insistence. *You* made an enemy of *me* at Bunker Hill when you spiked my cannons. Now, I'll wager you wish you hadn't." Sinclair idly moved his sword tip closer. "Well? Do you?"

"No," gasped Tallmadge.

Sinclair curled his lip and closed in. Shaw jumped atop the main rafter beam, whose far end detached from the roof to swing in a wide arc across the barn, using the stable

near end as a fulcrum. He rolled off the vehicle just before impact, a tremendous collision that shattered the barn doors as the rafter beam crashed through them.

Through the smoke Shaw saw the familiar soot-stained faces of his fellow recruits, who poured into the barn to come to his aid. He weakly redirected them to Tallmadge, the one truly in need of assistance – but Tallmadge was fine. Sinclair was gone.

Shaw and Caleb led Tallmadge politely but firmly to the exit. Since the fall of the main rafter beam, the entire barn had slowly started to collapse; time was of the essence. But Tallmadge shook off his recruits' helping hands to ask, "Where's Sinclair?"

"Don't worry," said Shaw, stumbling over a singed plank. "He's trapped. We'll get him when he leaves the barn."

"He already has." That was Anna, standing in the doorway alongside a revived Arthur.

Shaw hastily helped Tallmadge the remaining few feet to the door, where they emerged into the brisk winter air. The full moon illuminated a conspicuous red-trimmed stage coach clattering down the road to Boston.

"That's right," confirmed Arthur. "That Sinclair fellow got out through the window. He stepped right over me."

Shaw scowled in displeasure as Sinclair's stage coach rode off into the night.

* * *

"You fool." Van Dyke pushed his way forward, his walking stick upraised against Shaw in anger: "Your stupidity nearly got us all killed."

Evidently feeling that the point deserved further emphasis, Van Dyke produced a greasy bandage which he began wrapping around a bloody gash on Tallmadge's left forearm.

By now Shaw was long used to such obnoxious treatment, right down to Silas's accompanying sneer. He made no response to Van Dyke's latest baiting, and was surprised that someone else did.

Tallmadge moved to Shaw's side, intervening on his recruit's behalf. The old spymaster said mildly, "It did succeed in getting us past the British defenses – not in the most subtle way, perhaps, but there it is." He winced in pain as Van Dyke savagely tied the ends of his bandage. "Sinclair will undoubtedly be sending reinforcements, so we must make haste."

Tallmadge shook himself free of Van Dyke and began walking rapidly down Orange Street, the road to Boston. The recruits hastened to follow. Arthur ran up beside Shaw and revealed a minor wound of his own, murmuring, "Two shillings that Van Dyke won't look at it."

Shaw muttered "Five," brushed Arthur off, and drew up alongside Tallmadge. He ventured, "Thanks for supporting me back there."

"You're welcome." Tallmadge kept striding forward, cold breaths coming rapidly, teeth gritted against the still-evident pain from his left forearm. "Although," he added, "Van Dyke was right."

"About me almost getting you killed?"

A heavy silence from Tallmadge, which Shaw took to signify assent. He blurted, "Why are you so friendly with that blockhead Van Dyke?"

"Van Dyke is an old friend from New York," Tallmadge replied calmly. "My ancestors captured the

place from his ancestors. He deserves civil treatment from all of us, including you.”

Disappointed, Shaw cast his eyes downwards at the frozen road. Tallmadge hesitated, formed a small smile through his white beard, and said, “Though you’re right. He is indeed a blockhead of the first order.”

The spymaster’s pace slowed as they gradually entered the outskirts of Boston.

* * *

They negotiated a maze of streets to arrive at a neighborhood in the city’s northwestern quadrant, situated in a topographic depression between Beacon Hill to the south, the Charles River to the west, and a mill pond to the northeast. The morning sun was rising over the pond as Tallmadge identified their safe house and strode up the front steps.

Shaw felt a small sense of surprise at the house’s stature. A mansion, really, with multiple stories and broad windows and ornate embellishments on the front railing. Though the house showed glimpses of a former grandeur, now it exuded a distinctly ramshackle appearance; its white paint dull and peeling, its lovely windows smashed in, its front door defiled by a long jagged scratch running diagonally from the eye slit to the rusting iron knocker.

Tallmadge knocked on the door. His efforts were soft at first – to avoid attracting unwanted attention – before escalating to a low pounding upon failing to elicit a response.

A velvet window curtain rustled. Moments later, the door’s eye slit opened and a wrinkled pair of eyes shone through. A muffled voice said, “Corinthians.”

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

The eye slit swung closed and the door swung open. The gray head of an old lady protruded in greeting.

“Mr. Tallmadge. Welcome.” The old lady curtly acknowledged the assembled recruits with a nod of her head, then withdrew back inside.

Tallmadge stepped into the front hall, removing his heavy greatcoat – torn in two places – which he placed atop a standing mahogany coat rack. He boomed, “You’re a welcome sight, Margaret. An island of safety in a sea of occupation. You’ve done well to keep this place concealed thus far, though now I will be assuming personal command.”

The recruits were still standing in the street, none brave enough to venture up the steps; Arthur was examining the house’s prominent Union Jack with bemusement. Tallmadge moved back into the doorway to address them:

“I assure you, there’s nothing to fear but the British patrols that roam this street at dawn. Please move inside.”

As the recruits hastily began filing up the front steps, Tallmadge nodded in satisfaction, spoke a few whispered words to the old lady, and disappeared up another set of steps to the second floor. The old lady pointed the approaching recruits towards yet another staircase leading to the basement.

Shaw stepped into the most opulent building he’d ever seen. In addition to the coat rack, the front hall boasted rococo paintings, plush indigo carpeting, slender round tables with glowing candelabras, a china cupboard complete with sliding glass doors, a polished walnut armoire, and even a harpsichord.

The old lady observed the recruits’ expressions of awe and paused to rub the severe gray bun in her hair. She said, “This house has been lent to us by a prominent citizen

of Boston who wishes to remain unnamed. The British would co-opt it for their own use, but they believe it to be uninhabitable.”

The old lady picked up a candelabra and began descending the cramped spiral staircase, Shaw and the other recruits close behind. She raised her voice to add, “This house aside, Massachusetts isn’t that wealthy a colony – just wealthy enough for the British to single it out. Its residents appreciate your help. I understand most of you hail from the Middle Colonies.”

Shaw demurred, “Well, we’re all Americans.”

“Quite,” said the lady, her gaze lingering upon Shaw through the candelabra. “We need each other. And for your immediate work, we will need certain specialized equipment.”

Swords? Knives? Cannon? Shaw indulged himself in fanciful speculation until they emerged from the dimly-lit stairwell into an even more dimly-lit basement.

A misty shaft of light streamed down from a window near the ceiling to illuminate a bare earth floor pockmarked with small holes. Stacks of torn-up floorboards lined three walls of the basement, whose fourth wall contained two wide horizontal shafts supported by additional floorboards.

The basement was littered with shovels, pickaxes, wheelbarrows, shovels, and still more shovels.

“Shovels,” mouthed a disappointed Shaw.

“Shovels,” confirmed the old lady. “We must locate a network of tunnels concealed beneath Boston. This is the lowest part of the city – nearly below sea level – and therefore the most likely candidate to contain the tunnel entrance. Without any intelligence to guide us, it’s as good a place as any to start digging.”

She walked to a pile of tools, hefted a shovel in a display of strength that belied her frail frame, and shoved it into Shaw's hand.

"When *do* we start digging?" That was Silas, clearly upset at the prospect of dirtying himself in such an unsavory environment. Shaw was none too pleased himself.

The steely old lady took a shovel of her own and thrust it into the ground. "I suppose... now."

* * *

Five minutes later, Shaw was knee-deep in dirt at the farthest reach of the rightmost shaft. Sweat lined his brow as he strained to pry another shovelful of dirt from the unyielding tunnel wall. He succeeded, and heaved the gooey brown mass into a nearby wheelbarrow, filling it by an utterly negligible amount.

Just a hundred more shovelfuls to go. Shaw ran a hand across his brow and griped, "Just as the sun's rising, we get to spend more time in darkness."

Arthur, patiently holding the wheelbarrow, was fidgeting with a clod of dirt embedded in the wall. He said, "You're just upset that Anna got assigned to the other hole."

Shaw flushed and tore savagely at the wall, prompting a shower of loosened dirt clumps to fall from the ceiling. He growled, "Maybe."

The cascade of dirt intensified. Deep cracks formed in the roof, while a low rumble sounded from overhead. Shaw dropped the shovel, protectively threw his hands over his head, and ran for the tunnel exit. Arthur trailed behind due to a stubborn insistence on keeping hold of his

wheelbarrow; the cave-in submerged him two feet from the exit.

Shaw seized Arthur's grasping hand – all that was left of him – and pulled. A bedraggled Arthur struggled out of the collapsed tunnel and rolled over to stare up at the wheelbarrow, which had made it out before him. "Egad!" he gasped. "At least... at least that filled the wheelbarrow."

Indeed, the wheelbarrow was now loaded to the brim.

"Guess we can take off early, then." Shaw brushed a piece of dirt off his tricorner hat and walked away.

Arthur called after him, "Say... thank you for saving my life. Again."

"Don't mention it." Shaw hopped up the basement steps, one hand already on the doorframe.

"How can I repay you?"

Reclining in the doorway, Shaw turned around to see Van Dyke touring the basement, inspecting the progress of the other recruits, closing in on the cave-in debacle.

"Cover for me."

Shaw disappeared up the dim stairwell.

* * *

Shaw emerged from the stairwell into the front hall. Marveling anew at the place's opulence, he made for the broad carpeted staircase that led to the second floor. As he took the steps two at a time he could only imagine the wonders that might lie above him – *a canopy bed? A grand piano?*

He reached the top. He was greeted by silence, total silence, save for the soft groaning of a draft through a

broken window. A tattered and moth-eaten curtain flared inwards from the wind.

Shaw walked across the creaking floorboards to close the window. After he did so, he thought he heard a footstep from behind him.

Shaw whirled around and saw nothing but a line of strange pieces of furniture draped in sheets. At the end of the musty corridor, a thin line of light shone from beneath a closed door. Shaw uneasily approached the light, running a hand along the railing at the top of the stairwell – until discovering the railing was coated in a thick layer of grime, and drawing his hand back in disgust.

He shook his hand in a futile effort to clean off the grime, soon giving up in favor of opening the mysterious door. The door opened into a small room that featured a map of Boston pinned to the far wall above a double bed. Stacks of books were crammed into every square foot of space, some even leaning against the bed's headboard.

A man was seated at a bare oak table, his back to the door. Puffs of languid pipe smoke wafted up from him – he evidently hadn't heard Shaw's entrance. Shaw cleared his throat.

Tallmadge emitted a harsh wheeze of surprise and turned around. Upon seeing Shaw he heaved a visible sigh of relief, as though he were expecting someone else. "You surprised me," he said, before adding, "Aren't you supposed to be digging?"

"I'm sorry. I – ran into some difficulties –"

Once more at ease, Tallmadge took a long draw on his pipe. He looked straight at Shaw and said, "You are disappointed with your assignment. I understand. Yet the pedestrian drudgery of digging is vital to saving this city. Your fellow recruits recognize this and are doing their work without complaint, and –" here he looked Shaw

directly in the eye – “I know you don’t consider yourself to be above them.”

Shaw hesitated imperceptibly before agreeing, “No, of course not –”

“Sit down.” Tallmadge drew up a battered chair identical to his own. Shaw sat, facing his leader across the glow of a bare candle on the tabletop.

“Your room’s plain, compared to the entryway.”

Tallmadge peered curiously at his surroundings for a moment, then chuckled. “The entryway contains every decent piece of furniture in the entire house. Have to keep up appearances for the recruits.”

So Tallmadge had stripped his own room bare for the sake of others. Shaw felt a growing admiration for the man.

“But aren’t you uncomfortable?”

“Oh, no.” Tallmadge leaned back in his chair, reaching behind him to pick up a small stack of books, which he set down on the tabletop. “Not as long as I’ve got these.”

“Books?”

“Yes, books. We cannot hope to defeat Sinclair without knowledge, which requires us to read – to learn. Languages, for example.”

Tallmadge pushed the books across the table to Shaw. The top book slid off the stack to land almost in his lap – Shaw caught it and examined the text curiously. Its yellowing cover read, *Nomenclatura Brevis Anglo=Latino*.

“Latin. French. German. Even Iroquois,” continued Tallmadge. “One finds their use in the unlikeliest of places. Please, borrow them, I have plenty of others.”

Shaw dutifully gathered up the books, but couldn't conceal his disappointment. "I was thinking something more along the lines of a weapon."

"Knowledge *is* a weapon. But I sense your disappointment. As I recall, you do not own a gun –"

"Oh, I do!" Shaw fumbled for his freshly-acquired pistol.

Tallmadge ignored the outburst, rising to his feet while reaching for his belt. "– so we will have to make do with this."

Tallmadge drew his sword, hovering it above the table, the sharp blade glinting in the candlelight. "The common longsword," he said. "More personal than firearms, and usually less effective. For use only on special occasions."

He didn't need to look at Shaw's face to sense his recruit's craving – with an abrupt flick of the wrist he flipped the longsword so that its hilt faced outwards.

"Go on, give it a try. Think of it as using a very long knife."

Shaw received the sword in awe, almost in disbelief that he was actually touching such a weapon. He closed the cold metal grip in his hand and began to wave the sword from side to side, faster and faster as his self-confidence gradually grew. *I can do anything!* A flick of his wrist and the sword tip swept neatly through the candle flame.

"All right, enough. Enough!" Tallmadge's voice was strained and hoarse. "Give the sword back."

Shaw hesitated, looking down at the sword that already felt like a natural extension of his body. He didn't want to give it back.

But he did. The sword's hilt inched reluctantly back towards its owner – Tallmadge seized it before Shaw

could have a change of heart, swiftly returning it to its scabbard.

Tallmadge said heatedly, “Read those books. Come back to me once you’ve learned something.”

Shaw had returned to reality. He pushed back his chair, hefted the stack of books, and departed.

* * *

His arms filled with books, Shaw made his way down the broad carpeted staircase. His descent was a slow one, for he’d already started to flip through *Nomenclatura Brevis Anglo=Latino*. Page 17 began:

Of Cloathing.

a Waftē-Coat I Subucula, x f

Shaw shook his head in disbelief – *Incomprehensible, totally incomprehensible.*

Halfway down from the landing he stopped. Someone was slipping out the front door. Shaw couldn’t make out the figure’s identity, but as the door swung shut he heard the muffled yip of a dog.

Van Dyke.

Instantly *Nomenclatura* was forgotten. Shaw scrambled down the remaining steps and threw the books in a heap on a table and grabbed his coat off the mahogany rack and bolted out the door.

It was cold. A visible cloud of air escaped Shaw’s lips while he descended the front steps. Van Dyke’s stolid frame was making its way along the street, which a nearby hand-written street sign proclaimed to be “Green Lane.”

After initially jogging forward in pursuit, Shaw slowed to a walk so Van Dyke wouldn't notice his presence. Upon further thought he carefully crossed to the other side of Green Lane, all the better to avoid detection.

At the first intersection Van Dyke made a left; at the second, a right. The city's brick residences were growing larger, towering over either side of the road – a road which was growing wider, but felt just the opposite. Shaw's throat constricted. This was his first time inside a large city.

On their right the dense buildings gave way to an open expanse of greenery: the Common, a staple of every good English town, though this particular specimen was larger in its entirety than any town Shaw had ever seen. He breathed easier.

Van Dyke bypassed the Common in favor of the commercial district, where they began to pass a significant number of other pedestrians, including the odd British soldier. Shaw instinctively hunched into his coat and lowered the brim of his tricorn hat. Van Dyke took no such precautions, striding along the cobblestones with his walking stick as though he were master of the city.

Van Dyke turned left up a street – King Street, Shaw read off the sign – to reach the heart of downtown Boston. Bustling shops jostled for attention, their hanging wooden signs pictorially proclaiming the wares sold within. Shaw couldn't help but stare through the window of the nearest shop, a glassmaker's, which boasted a dazzling array of beads and jars and tinted vases. And, most remarkably, a glass walking stick.

Shaw snapped back into focus, once more focused on his target. But Van Dyke couldn't be found. *I've lost him!*

Shaw stifled the urge to break into a run, merely picking up his pace and giving each shop a quick glance as he walked by. The gnawing pit in his stomach intensified as he began to run out of shops. State Street only extended another twenty yards before it gave way to a long wharf jutting into the harbor.

He'd just reached the last shop – still no Van Dyke – when he stopped, blinked twice in belated recognition, and doubled back. Off a side street a prominent hanging sign featured the image of a plate of food. Three round tables stood outside the dining establishment, two of which were occupied by patrons eating porridge off wooden plates.

The third table contained Van Dyke. The man's considerable bulk reclined in a wicker chair about fifty feet distant, facing a companion – and also facing Shaw. Shaw hastily lowered his head and moved through the crowd towards Van Dyke's mysterious companion, whose back was turned.

So Van Dyke has a contact. A British agent? Shaw's pulse raced as he contemplated all the exciting possibilities. Maybe it was Van Dyke who tipped off the British in Connecticut!

Shaw negotiated his way past a final pedestrian to reach a safe vantage point behind a parked carriage. He finally looked at the face of Van Dyke's contact....

...and broke into involuntary laughter, releasing days of pent-up tension.

It was only Silas. Shaw's rival had managed to obtain his own reprieve from digging.

* * *

Digging. Back in the basement, Shaw disgustedly shoved his shovel into a mound of dirt. Clearing up this cave-in would take a while.

* * *

The weeks passed by.

He sat in a dimly-lit study in the safe house, hunched over his opened copy of *Nomenclatura Brevis Anglo=Latino*.

He watched Tallmadge demonstrate sword techniques.

He attempted some target practice in the green hills of Boston Common, though his first shot went wild by over thirty feet to scatter some pigeons.

He sought out Tallmadge for instruction on the use and care of firearms. It helped; on his next visit to the Common, his pistol shot went wide by only ten feet, and a smaller number of pigeons fled in terror.

The snows of January gave way to the snows of February.

He finally finished *Nomenclatura Brevis Anglo=Latino* with Arthur's help, and moved on to *The Short French Dictionary*.

He wearily rested his chin against the handle of his shovel, sick and tired of digging.

He practiced his swordplay, Tallmadge providing guidance on the great Angelo's five wrist positions.

On a return trip from the Common, he successfully used Angelo's fourth wrist position to cut down a clothesline with a deft twirl of Tallmadge's sword, prompting a furious fist-shaking housewife to appear in the adjacent window.

The snows of February gave way to the snows of March.

He transferred *Iroquois Dictionary*, the last of Tallmadge's books, to his "done" stack.

He hit the pistol target dead-on; the pigeons breathed a collective sigh of relief.

As his mentor looked on, he swept his sword tip through a candle in one fluid motion to plunge the room into darkness.

Chapter 5
THE LOVER

MARCH 9, 1776

Sunlight drenched downtown Boston. A bell tolled in the state house, scattering a flock of pigeons nesting in the belfry. Eleven subsequent peals echoed throughout the city as the pigeons soared westwards towards the green Common.

People strolled throughout the Common, enjoying the Saturday sunshine, telling jokes or pointing out wildlife or purchasing hoecakes at an enterprising vendor's. A livery stable offered carriages for rent, clean black-trimmed hackneys ideal for taking in the light breeze.

One such carriage ambled leisurely north up Common Street. A row of residences passed by on the right, a row of stumps on the left – victims of the besieged city's fuel shortage.

Shaw, seated on the forward-facing left side of the livery carriage's open passenger compartment, watched the stumps move past one by one. Beyond the stumps a regiment of red-coated British soldiers conducted drills in line formation, their bayonets glinting in the bright midday sun.

While watching the soldiers Shaw absent-mindedly rubbed his left arm. "Good thing my arm's mostly healed," he said, adding with heavy sarcasm, "Now I can do more *digging*."

"Oh, stop being such a sourpuss," said Anna, seated beside him. "We're supposed to be enjoying ourselves."

Having run out of Common, their carriage made a right on Winter Street, then a left up the city's main thoroughfare. Arthur, in the rear-facing seat across from Shaw, had difficulty negotiating the turns – he inadvertently jostled against Silas, whose sullen scowl indicated that he, for one, was most certainly not enjoying himself.

"I'm so sorry," Arthur apologized, without receiving a response. He shrugged, gave up on Silas, and said to Anna by way of faint protest, "*I'm* enjoying myself...."

Anna didn't hear the remark, since she'd perched on her seat in excitement. She pointed ahead to a rectangular brick building at the corner of Milk Street and exclaimed, "Look, there's the Old South Meeting House!"

"What happened there?" asked Shaw.

Arthur replied, "I don't know. It might be where the Sons of Liberty protested the tea tax, or one of those taxes."

Anna pointed ahead to another brick building, shaped eerily similar to the previous one. "There's the Town House!"

“What happened *there*?” asked Shaw, not really caring about the answer.

“I don’t know,” said Arthur, “it’s just a town house.”

“Stop the carriage!” Shaw shot bolt upright, leaning past a befuddled Arthur to clap the driver on the back. The reticent driver nodded and began maneuvering the horses rightwards.

“We’re going shopping?”

Shaw didn’t dignify that with a response. When the carriage pulled to a stop in a cobblestone square by the State House, he swiftly disembarked, thrust some coins into the waiting hands of the driver, and started walking south down the main thoroughfare. He cocked his tricorner hat over his face to avoid detection by the British soldiers clustered around their headquarters two blocks ahead.

“Ben! Ben!” Arthur ran after him, followed by the two others. Shaw didn’t slow down or even acknowledge his friend, hunching his shoulders while continuing to push his way through the throngs of people. Arthur at last caught up, gasping. “Why did you stop? And why so close to British headquarters?”

Shaw winced, waving his hand in a signal for Arthur to keep his voice down. He whispered, “See that man up there? The one in the gray overcoat?”

“Yes...” A distant gray figure was making its way through the crowd about a hundred feet ahead of them.

“That’s Tallmadge.” Shaw again made an irritated hand motion to forestall his friends’ expressions of surprise. Then he shoved his hand back in his coat pocket and picked up his pace. “I think he’s been holding back on us. I’ve gotta figure out what he’s up to, or we’re stuck digging forever.”

“Shaw,” said Silas, breaking his silence. “This is simply outrageous behavior. If Tallmadge were to find out – or Dr. Van Dyke –”

Arthur frowned. Anna turned to face her paramour and said sharply, “Is that some sort of threat?”

“Not at all,” smirked Silas in an entirely un reassuring way. “I was merely pointing out that the three of us might not wish to have our livelihoods endangered by the reckless actions of Mr. Shaw.”

“He’s gone!” exclaimed Arthur, who made a rabbit-like hop in the air to look out over people’s heads. Silas had nothing to fear – Shaw had lost himself in the crowd.

* * *

Shaw walked along the sidewalk in front of British headquarters, doing his best to remain calm and inconspicuous. He brushed shoulders with a passing soldier, then frowned.

He’d lost Tallmadge. After negotiating a circuitous route around the block in an attempt to shake off pursuers – without success – the crafty spymaster evidently now had one more trick up his sleeve.

If I were the old man, how would I sneak up on this place? Shaw examined the headquarters’ exterior more closely.

“Province House”, the British called it. A white stone plaza governed the approaches to an array of neoclassical columns, which flanked a broad doorway set into the building’s façade. The front entrance. But surely not the only one.

There! Tallmadge was crouched below an open window of Province House, overhearing a conversation

transpiring within. Since his mentor couldn't see inside, Shaw moved to a vantage point behind a stack of crates which did provide a view through the window.

He gazed upon the lavishly-furnished office that comprised the nerve center of British army intelligence. A nondescript aide guarded the interior entrance, a mahogany door with trimmed molding. An elderly gentleman stood with his back turned beside a varnished table near the windowsill. A third man sat behind a desk.

Shaw recognized the desk's occupant as Capt. Sinclair. Sinclair was speaking:

"...we believe we have finally tracked down the map giving the location of those Indian tunnels. This very evening I shall lead a regiment of our finest men to retrieve it. We may then dig a channel linking the tunnels and the sea, if only we might have some surplus entrenching equipment --"

"Entrenching equipment?" An outcry from the man by the window. In his hand he held a packet of documents, with which he faintly gesticulated in protest. "You know full well, Sinclair, that I've not approved this scheme of yours and shall never approve it! What you propose entails nothing less than the mass murder of this town's civilian population, and I absolutely forbid such a thing."

"Major," said Sinclair with uncharacteristic patience, "this city is infested with rebel sympathizers and spies. We may kill some civilians, true, but along the way we shall have significantly weakened the rebels' strength and morale."

The major sputtered in protest, impotently clutching his precious packet of documents. As he began to give voice to his objections, he was undercut by the smooth voice of Sinclair's aide moving in from the doorway, bearing a tea tray.

“Tea, Major Martigan?”

“No thank you,” said Martigan. To his subordinate he said, “Sinclair, I don’t know how you conduct business in the Irish garrison, but that’s not how we do it here. You’re not right in the head, get some rest –”

Sinclair leaned forward in his chair, clasping his hands together such that his long fingers intertwined. His voice became silky, sibilant, almost dangerous. “Major, I should inform you that I have discussed this matter with numerous acquaintances, including a close friend who happens to be King George’s personal steward. I don’t think they would be very pleased to find that an officer of His Majesty’s secret service is prosecuting this fight with anything less than total determination.”

Martigan’s hands trembled. Outmatched, he set the packet of documents down on the table by the open window. As he turned to leave Sinclair’s office, he fell back on a weak, “Do not pursue this scheme any further. That is an order.”

The documents moved after Martigan released them... then, ever so slightly, they shifted again.

Sinclair snapped to attention, staring at the windowsill. The corner of his mouth twitched and his demeanor grew to resemble a cat stalking its prey. He called out, “Staff Sergeant Turnip!”

The aide hastened from the doorway, saluted, and said “Turner.”

“What?”

“That’s ‘Turner’, sir, not ‘Turnip’.”

“Yes,” muttered Sinclair in an irritated fashion, “that’s what I said.”

“Begging your pardon, sir, I distinctly heard you use the word ‘Turnip’. Like the vegetable.”

Sinclair couldn't care less – he was making frantic hand gestures at the aide, whatever his name was. Turner proved slow on the uptake, standing confused for a full two seconds before whispering orders to a messenger boy in the next room. The boy became wide-eyed and swiftly departed.

The wily captain had detected his old enemy's presence, and decided to stall for time while dispatching troops to the alleyway.

"Well, whatever your name is," Sinclair said loudly, striving to maintain a semblance of normal dialogue, "please deliver this note to the barracks immediately."

"What note, sir?"

"The – ah – the one I am about to write now." Improvising, Sinclair began scribbling on a sheet of paper with his quill pen. Midway through he crumpled the meaningless note, saying, "Blast. The ink spilled; I'll have to start afresh."

Sinclair slowly blotted the imaginary mess, dipped his pen in fresh ink, and resumed writing on a new sheet of paper. Outside, Shaw shifted his attention from the acting performance – he thought he heard footsteps approaching from the far end of the alleyway. *No more time.*

Girding himself up to face his mentor's wrath, Shaw broke cover and raced forward, keeping a low profile so as not to be seen from the opened window. He whispered, "Tallmadge! Sir. We've gotta get out of here."

Tallmadge broke his intense concentration on Sinclair's literary pursuits. He blinked rapidly, appearing disoriented. "Huh...?"

Shaw grabbed Tallmadge's arm, and was instinctively shaken off. He said in a louder voice, "We've been discovered. Soldiers are moving in on our position as we speak –"

Tallmadge blinked again. He finally registered Shaw's presence, and a faint look of irritation crossed his weathered face. As he turned back towards the window he muttered, "Quiet down, you'll blow my cover."

The patter of footsteps intensified. Frantic, Shaw again grabbed Tallmadge's arm to practically drag him away from the enticing window.

"Our man Sinclair has already taken care of that. This way. Now!"

His last whisper was so furious that it couldn't help but be heard inside the room. Sinclair looked up from his ink-smudged paper – just in time to see a hand reach over the windowsill to snatch away the packet of documents. The hand receded from view, and then Shaw's back receded down the alleyway.

A look of intense fury crossed Sinclair's face. He crumpled his clever decoy note in disgust.

His aide ventured, "I assume that delivery of the note is no longer required, sir?"

Sinclair hurled the wadded-up paper across the room at his aide. He missed. He snarled, "Shut up, Turnip."

* * *

Shoving the packet of captured documents into his coat pocket, Shaw sprinted from the alleyway into the main street, a faltering Tallmadge doing his best to keep up. They plunged headlong into a crowd of passersby, who amid murmurs of protest parted to make way for them.

A British patrol shot out from Province House's front doorway, seconds behind them. The lead soldier raised a musket and shouted, "Halt!"

The fugitives didn't halt. They were safe for now, shielded by the mere presence of the innocent bystanders. Aside from Sinclair, the British were in no mind for a second Boston Massacre.

"Flat against the ground!"

The patrol leader's barked order induced the nearest civilians to fling themselves to the cobblestones, clearing a line of fire. Additional people began to follow suit. After years of occupation, the citizens of Boston had learned to keep a low profile.

The ripple of bodies lowering to the ground spread rapidly outwards, faster than Shaw and Tallmadge could run, almost encompassing them... when it came to an abrupt halt. The fugitives' backs were now exposed to the British patrol, but for a grand old lady who stood firmly in the way, issuing the soldiers a steely glare.

Frustrated, the patrol leader made his way through the crowd, shoved the recalcitrant lady aside, and leveled his musket at the fleeing rebels. He fired.

He was an instant too late – the musket shot ricocheted off the corner of a brick building seconds before the tail of Shaw's coat disappeared behind it. They'd reached temporary refuge behind the Old South Meeting House.

The patrol leader cursed. His men congregated around him, about to rush forward into the narrow side street.

"Wait." The patrol leader held up a cautionary arm. His soldiers froze.

"Send flanking parties to the other end of the side street. They might just be stupid enough to fight it out."

Shaw, breathing heavily, withdrew his pistol and held it up against the side of the meeting house. Just

around the corner stood British headquarters along with half the Boston garrison.

Beside him, Tallmadge was in poor shape. He slumped against the faded red bricks of the meeting house, making an unhealthy wheezing sound. Then he saw Shaw's gun and pulled himself together. "What," croaked Tallmadge, "are you doing?"

"We'll never outrun them. No choice but to fight it out."

"That won't be necessary."

Shaw dismissed the assertion – he returned his focus to the pistol, eyes narrowing. "Of course it's necessary..."

He turned away from the pistol in a double take. "What do you mean?"

Tallmadge just smiled. Shaw soon heard an escalating clatter of hooves pounding against cobblestones.

The hoofbeats came from the far end of the side street; he'd figured the British would send a flanking party, but hadn't expected it to arrive so soon. He braced himself for an onslaught of cavalry.

There was just one horse. Shaw recognized its riders, and his features broke into a broad smile.

Anna and Silas dismounted, Arthur remaining in the saddle. Arthur said, "We figured you'd need help."

"And knowing you," added Anna, "a lot of it."

"Too much," said Shaw, his eyes darting between the stricken Tallmadge, his friends, and the horse. "We won't all fit."

He motioned to Silas to help him hoist Tallmadge into the saddle. The tall man occupied all the remaining space.

“I think that barn fire weakened Tallmadge’s lungs. Arthur, get him out of here.”

“Okay,” said Arthur, bringing the horse to a walk, “but what about you?”

Shaw put a hand on Anna’s shoulder. With any luck she’d be of more use than Arthur was back on Boston Neck.

“We’ll be the diversion.”

They moved towards the far end of the side street. Silas spoke up, in a dangerously quiet voice: “What about me?”

Shaw clenched his teeth. *Why can’t the worthless bully just get out of the way?* “You’ll have to hide,” said Shaw, shifting his gaze behind Silas to a barrel of dung left outside a ramshackle building.

Silas’s fist involuntarily clenched.

“Oh, really, Silas,” said Anna. “We all know you’d just run away anyhow.”

Silas snarled, but his fist slackened. He had no choice but to comply. He forced himself inside a waste bin, sliding bitterly into the grimy muck.

As Silas lowered the lid to seal himself in darkness, he watched the departing recruits run off hand in hand, and his eyes burned with a fierce hatred.

* * *

Shaw and Anna ran north through the twisting streets of Boston, dodging bemused pedestrians – pedestrians who moments later became even more bemused when a pursuing column of British soldiers quick-stepped past.

They emerged from an alley to find the State House looming over them. To their right stretched that bustling artery of commerce known in better times as State Street, in current times as King Street.

Shaw scanned the swinging wooden signs that hung outside each storefront, trying to make sense of the images. “Barrel... a cooper’s. Wheat... a miller’s. What’s that?”

That picture was a misshapen lump.

“A pot,” said Anna. “It’s a potter’s.” She and Shaw ducked inside.

Indeed, dozens of clay pots lined the shop’s shelves, a motley assortment spanning the spectrum from dark grays to light browns to dark browns. The proprietor, who wore a heavily stained white smock, looked up from the two customers he was serving and said, “Be with you in a moment.”

As the potter continued, “My apologies, Mr. Adams; these items will come to thirteen shillings,” Shaw removed his coat while moving towards a shelf of clay jars by the window. He stuffed the coat behind one of the jars. While ostensibly inspecting the merchandise, he focused his attention on a space between two jars, through which he could see the British soldiers streaming past. *With any luck we’ve lost them.*

Anna made a beeline for the shop’s prize offering, a gleaming porcelain plate. She reached out to touch it, visibly gasped, and shook Shaw’s arm in a signal for him to join her.

He shot her a quizzical look. Exasperated, Anna almost dragged him away from the window to face her precious porcelain. Shaw yielded with more than mild irritation: *What a time for frivolity.*

The potter called out with pride, “That’s me finest ware. A first-rate porcelain plate, imported all the way from the Orient. Five pounds.”

The shop’s door banged open. Four British soldiers stormed inside, muskets at the ready. The potter’s voice trailed off: “Out of your price range, I reckon...”

“I wouldn’t be so sure,” Anna replied.

Two soldiers began searching the shelves. Due to Anna’s intervention Shaw’s back faced the soldiers; they hadn’t yet seen his face. The patrol leader advanced towards him.

The potter cleared his throat. “Excuse me,” he said in firm tones, “but those are paying customers. Will you leave them be.”

The patrol leader drew back at first, before questioning the necessity of taking orders from a mere potter. He shifted his musket, on the verge of plunging ahead. Across the shop a soldier reached for the jar concealing Shaw’s coat.

A subordinate tugged on the patrol leader’s sleeve and whispered, “Didn’t our man have a coat?”

Shaw’s back was distinctly coatless. “He must have doubled back,” the patrol leader said in resignation, and he waved at his men to call off the search. The tall soldier obediently drew back his hand from the incriminating jar and followed his colleagues out of the shop.

“My apologies for the disturbance, Mr. Adams,” said the potter, addressing the other customer this time. “I don’t know why these redcoats won’t let us alone.”

“We’re working on it.”

Anna and Shaw exchanged smiles, allowing themselves to savor their narrow escape. Shaw retrieved his coat – touching the captured documents for reassurance

– and had put one arm through a sleeve when he cast a final look through the shop’s window.

He locked eyes with the British patrol leader! Shaw cursed under his breath: *They’re the ones who doubled back.*

The British soldiers raced back towards the potter’s shop at a quick step. One paused to open fire, shattering the window – Shaw, squirming into the other coat sleeve, ducked the flying shards of glass while stumbling towards the exit. Anna seized the porcelain plate and ran for the door, shoving her way past an Adams.

Shaw followed moments later, shoving his way past the other Adams, who gave him a frosty stare. He tossed a handful of coins onto the counter, saying sheepishly, “Five shillings, was it?”

With that he was gone.

* * *

Fine work, Shaw thought bitterly. *Back where we started, with nothing but stolen goods to show for it.* Anna struggled to clasp the cumbersome plate under her arm; it was clearly slowing her down. The British soldiers were gaining.

Shaw snapped, “You’re not gonna keep that, are you?”

“Of course I am – it’s lovely. And maybe useful.”

They rounded a corner onto Common Street. Shaw blinked at the sudden influx of light; they’d finally emerged from the maze of streets into open terrain.

Boston Common. Green grass, rolling hills, and the Royal Army’s chief encampment. Shaw seized Anna’s hand and resumed running.

The field below them contained an entire British regiment! A soldier shouted and pointed up at the two fugitives.

They backtracked. At a burying ground south of Beacon Hill, Shaw frantically cast about for some means of escape. Their pursuers were pounding towards them across the sidewalk, accompanied by a second contingent arriving on the scene from British headquarters.

A hackney carriage clattered past. *Of course!* Shaw sprinted towards a livery stable and a familiar hand-painted sign reading, "Rides, three pennies". Carriages lined the side of the road, awaiting rental. He and Anna clambered inside one and took off.

The fastest British soldier caught up with them, managing to jump onto the carriage's rear ledge before it pulled away. The other soldiers were left with a convenient alternative means of transportation: the remaining carriages, which one by one they began to commandeer. The aged livery attendant pointed to his sign in feeble protest, to no avail.

Shaw looked back from the driver's seat to see an intruder climbing into the passenger compartment. He shoved the reins at Anna, shouting, "You drive."

"But I don't know how –"

Shaw ignored the protest. He vaulted into the passenger compartment and punched the advancing soldier, sending his adversary reeling backwards. Beyond the soldier he could see three carriages in close pursuit, chasing them north along Treamount Street.

The street's rough cobblestones sent a constant tremor throughout the carriage. Shaw momentarily lost his footing, an opening which the soldier used to lash outwards.

Shaw easily dodged, then slammed his adversary against the forward-facing passenger seat. There he paused. The soldier gave him a quizzical look – why didn't Shaw deliver a finishing blow?

A pursuing carriage pulled up alongside them. Shaw threw the soldier across the gap onto the adjacent carriage's driver, who gave a muffled cry of pain. Unable to see, the driver involuntarily weakened his grip on the reins and lost control of his carriage, which veered off the road onto the cold dirt of the burying grounds.

Just before the other carriage smashed into a headstone, one of its occupants leaped to safety. The British patrol leader landed heavily atop Shaw, who staggered backwards against the forward-facing passenger seat while grappling defensively.

“Ben! Help!” An apple-laden oxcart was slowly advancing from a cross street onto the road ahead, on course to block the carriage's path; Anna instinctively yanked back on the reins. The carriage abruptly slowed, hurling the entwined combatants forward against the rear-facing passenger seat.

Shaw groaned, rubbing his now-aching left shoulder, and shouted, “No, faster!”

Anna just looked panicked. Through a hostile elbow to the face Shaw repeated, “Faster!”

Anna flicked the reins and the carriage lurched forward, now on a near-collision course with the approaching oxcart. Shaw and the patrol leader flew backwards – almost off the carriage completely – but were happily stopped by the forward-facing seat. They exchanged relieved smiles, then Shaw punched him over the edge.

“You know, all the *clever* Englishmen join the Navy.”

Another pursuing carriage was steadily gaining ground, passing right over the fallen patrol leader. One of its soldiers aimed a musket at Shaw.

Shaw hastily vaulted back into the driver's seat, where he received the reins from a relieved Anna. He stared ahead. Their carriage pounded past the oxcart with mere inches to spare. The pursuing carriage was less fortunate, plowing directly into the cart to overturn it and scatter apples throughout the intersection.

Shaw shot Anna a look of tentative triumph – which soon faded when they saw yet another British-occupied carriage navigate around the wreckage to continue the chase. A bearded soldier fired a musket at their left front wheel, loosening it from the axel.

As Shaw and Anna turned right onto Hanover Street, their carriage began to shake dangerously. The rattling only escalated as the damaged wheel continued to endure the harsh depredations of each cobblestone. Shaw turned in his seat and returned fire with his pistol, but a sudden jolt caused the shot to go wild.

We need to get off this thing.

Shaw grimaced and looked for a way off the crippled vehicle. When the pursuing carriage drew up beside them, he impulsively grabbed Anna and leaped aboard.

They landed safely in the passenger compartment. Their old carriage disintegrated while bouncing out of control into a storefront.

Shaw and Anna's new carriage continued northeast along Middle Street, on course for the North End. A large pond appeared to the left of the road; through a gap between two buildings they caught a glimpse of a mill at the water's edge. Straight ahead of them soared the spire of the Old North Church.

Surrounding them stood a group of soldiers.

Shaw lunged for the bearded soldier, wrestling for control of the spent musket. When a second soldier attacked from behind, Shaw swung the musket butt around to catch him in the face, then thrust the weapon forward to send the bearded soldier toppling into the driver's seat.

As the driver tried to shake the soldier out of the way, the carriage swerved from side to side, narrowly avoiding a pedestrian. The packet of captured documents fell out of Shaw's coat pocket and flew against the rear passenger seat, trapped there by the rapid air current.

Muttering imprecations under his breath, Shaw went to retrieve the documents. The carriage briefly lurched off the road onto a dirt shoulder, and he stumbled; a soldier took the opportunity to hit him in the face. Shaw's instant counterpunch sent the soldier sailing into the mill pond.

"Take a swim."

But the delay proved costly. The packet of documents slipped upward across the rear seat, on the verge of flying loose from the carriage.

Shaw threw his knife at the papers, pinning them against the seat. He shouted, "Anna, get the documents!"

He lacked the time to retrieve them himself, for the bearded soldier had recovered. Shaw hurled himself forward to knock the soldier clear off the carriage and down a rocky slope to join his colleague in the mill pond.

The carriage was now bumping its way down a grassy hill. Given the driver's recent difficulties, Shaw thoughtfully moved to provide navigation assistance – but when he climbed into the box seat, the ungrateful driver attacked him. Shaw fought back, attempting to gain control of the reins.

He met with little success; the driver's hands proved resilient, clutching at the reins while clawing at Shaw's face. Then they suddenly slackened.

Shaw looked up in surprise. The driver slumped against the seat, head lolling to one side; above him stood Anna, holding the remains of a lovely, and freshly-broken, porcelain plate. She said, "I was hoping to keep this longer."

Shaw exhaled in relief, unable to conceal his smile of admiration.

Then his eyes widened. Their carriage was about to travel over an embankment! A six-foot stone retaining wall supported the base of the grassy hill, beyond which they saw nothing but air. Shaw and Anna leaped to safety and rolled down the remaining expanse of grass just before the carriage sailed off the edge.

The sickening *crash* reverberated throughout the North End. Shaw and Anna dropped down from the stone wall to land atop chunks of wrecked carriage-bits. *The transportation's gone, but at least now we're safe.*

A red-trimmed stage coach rounded the corner from Salem Street. Shaw felt vaguely apprehensive: *I've seen that coach before....*

The coach bore down upon them, soon drawing close enough for Shaw to make out an angry face in the window.

Sinclair!

* * *

Shaw and Anna turned heel and ran, fleeing hand in hand downhill towards the mill pond. The red-trimmed coach loomed behind them like an avalanche.

Anna cried out, “Where are we going?”

A good question, thought Shaw, who was wondering the same thing himself. His eyes darted about for a place of refuge – and found one in a building by the pond below. A grain mill, built near a dam dividing the pond from the Charles River, whose far wall featured a large wooden wheel that rotated in the river’s current.

“That mill house.”

The front door was thankfully unlocked. They dashed inside just as Sinclair’s coach pulled to a halt at the curb. A contingent of soldiers poured out of the coach’s passenger compartment, led by a particularly menacing Sgt. McClintock.

Shaw and Anna scrambled to fasten the front door’s many elaborate locks. They finished mere moments before McClintock reached the door. The hulking sergeant tried the handle and met with failure.

Shaw sunk down in a rough-hewn chair, triumphant. “I used to pay good money to use a grain mill.”

“It doesn’t look very comfortable.”

“As long as we’re safe from those brutes.” Shaw looked at the front door and made a slight frown. After a cursory rattling, the sounds had stopped – McClintock was making no attempt to break down the door. *He can’t just be giving up....*

McClintock’s silhouette appeared in the front window, moving towards the north face of the mill. Shaw’s puzzled gaze followed McClintock and the trailing column of soldiers – when his gaze reached the north wall, his heart sank.

A side door!

Okay, I’m an idiot. Shaw sprang from his chair, grabbed a sack of grain from the base of a staircase, and

raced to place it behind the vulnerable side door. He shouted, "Get the chair!"

Anna complied by dragging the chair up against the side door. Shaw then hefted a small millstone and heaved it atop the chair. He brushed his hands together in satisfaction, saying, "There. Let's see them get through *that*."

The side door swung smoothly open. It hinged outwards.

Shaw found himself staring directly into the scarred face of McClintock, who glared at him and lifted a heavy boot to begin kicking away the obstacles.

Anna bolted up the staircase. Shaw's mouth opened in shock, then closed. At last he said "Right," and turned to race up the stairs after her.

To Anna he growled, "Don't say it." She giggled.

The mill's second floor was sparse. It boasted little but a heavy oak chair, a small paned window facing the street, and a larger window facing the river that opened onto the giant rotating slats of the mill wheel. And a cupboard.

Shaw ignored the cupboard and made for the smaller window. He moved his face to the glass, and rapidly withdrew it upon being greeted by a gunshot from the street. Footsteps began to pound up the staircase.

"Okay, genius," said Anna, "now what?"

"You've gotta get out of here."

"Yeah, I kind of figured that part out."

Shaw was busy throwing the heavy chair through the window, and didn't hear her over the sound of breaking glass. He reached outside to tug on a clothesline that connected to the window of an adjacent house. It felt secure.

Anna walked to the window and said incredulously, “You’re not really going to try that, are you?”

“No,” said Shaw, “you are.” He thrust the end of the clothesline into Anna’s hand, kissed her roughly, and shoved her out the window.

Anna swung in a wide arc across to the adjacent house, screaming, “I hate youuu...!!!”

Shaw just grinned and waved goodbye. *Well, at least she’s safe.*

The pounding of footsteps crescendoed. McClintock and his soldiers had almost ascended the staircase... and now, they had.

But the room was empty! McClintock pointed a gloved finger at the cupboard, directing a fat soldier to search it. He himself approached the smashed front window.

Looking outside, McClintock saw his master’s coach still parked at the curb below. Sinclair emerged from the coach and waved up at the window, shouting, “Where is he?”

McClintock gave a curt salute. “One moment, sir.”

He withdrew back into the room. The fat soldier pointed to the open cupboard: empty. McClintock scowled and strode to the rear window.

A breeze of fresh air wafted over the Charles River. The giant mill wheel creaked and groaned as it rotated, driven by the slow current. The slow gears of McClintock’s mind turned in thought. He peered curiously at the downward slope of the wheel.

Nothing. McClintock shrugged and began to pull his head back inside.

A hand reached over the edge of a wheel slat. McClintock froze. He could scarcely believe his eyes: a

second hand followed suit, climbing upwards against the direction of rotation. Incredibly, Shaw was clinging onto the rotating mill wheel!

* * *

A decent attempt at hiding, but one ultimately doomed to failure – upon lifting his head over the slat, Shaw saw McClintock and likewise froze. Then he resumed climbing, for to remain immobile was to be slowly but surely cast into the tempestuous waters below, churned into a dangerous froth by the wheel's iron-tipped slats.

McClintock, breaking Shaw's gaze, clambered out the window onto the mill wheel, his face set in a grimace. He withdrew his giant saber.

Shaw knocked it out of his hand. The weapon went clattering across the top of the wheel, settling into a niche two slats up from them: safe for now.

McClintock moved to retrieve his saber, picking his way cautiously across the uneven terrain. Shaw scrambled forward to intercept him, only to be abruptly halted by the back of McClintock's extended hand. As Shaw wrinkled his aching nose, he saw the hulking sergeant turn around to confront him.

"Very well," said McClintock, "we'll do this the hard way." He punched Shaw in the face.

Shaw tumbled downwards, bouncing sickeningly against several of the wheel's protruding slats. If he hadn't managed to catch hold of a horizontal slat he would have been cast down into the mill wheel's maw; as it was, he barely managed to haul himself over the edge of the slat to a short-lived safety.

McClintock, having retrieved his saber, descended towards Shaw to press the attack. He raised the weapon in

preparation to slash. Wincing, Shaw protectively covered his face with a hand.

Yet Shaw was not concerned with the saber. McClintock's fat soldier had mounted the mill wheel in an effort to assist his commander, and proceeded to lose his balance on the dangerous ground. The soldier toppled forward, colliding with McClintock's upraised arm – McClintock struggled to maintain his own balance as the thin saber and the fat soldier flew screaming past him and Shaw into the churning waters below.

Shaw flashed upright to land a punch on McClintock's cheek. Perhaps due to his protective scarring, the sergeant appeared to feel nothing. He delivered Shaw a sharp head butt, sending him staggering backwards.

A second soldier appeared in the mill window. He carried a pistol, yet hesitated to fire for fear of hitting McClintock; frustrated, he stepped onto the wheel in hopes of gaining a clear shot at his target.

McClintock appraised the situation with a glance over his shoulder, and stepped aside to open a path to Shaw. Shaw rolled sideways, gaining a precious few seconds, then lowered himself behind a slat just before the pistol discharged.

The shot glanced harmlessly off the slat, kicking up a cloud of splinters. Shaw raised himself back over the slat and charged the offending soldier, bodily lifting the man to heave him over the edge of the mill wheel. He landed with a dull *splash*.

Shaw made for the mill window, hoping to strand McClintock at what had become a dangerously low altitude. But his adversary proved faster than expected. McClintock climbed forward, extended an arm and caught the fringe of Shaw's coat, dragging him back onto the

wheel. The sergeant proceeded to deliver a mighty body blow that sent Shaw reeling almost past the point of no return.

McClintock paced leisurely downwards, his grimace changed to a satisfied sneer. All that kept Shaw in the fight were his fingertips, which barely protruded over the tip of a descending wooden slat. McClintock stepped on them.

His heavy boot felt a satisfying crunch as it ground into the yielding flesh and unyielding iron. Shaw's eyes watered in suppressed pain. McClintock extended a hand.

"You seem a sensible lad," he said, "so I'll offer you a sensible choice. Join us... or die."

* * *

Sinclair hurried around the side of the mill. He hadn't heard back from McClintock for several minutes and had decided to take matters into his own hands.

"Have you acquired those rowboats I asked for?" he demanded of his aide, who lagged several paces behind.

"Yes, sir. Six of them, ready to scour the river. We've commandeered all the Charles Town ferries."

Sinclair did not immediately reply. After stepping over an unremarkable fallen clothesline, he rounded the back corner of the mill to find a remarkable sight: the figure of Ben Shaw, dangling for his life from a giant rotating mill wheel, McClintock looming over him.

Sinclair smiled. To his aide he replied, "It looks as if we shan't be needing those rowboats after all, Turnip."

Staring downwards into the turgid waters, Shaw felt somewhat in need of a rowboat himself. His tricorner hat fell off and floated towards the wheel's maw.

Then he blinked.

Come to think of it... what's so damn terrible about falling off the wheel? It's just a twenty-foot drop into some water! He almost laughed.

Shaw shot McClintock a weary smile and released his fingers. He dropped off the wheel seconds before he would have fallen anyway, plummeting so far underwater that all that remained was a sea of bubbles.

Then he resurfaced, drawing a deep gasp of air. He recovered his tricorner hat and slapped it onto his head. Spotting Sinclair standing on the riverbank, he gave his enemy an ironic wave, then made a frog kick and began swimming downriver.

Sinclair sputtered in impotent fury. His aide said placidly, "Shall I summon the rowboats, sir?"

At last words began to form. "Pursue him!"

Sinclair's attention switched to his other subordinate.

"And get off that blasted wheel!"

McClintock snapped to attention, saluting his commanding officer. Due to the mill wheel's continued rotation, he fell headlong into the river.

* * *

Arthur's horse galloped west along Green Lane, bound for the safe house. He'd successfully thrown off their pursuers.

Color returned to Tallmadge's face – he sat up straight in the saddle, his lung condition a thing of the past. He said, "We have to go back."

"What?" asked Arthur. "You're sick, and we're safe –"

Tallmadge fingered the hilt of his sword, speaking with quiet authority.

“Turn around.”

The horse turned around.

* * *

Tallmadge struggled to drag a bedraggled Shaw ashore near Hancock’s Wharf. He said, “I won’t always be able to bail you out.”

Shaw coughed up half a pint of water before responding.

“Thanks. Sinclair must have rounded up every ship in the Boston area.”

Behind Shaw, dozens of British men-o’-war and frigates and rowboats swarmed the harbor. The rowboats had been capsized, set on fire, or otherwise incapacitated. Tallmadge had destroyed them.

Tallmadge switched his attention from the riverbank to Arthur, who stood atop the wharf holding a horse. “Where’s Silas?”

“I thought he was with you.”

In fact, at that moment a British soldier was shaking Silas out of his barrel, sending him sprawling against the grimy cobblestones amid a sea of refuse.

“Ah, I’m sure he’s all right,” Shaw mumbled. “Let’s get out of here.”

* * *

Shaw met Tallmadge that night in the safe house. A candle burned on the bare oak table, silhouetting Shaw’s

seated profile against the wall map of Boston, and emphasizing the deep lines etched in Tallmadge's face.

Tallmadge wasn't pleased. His white beard bristled as he said, "The problem with me is I'm too quick to avoid a fight. But the problem with you is, you're too quick to get into a fight. The mark of a good agent is outwitting the enemy without having to resort to violence."

Tallmadge paused for effect, then abruptly slumped against the back of his chair and said, "I was a hindrance to you back there. I'm sorry."

Shaw blinked in surprise. He wasn't an adept consoler, and hadn't expected to play the part with as strong a character as Tallmadge. He averted eye contact and shifted awkwardly in his chair, his right hand drifting down to the table to toy with a strange oblong object.

"What do you mean? You're the one who pulled me out of the river."

Tallmadge's face hardened. He uncharacteristically snapped, "Don't feign ignorance. We both know what happened."

What can I say to that? Shaw remained silent, busy fidgeting with the strange object. Tallmadge's face softened, and the veteran spymaster lit his pipe at the candle on the table.

He resumed, "I'm an old man, and that fire wasn't kind to my lungs. I should have known better. But that's in the past."

Tallmadge extracted a packet of documents from his pocket and held them aloft.

"I've had the opportunity to examine these documents you took from Sinclair's office." He tossed them onto the table. "Quite interesting. They indicate that the map giving the location of the underground tunnels is

located somewhere outside Boston. Precisely where, I haven't the faintest idea."

"And Sinclair is going after it tonight." Shaw drummed his fingers on the table and absent-mindedly shoved the strange object into his right coat pocket. It struck something. Annoyed, he set the offending obstruction on the table.

Having made room for his latest knickknack, Shaw was about to return the older specimen to his pocket when Tallmadge interrupted him. "What's that book?"

The book – for it was a book, a musty old thing – meant little to Shaw. He didn't even recognize it. With a flick of the wrist he sent it sliding across the table to Tallmadge.

Tallmadge barely caught the book before it sailed over the edge. He squinted to make out the faded lettering on the cover.

"*Wonders of the Invisible World*. Cotton Mather." He looked upwards sharply. "You're a student of witchcraft, are you?"

"No, no, not at all. I, ah –" Shaw struggled to recall his connection with the book, the memories were coming back to him now – "I found it in that sergeant's coat pocket. You know, Sinclair's brute. When he attacked me back in Connecticut."

A gleam shone in Tallmadge's gray eyes. He leaned forward in his chair, pounding the cover of the ancient book for emphasis. "Then we are saved! There is only one reason Sinclair could be interested in this book, only one place it could refer to." His gaze drifted to the map on his wall. "Salem."

Shaw sat still in shock. Tallmadge sprang out of his chair, walked sprightly to the map, and fingered its northernmost edge.

“Of course; it couldn’t be plainer. Salem’s one of the oldest settlements in New England. Cotton Mather must have discovered the Indian burial grounds, branded them the work of the Devil, and sealed the tunnels to prevent the release of evil spirits. But –” and here Tallmadge was forced to pause to cough into his hand, though swiftly resuming as lively as ever – “before he died, he drew up a map giving directions to the tunnel entrance... so at some future date, abler men than he could seek out and destroy the spirits forever.”

While Tallmadge paused once more for breath, Shaw began to venture a question, but he had underestimated the older man’s staying power. Tallmadge continued, “You must travel to Salem post-haste. In the company of Dr. Van Dyke.”

“That old fool,” Shaw said in disgust. “Why not you?”

Tallmadge heaved himself back into his chair. “I know Sinclair; he’s a crafty one. For all we know, he already has the map and plans to flood the city tonight. I need to stay here in case this is a ruse to lure us away from Boston.”

Shaw cracked a wan half-smile. “So you might be sending me straight into a British trap.”

Tallmadge returned the smile. “A risk I’m willing to take. And believe me, that stands as a high compliment of your abilities. Now go,” he concluded, eyeing the door in anticipation of Shaw’s departure.

The door unexpectedly swung open. Both men started. Shaw swiveled in his chair to make brief contact with a familiar, shining set of eyes.

Upon seeing that Shaw was otherwise occupied, the eyes moved away and the door hastily reclosed. Shaw turned back to face his mentor.

“At least give me time to say goodbye to Anna.”

Tallmadge made a knowing smile. “All right,” he said. “Two hours.”

* * *

Exactly two hours later, a lone figure crept along the fog-shrouded waterfront of Boston Harbor. A small one-man sailboat bobbed with the tide, moored to one of the harbor’s lesser-used wharves. The figure quietly dropped down into the boat and began to unfurl its sail.

The one-man vessel would have to carry two: a second figure emerged from the mist, this one walking at a more leisurely pace due to its reliance upon a knobbed walking stick.

Van Dyke caught his companion’s eye and hissed, “So circumstances force us to work together. And Tallmadge has seen fit to place *you* in command of the mission.”

“Don’t worry,” said Shaw, who proceeded to slash the boat’s mooring rope with his knife. “I wouldn’t dream of abusing my position of authority.”

Van Dyke ignored the jibe, merely stepping across the gangplank to his seat. He gave a final hiss of displeasure, no less audible than the hiss the sail emitted as it began to billow in the wind.

The boat moved away from the wharf into a sea of fog.

Chapter 6
THE SCHOLAR

MARCH 10, 1776 8:29 AM

The boat glided alongside a pier in Salem Harbor. Bright sunlight flooded the harbor, which had achieved unparalleled levels of prosperity since the British had taken its main rival out of commission.

Shaw leaped onto the pier while his boat was still slowing to a halt. He briskly walked towards dry land, taking in his surroundings: a warehouse abutting the water, a church just beyond. At the pier's end stood an unobtrusive man clad in a cloth robe and black four-cornered hat reminiscent of those worn by Renaissance-era scholars.

The man called out, "Welcome to Salem. This is rather short notice, Mr....?"

While Van Dyke still struggled to heave himself out of the boat, Shaw lightly stepped off the pier onto solid ground and extended an arm. “Shaw. Ben Shaw.”

“Pleased to make your acquaintance,” said the man, limply shaking Shaw’s hand. “I’m Timothy Tompkins.”

“Tompkins,” Shaw repeated, releasing the man’s hand. “A fine name. You’re a scholar?”

“Yes.” Tompkins shifted from one foot to another, anxious to be on their way. He observed Van Dyke slowly making his way down the pier, preceded by a walking stick and followed by a rat – no, a dog.

Shaw said a bit too hastily, “I, too, am a scholar – currently researching 17th-century mysticism. This is my assistant, Pedro.”

Van Dyke stepped off the pier just in time to receive his spurious introduction. He visibly seethed – but he couldn’t protest without blowing their cover, and both he and Shaw knew it. “Charmed,” he glowered, refusing to extend a hand.

Tompkins didn’t notice the slight; with all parties present and accounted for, he was anxious to leave the uncomfortable open air and return to his study. He nodded vaguely at “Pedro” and began walking along an unpaved street towards the town square.

Shaw thrust his hands in his coat and hurried to keep up. He showed his book to Tompkins, just enough of a glimpse to pique the scholar’s interest.

“And this is my book. *Wonders of the Invisible World.*”

“Ah,” replied Tompkins, a glint showing in his eyes. “Mather’s book. Cotton Mather, to be precise.”

Shaw, who was unaware there were any other Mathers, nodded as though he understood. “Of course,” he

said sagely. “For it was Cotton Mather who was most interested in the, ah... wonders... of the invisible world.”

“Of course,” agreed Tompkins.

During this scintillating conversation, Shaw skimmed his hand along the top of a white picket fence whose paint was peeling with age. A farmer passed them leading a tired mule, heading for the harbor warehouse.

Behind the warehouse stood a gang of men who watched the two visitors depart. One finished smoking a Spanish cigar and cast it aside. He nodded at the others, who lowered hoods over their faces and began following Shaw towards the town square.

* * *

Shaw asked, “You think there’s a Masonic connection?”

“No, that’s a load of rubbish.”

Tompkins had locked on to their destination, an ancient building of crumbling brick that dominated the center of Town House Square. Beside the building stood a defoliated tree, whose long spindly branches reached like withered, grasping arms towards a second-story window.

“Salem’s old town house,” said Tompkins, “meeting place of the early Puritans, presently a schoolhouse of which I am master. Mather’s papers are housed within. Coincidentally enough, it is also home to my personal collection.”

They trudged up the creaky wooden steps to the front door. Tompkins fumbled with the lock and cast open the door.

The spacious room was littered with dozens of school desks, each buried in heaps of dusty papers and

artifacts and miscellaneous knickknacks. The room's far corner contained eight bookcases arranged in a 2x4 grid, while its near corner contained a merrily crackling fireplace. Tompkins visibly relaxed, as if returning home; he said, "I spend much time here."

Shaw took in the scholar's unusual habitat with a degree of polite interest and a degree of genuine awe. He waved at a teenaged black boy who stood at a desk dusting off a ceramic urn.

"My own assistant," said Tompkins, who was making his way towards a staircase at the back of the room.

At hearing this, Van Dyke made a scowl. "Perhaps we *assistants*," he said, voice dripping with disdain, "should remain behind, so as not to interfere. Besides, Fido has a delicate disposition; the poor creature doesn't agree with the dust."

Indeed, Fido emitted a light sneeze.

With Tompkins halfway up the staircase already, Shaw was in no mind to argue. "Right, there's no need for you to join us in the –" he turned to address Tompkins – "where is it we're going?"

The schoolhouse's second floor was lined with books – books lining the shelves, books covering the tables, books stacked upon the floor waist-high. Tompkins said, "The library."

Shaw, who had assumed that the numerous bookcases downstairs constituted "the library", scuffed his foot at some books in mild bemusement. The tower of books belched a cloud of dust, teetered, and began to topple over; he scrambled to keep it upright.

Tompkins, oblivious to the disruption, advanced deeper into the room and began fussing with the vast quantity of manuscripts.

“Aha!” The scholar homed in on a bookcase. From it he extracted books in rapid-fire fashion, stacking them in Shaw’s reluctant arms. “Here are the complete works of Cotton Mather. No doubt you will find them to be of interest.”

Shaw, struggling to hold the ever-growing weight of books, feebly protested: “Actually, it’s not so much a book as a map –”

He stopped. He stared at a thin hardback book at the rightmost end of the top shelf, a book which Tompkins had passed over. “What’s this?”

“Oh,” said Tompkins, preoccupied with propping up a wobbly stack of books, “that one’s stuck. It’s quite firmly wedged in there. Good luck getting it out, if you can. But it’s really not very interesting. Now, this one here –”

Shaw ignored Tompkins’s babbling and proffered book, preferring instead to approach the remaining book on the shelf. He read the title off the spine: “*Liber de tabulas*. Book... of... maps.”

His hesitant translation turned to triumph, Shaw dropped the forgotten armful of books – causing a *thump* to resonate throughout the room below, eliciting bemused stares from Van Dyke and the scholar’s assistant – and reached forward. He pulled at the book, to no avail; as Tompkins said, it wouldn’t budge.

Then Shaw pushed the book. It slid back along the shelf until it made contact with the rear wall of the bookcase, producing a soft *click*. Under continued pressure the right half of the bookcase sunk inwards, pivoting around the central axis to rotate the entire bookcase ninety degrees and reveal a darkened area beyond.

Shaw stepped through the newly-created opening to discover a cramped room. The schoolhouse roof sloped

diagonally downward to reduce the room's size, such that a small dusty table occupied nearly all the available space.

Shaw ducked his head to avoid the rafters – at two inches shorter, Tompkins had no need to – and advanced across the creaking, termite-ridden floorboards to the table. He picked up a prominent scrap of parchment, blew from it a small mountain of dust, and brought it close to his face, the better to make out the faded images.

A map!

* * *

Capt. Edward Sinclair descended a gangplank to Salem harbor. McClintock greeted him with a wave and a gesture towards the town square.

Sinclair leisurely set foot on the docks and cast an approving eye over the *Redoubtable*, the huge man-o'-war from which he had just disembarked. She was a fast ship, for a man-o'-war. With luck he'd be back in Boston before nightfall.

Until then, he had some business to attend to.

* * *

“Egad,” said Tompkins, sounding much like a version of Arthur aged ten or fifteen years.

“There's an “X” somewhere in the northwest of Boston, it's difficult to make out –”

Tompkins peered at the parchment over his spectacles. “Look here, below the map there's a sort of riddle.”

The lower half of the parchment contained the epigraph “Cotton Mather, 1 November 1693”, alongside a block of Latin script.

“If... he...,” began Shaw in broken English, “– no – ‘if you’...”

Tompkins coughed lightly. He ruffled his black scholar’s cloak in almost a preening manner; his intentions couldn’t be plainer.

Shaw gave up. He passed the parchment to Tompkins, growling, “Here, *you* read it.”

Tompkins cleared his throat, clearly pleased. He read crisply and fluidly:

*If thou beist a better man than I
Here is where thou wishest to go.
Beneath the sea, yet it is dry
Where the city’s most low, below, below.*

“Where the city’s most low,” Shaw mused, rubbing his chin in thought. “Low... below... it must refer to... the place in Boston with the lowest elevation!”

“Where could that be?”

Shaw knew only too well “where that could be”, and knew better than to tell a near-stranger, but in his elation he let it slip nonetheless.

“A mansion near Beacon Hill, I’m familiar with it.” As the implications sunk in, Shaw’s face fell somewhat – he muttered to himself, “This means more digging.”

Tompkins’s demeanor likewise grew somber; his face flushed, and sweat gleamed on his forehead. He said hesitantly, “Dr. Shaw... we are scholars, in the business of preserving antiquities. Yet if Mather’s writings are correct, and there is indeed a system of tunnels beneath Boston...

could not this information be very dangerous, in the wrong hands? Might it not be prudent to –” and here he gulped – “destroy the map, now that we have ascertained its contents?”

Shaw smiled. He couldn't help but admire the scholar's advice when it required so much obvious effort – and, for that matter, was obviously correct. *If Sinclair gets this map, he'll not only find the tunnels but our entire base of operations.*

Shaw clapped Tompkins on the shoulder and said, “You're right, you're absolutely right. Still, there's plenty of time. We'll destroy the map later.”

Still shaken from his efforts, Tompkins accidentally dropped the map, which fluttered to the frail floor. He bent to pick it up... slowly.

There was plenty of time.

* * *

Edward Sinclair marched through the streets of Salem, a black traveling cloak swirling behind him. He and his retinue of British soldiers traversed the same route through Town House Square that Shaw had taken fifteen minutes earlier – when they passed a residence with a peeling white picket fence, a matronly woman shrieked “Another raid!” and shuttered a second-story window.

Sinclair ignored her, pressing onwards, ever onwards. For his part, McClintock aimed a sharp kick at the offending woman's fence that caused a section to collapse onto the barren lawn. In two effortless long strides the sergeant caught back up with his master.

Ahead of them stood an ancient building of crumbling brick.

* * *

Two people occupied the building's ground floor. Tompkins's youthful assistant was cleaning a set of rusty iron shackles which had been used to bind accused witches nearly a hundred years ago. Van Dyke, sprawled in a rickety chair that looked none too comfortable with his weight, couldn't conceal his boredom – Fido having wandered off, he fiddled relentlessly with a jar on a cluttered desk.

The jar contained an animal specimen suspended in a clear viscous fluid. As Van Dyke's machinations were growing increasingly vigorous, in order to prevent the specimen's imminent destruction the scholar's assistant cleared his throat to make small talk. He didn't particularly wish to converse with the man, but such are the sacrifices that must be made for the sake of science.

“Pedro, is it?”

“Yes.” Van Dyke's tone could not have been icier, though he did cease his depredations against the specimen jar.

“I'm Daniel.”

A cold silence again descended upon the room. Van Dyke was once more eyeing the specimen jar when Daniel hastily intervened.

“So... have you read the pamphlet by that Thomas Paine fellow?”

“Excuse me?” If possible, Van Dyke's tone grew even icier.

“You know, the one giving reasons why we colonists should seek our independence from Britain. It

calls King George a 'royal brute'." Daniel made a juvenile giggle.

"Never heard of it."

"You've never heard of it?" Daniel showed genuine surprise. "How can you call yourself a scholar? Excuse me, scholar's assistant."

He'd intended the words as a friendly show of solidarity among fellow scholar's assistants, but for some reason "Pedro" didn't take kindly to the term.

Van Dyke looked even more disdainful than usual and said, "Actually, I'm more of a military advisor. I'm a veteran, you know." He attempted to call attention to his walking stick by shifting it across his expansive lap, and succeeded in calling attention to both.

For the first time Daniel felt a sense of respect for the man. "The French and Indian War?"

"Yes."

"My father also fought in that war!" Daniel exclaimed, prompting Van Dyke to twitch nervously. "He told me all about it. How the brave New England volunteers sailed up to the great fortresses in Acadia and captured them from entire regiments of professional soldiers. That's how he won his freedom."

"Ye-es, the French and Indian War. Ah, the memories." Van Dyke now wore a look of distinct discomfort. "I fought on the French side, of course – didn't want side with those dirty Indians."

Daniel abruptly stopped cleaning his shackles. The alleged veteran's reply had revealed a complete lack of knowledge about the conflict.

Then again, "Pedro" was an elderly man and no doubt was just getting forgetful. Daniel resumed his work while mildly correcting the visitor.

“Er, I believe you mean you fought *against* the French side – and *with* the British and your fellow colonists.”

Van Dyke flew into a rage. With no small degree of difficulty he raised his bulk from his chair, brandishing his walking stick. The blunt instrument flailed around and came within a hair’s breadth of upsetting a stack of textbooks, which Daniel hastened to save.

“How *dare* you correct me!” bellowed Van Dyke, red veins throbbing in his thick neck. “It’s damned hard to keep all these 18th-century wars straight! I am a doctor, a war veteran, and a slaveholder! You and your kind will never be free... you and your talk of liberty and your *Common Sense*....”

Daniel spoke quietly: “I don’t think I ever mentioned the name of the pamphlet, sir.”

Each stared at the other a long moment. Daniel broke the tense standoff to begin inching away from the enraged visitor, making for a nearby desk with a partly-open top drawer. Van Dyke wiped a fleck of spittle off his lower lip and visibly calmed himself – when he spoke again it was in sweet, dulcet tones.

“Well, of course the pamphlet’s name is familiar to me,” said Van Dyke in his closest possible approximation to a soothing manner. “It’s been sold everywhere.”

“You said you’d never heard of it.” Daniel edged closer to the desk drawer. Six more inches...

Van Dyke laughed unconvincingly: “Oh, that’s absurd.”

The next events happened very fast.

Daniel lunged for the desk drawer, forced it open, and pulled out an ancient matchlock pistol.

Van Dyke’s sickly-sweet smile turned to a snarl. He lunged for the boy, but couldn’t stop him in time.

Daniel's shaky hands swung around to point the pistol at Van Dyke... and were stopped by an unknown third hand.

Daniel saw that the hand held him firmly by the wrist. He moved his gaze up a red-coated arm to a face – a harsh, sneering face.

* * *

Sinclair gave the boy's wrist a sharp tweak. Amid the ensuing twinge of pain Daniel dropped the pistol, which clattered across the floor. Sinclair motioned at McClintock to retrieve the weapon.

Still tightly clutching Daniel's wrist, Sinclair nodded politely towards an ashen-faced Van Dyke and said, "Good morning, doctor."

"Good morning." Van Dyke was regaining his composure; color came back to his cheeks, returning them to their normal shade of red.

"Where is he?"

A short silence.

"*Where is he?*" spat Sinclair, tightening his hold on the assistant and eliciting a pitiful gurgle. "Don't tell me you've lost him!"

"He, he went upstairs to find the map, with the scholar –"

At that moment, some rotten boards in the ceiling began to creak and buckle downwards – under the clear pressure of someone standing on them from above. Sinclair's features spread themselves into a slow, crafty smile.

He couldn't take action as long as he held the struggling scholar's assistant. To solve this problem

Sinclair again motioned at McClintock; his trusty sergeant rapped the boy on the head with the pistol butt, and Daniel slumped unconscious to the floor.

Sinclair sidled over to the site of the creaking ceiling boards. He climbed onto a desk, his black peak cap brushing against a weak point in the rotten wood.

He prodded the wood with his sword.

* * *

The map room's frail floorboards gave a great shudder and collapsed, taking their two occupants along with them. Shaw lurched across the room, flailed his arms in an unsuccessful attempt to simultaneously keep his balance and his tricorner hat, and at last plunged through to the ground floor. Tompkins followed, his scholar's cap flung wide by the fall.

Shaw blinked rapidly as his eyes acclimated themselves to the increased light, taking in the ancient desks, the heaps of papers... the British soldiers surrounding him with pointed muskets....

He heaved a weary sigh, and reached for his belt. The soldiers tensed, pressing in closer, their bayonets gleaming.

Shaw detached his knife and bitterly placed it in Sinclair's waiting hand.

Appearing extremely self-satisfied, Sinclair remarked, "It always falls to me to treat you rebels humanely. McClintock wanted to set the school afire."

McClintock leered in agreement.

"I've gotta hand it to you, Sinclair," said Shaw, rising to his feet. "How did you find... *us*..."

Shaw's gaze gradually shifted from Sinclair to the man standing alongside him... Dr. Karel Van Dyke. Van Dyke averted eye contact.

"... *You!*" Shaw lunged at the traitorous scoundrel in a blind rage. No less blind than impotent – two soldiers proceeded to cross their muskets, neatly blocking Shaw's path.

Sinclair found the episode highly amusing.

"That's correct; the estimable Dr. Van Dyke is on our side now. He has recognized Royalism for the morally superior cause that it is. Would that you would do the same."

Think. Shaw forced himself to calm down. Tompkins was right; he had to destroy the map.

His mind racing furiously, Shaw flicked his gaze around the schoolhouse. Desks... bookcases... nothing... wait. There. A fireplace.

Shaw began edging towards the fireplace as he replied, "So it's morally right for an island to rule a continent, without giving its people any say in running their affairs?"

"I am not here to debate politics with you, Shaw. Give me the map."

"Oh, it's the map you want? And here I thought you were after an intelligent conversationalist." Shaw curtly nodded at the hulking McClintock – who at first proved slow on the uptake, then scowled in anger – and continued his slow journey to the fireplace.

"Sergeant McClintock may not be adept at small talk, but he *is* adept at inflicting pain. I would advise you most strongly to surrender the map, if you have it."

"I don't have it," Shaw smiled, reaching into his coat pocket. "Not anymore."

He whipped out Mather's map and flung it towards the fireplace.

The map dipped and fluttered and fell to earth, a full ten feet short of the fireplace. The whole room burst into laughter.

Tears streaming down his face, Sinclair staggered towards the fallen map while struggling to form words: "Thank you, Mr. Shaw, for that... *entertaining* demonstration. I think I shall now take my map –" which he did, holding it reverently aloft before tucking it away in his uniform – "and go."

Sinclair swirled his black traveling cloak and was off, out the front door, followed by a bevy of British soldiers. Shaw watched them go in disbelief – *What, are they just leaving?* – before he became aware of the heavy breathing behind him.

With great trepidation Shaw turned around to see the scarred visage of Sgt. Victor McClintock – whom he had just personally insulted – flanked by two of the burliest soldiers he'd ever seen.

McClintock had viciously slammed Shaw against the wall before he could even say "Egad".

* * *

MARCH 10, 1776 9:02 AM

Twenty minutes later, Shaw was covered in bruises and a set of rusty iron shackles, which had been used to bind accused witches nearly a hundred years ago. The bruises would fade with time, but the shackles proved as stubborn as Shaw's oxen back in Pennsylvania. He strained at them to no avail.

McClintock, before departing, had personally tied Shaw up behind the 2x4 grid of bookcases. At the far end of the center aisle Shaw could see the motionless backs of two soldiers, one standing guard by each column of bookcases, bayoneted muskets at the ready.

Tompkins lay tied in a crumpled heap nearby. Shaw whispered, “Any luck with your ropes?”

“Mmm-mmm.” Tompkins struggled and spat out a cloth gag. “There, that’s better. I mean, I am a bit talkative, but that was just completely inappropriate.”

“Look – can you work your way over to that other bookcase?”

“I think so.” Straining against his ropes, Tompkins succeeded in squirming towards the designated bookcase in a curious sort of shuffle. Midway there he craned his neck over his shoulder to add a wry remark:

“Say – you’re not really a scholar, are you?”

“Nope. Sorry to interrupt your studies.”

“Oh, no, I’m not disappointed; I think it’s great fun,” Tompkins said brightly. “General Gage raided the town last year to seize our stocks of gunpowder. I should have known it was you military folk, really.”

“Not quite military... when I give the signal, can you throw your whole weight against the bookcase?”

Tompkins looked flustered. “But it would fall over!”

Shaw made a thin smile and said, “That’s the idea.” He gave the motionless guards a final, appraising look.

“Now!”

Shaw slammed himself against the nearest bookcase, which shuddered and toppled onto the bookcase in the adjacent row. After a moment’s hesitation,

Tompkins followed suit on the other side of the center aisle.

The second bookcase toppled onto the third, which toppled onto the fourth – which toppled onto a guard, squashing him. Shaw sprang to his feet and hurtled forward.

The other guard observed the incoming bookcase from Tompkins's cascade, and managed to leap clear in time. Shaw barreled into him, knocking the guard over and sending his musket clattering a short ways across the floor.

That musket's critical.

The guard apparently agreed, attempting to shake himself free from Shaw's frenzied blows to retrieve the weapon. Shaw couldn't administer much more than weak kicks, due to the shackles that bound his arms. Unable to block, he took a hard punch to the face and started bleeding from the nose.

Through a haze of red Shaw saw that the guard had retrieved the musket... was swinging it around... brandishing the wicked-sharp bayonet.... Shaw lunged forward to bite him on the arm.

Shaw cast the broken shackles aside and in a swift punch knocked the guard unconscious. He was free.

* * *

A man crept towards the schoolhouse along Church Street. He kept his identity hidden with a heavy greatcoat and a hood that swept down over his face. A puff of smoke wafted out from beneath the hood – pipe smoke. A second puff of smoke soon followed, this time the man's breath made visible by the bitter cold.

The man saw a British patrol standing guard outside the schoolhouse's front door. He stopped. Then he resumed walking, changing course towards a spidery tree growing alongside the building.

He climbed the tree, making use of the natural handholds, stealing frequent glances at the front door to ensure that his ascent was proceeding undetected. The soldiers were oblivious.

When the man reached the top of the tree, two loud *thumps* sounded in quick succession from within the schoolhouse. Continuing sounds of a scuffle drifted out the front door. The soldiers rushed inside.

The man followed suit, breaking in feet first through a second-story window to disappear into the darkened schoolhouse.

* * *

Shaw saw the patrol appear in the front doorway. He hastily ducked for cover behind an antique desk, barely daring to breathe as the soldiers moved throughout the room.

The patrol leader saw an unconscious body and prodded it with his foot, frowning. He slowly turned around, and saw Shaw.

Shaw had no time to react... the patrol leader raised a musket... a gunshot echoed throughout the schoolhouse.

The patrol leader slumped to the floor, blood trickling from his mouth. A strange oblong object bounced down the staircase, rolling across the floor towards a cluster of British soldiers. A voice shouted, "Get back!"

Tompkins did just the opposite, leaving his hiding place behind the overturned bookcases to investigate the

commotion. Shaw grabbed the scholar and pulled the two of them down behind the antique desk.

The targeted soldiers returned fire – and moments later were consumed by a small explosion. A second gunshot from the staircase had detonated the strange object, blowing out all the windows on the first floor and eliminating half the British patrol.

The remaining three soldiers were knocked back by the force of the explosion, but soon recovered and concealed themselves behind various flaming heaps of junk. They directed their musket fire at a location halfway up the staircase.

“Someone’s come to rescue us,” exclaimed Tompkins, “how exciting. Wh–what are you doing?”

“Covering for him.” Shaw had moved to the edge of the desk – he wished he knew the identity of his mysterious rescuer, but resolved to provide help in any way possible. During a lull in the shooting, he sprang out from behind the desk and made his way around the perimeter of the room, drawing the attention of one soldier.

The soldier moved towards Shaw, raising a musket. His head pounding, Shaw charged towards his adversary and wrested away the musket and used its butt to knock its former owner unconscious.

A chair crashed down on the back of Shaw’s head. Shaw contorted his face in pain; with a tremendous effort he fought through the blinding flashes of light and turned around to face his attacker. The second remaining soldier, who had shrewdly taken advantage of Shaw’s distraction.

The soldier pressed his advantage, moving in with his bayonet at close quarters. Shaw narrowly dodged the bayonet’s thrust, rolling to the side while scooping up a handful of dust. He flung the dust into the soldier’s eyes.

Having bought himself a moment's respite, Shaw took hold of a wooden stick that had until recently been a chair leg. He blindly swung the chair leg, and missed. He swung again, and connected – with an antique lamp, which shattered and sprayed shards of glass everywhere.

He swung the chair leg a third time, and this time met with success. The soldier fell back amid successive poundings from the blunt weapon, which soon became tinged with blood. Shaw drew back for the finishing blow.

The blow arrived, but this time the soft sound of wood meeting flesh was inaudible – overshadowed by the crack of a gunshot. Shaw heard a faint groan, then a body tumbling down the staircase. His rescuer had been shot!

He mentally cursed himself – he'd forgotten all about the last remaining soldier. Having just fired a shot, the soldier was helpless; Shaw hastily dispatched him with the chair leg, which snapped in half at this latest indignity. Shaw unceremoniously tossed the broken weapon aside while running to the prostrate body at the foot of the stairs.

The man lay on his side, a dark red stain spreading over his upper right arm. Somehow Shaw knew the man's identity before seeing his face.... Tallmadge.

* * *

Tallmadge looked up through weak gray eyes, his face contorted and gleaming with sweat. He croaked, "Don't worry, I'll be all right. It's not my sword arm."

"You shouldn't have come here," Shaw cried. He didn't know what else to say.

"I had to. Sinclair found us out, somehow... placed the entire town of Salem under armed watch... you were walking right into a trap, I had to come help you."

“Well, you did. How’d you make that explosion?”

Despite his pitiable condition, Tallmadge couldn’t conceal his pride. He began rummaging in his coat with his left hand.

“Ah! The answer lies with a special device of my own making. Compressed black powder, tamped down in a paper cartridge saturated with liquid saltpeter to create an explosive charge. Here is another.” Tallmadge produced a familiar oblong object, which he strained to pass upwards to Shaw. “I will teach you how to make them later, at a... more opportune time.”

Shaw took the detonator, tucking it away in his left coat pocket. “Thanks.”

“I must ask... did you retrieve the map?”

“Yes! Well... no. Sinclair has it.” Shaw saw his mentor’s shoulders slump in dismay, and hastened to add, “But only because of Van Dyke!”

“That’s *Doctor* Van Dyke, and I don’t see what he has to do with it –”

Shaw showed genuine astonishment. “Don’t you know? He turned traitor!”

Tallmadge’s features grew pale, almost ashen, as the blood and very vitality seemed to drain from his face. Here was a man who had trusted another utterly, and news of the betrayal came as a staggering blow. He croaked, “Are you – are you quite certain?”

Shaw nodded vigorously. He resisted the temptation to say, *I told you so*.

Tallmadge groaned, turning his head away. “Go... leave me...”

Shaw had expected Tallmadge to take the news badly, but not this badly. He said patiently, “I can’t leave you. You’re hurt.”

“Mine is but one life. Thousands of others are at stake. Go...”

Shaw stared at Tallmadge with utter incredulity. “Are you saying,” he said slowly, “that I should – go after the map?”

To all appearances Tallmadge remained in great pain, but his face concealed a small smile. “Of course not,” he said. “Sinclair has brought half the Royal Navy with him. You can’t chase down an entire fleet... that’s impossible.”

Shaw had been thinking the exact same thing himself – *impossible, utterly impossible*. But he somehow felt disappointed in his mentor’s lack of gumption, a disappointment which he expressed through a flash of anger:

“Don’t tell me what I can’t do!”

“You’re right... forgive me, I couldn’t help myself... I think of you as a son to me...”

Shaw’s anger intensified. He growled, “I’m not your son.”

“Yes, I know. Leave me. I’ll be all right.”

“You’d *better* be all right,” said Shaw, rising to his feet. “I’ve got to leave. I’ve got to recover that map.”

Shaw stormed off, picking up a satchel containing his confiscated weapons and striding to the merrily burning front door. He paused in the doorway; Tompkins had only now emerged from hiding, surrounded by the ruins of his schoolhouse, timidly raising an arm in farewell.

Shaw gave the scholar a curt nod of thanks. He stalked out the front door and slammed it behind him.

* * *

MARCH 10, 1776 9:09 AM

Shaw jogged away from the schoolhouse. The fresh air lifted his spirits, but he remained angry at Tallmadge – he couldn't shake the feeling that the old man had manipulated him, somehow. He shook his head, trying to remember the way back to the harbor.

He almost collided with a British patrol that rounded the corner from Lynde Street. *Not that way.* Ignoring the soldiers' shouted warnings, Shaw darted down an alley in hopes of avoiding the nuisance.

How many British patrols are there in this town? Shaw turned right to enter the back lot of a residential complex. Soldiers hot on his heels, he vaulted over a partially collapsed white picket fence, sprinted across a desolate garden, and jumped up to seize the edge of a balcony.

Two soldiers paused at the mouth of the alley to fire their muskets. They missed; Shaw continued pulling himself upwards through a railing.

Another soldier sped through a gate in the picket fence and grabbed hold of Shaw's ankles. Shaw kicked outwards to dislodge the man, then finally hauled himself atop the balcony floor.

The persistent soldier followed suit, jumping up to cling to the edge. Shaw was tempted to step on his fingers, but chose to act honorably – by waiting for the soldier to finish climbing up, then greeting him with a swift punch to the jaw. The soldier toppled into the garden.

Another musket shot narrowly missed him, shattering the glass of a window behind him. Shaw's eyes flicked from the broken window to the soldier-infested alleyway to a shuttered window above an adjacent balcony.

He tensed himself and leaped laterally to the adjacent balcony, then to a vine-covered trellis mounted on the residence's exterior wall. He began scaling the trellis, which gave out when he was just below the roofline.

Shaw clambered onto the roof. He gave the collapsing trellis a helping hand, tipping the wooden framework onto the ground below. It slowly landed atop a soldier.

“Good luck getting through that.”

From his vantage point atop the roof, Shaw was finally able to scope out his surroundings. A cluster of tightly-packed buildings ending at the South River, where he'd find the harbor. Two rooftops south.

Fighting the chilly wind, Shaw jogged down the sloping tile roof and leaped across to the adjacent roof, that of a church.

Below him, the British patrol had barged into the residence and charged up the stairs, over the furious protests of a matronly woman: “Privacy rights, they're in English common law! You brutes!”

The thusly-accused brutes emerged through a trapdoor onto the rooftop. One of them pointed south, at the silhouette of a man with a tricorner hat.

A heavysset soldier opened fire, but missed and shattered a window in the church steeple. He then quick-stepped to the roof's edge and jumped across to the church, the other soldiers following in turn.

Shaw had already leaped to the next building – or tried to. The riverside warehouse was over nine yards from the church; he just barely managed to grab hold of the rooftop's edge, fingers scraping against the cold metal of the rain gutter, feet dangling in midair.

Several soldiers trained their muskets on the helpless fugitive, but held back. The heavysset soldier had

plunged ahead to land alongside Shaw, and any gunshot would run the risk of friendly fire.

The soldier instigated a scuffle. One hand stayed on the rain gutter, while the other lashed out at Shaw. Grunting, Shaw released his own right hand from the gutter in an effort to defend himself.

The soldier drew ever closer to Shaw's face, straining, attempting to gouge out the fugitive's eyes. "You won't get away that easy," he growled.

Shaw grimaced, struggling to hold onto the rain gutter with his free left hand.

"You call this easy?"

He kned his adversary in the groin. The heavysset soldier fell open-mouthed onto a stack of shipping crates, which collapsed under him.

The risk of friendly fire gone, the soldiers on the church rooftop began shooting at the gutter. Shaw hastily returned his right hand to the gutter, hauled himself onto the warehouse roof, and ducked behind a brick chimney to relative safety.

One soldier had found a ladder, which he held at one end while the other patrol members pushed it towards the warehouse. The ladder swung in a downward arc to land on the adjacent rooftop, bridging the divide and allowing the soldiers to pour across.

They ascended the warehouse roof to witness a remarkable sight. A panorama of Salem harbor, with a distant British fleet sailing towards the open sea, and a nearby rebel fugitive crouching at the far end of the rooftop. To the soldiers' amazement, he proceeded to leap off the edge.

Shaw landed with a *splash* in the harbor and began swimming arm over arm away from shore, gunfire raking the water around him. He soon reached the one-man

sailboat in which he'd arrived in Salem not forty minutes earlier. He slashed the mooring rope, then treaded water while waiting for the boat to pick up speed, positioning himself so the hull shielded him from the continuing musket fire.

A brisk wind filled the boat's sails, moving it towards the open ocean. He hauled himself over the gunwale into the cockpit.

Dripping wet, Shaw looked back at the receding town of Salem. He spotted a congregation of red-coated soldiers atop the warehouse roof and an uncontrollable grin spread across his face.

To them, he waved a hearty farewell.

Chapter 7
THE ADMIRAL

MARCH 10, 1776 9:12 AM

Shaw allowed himself to relax, but only for a moment. Still grinning, he turned around, swung the boom into position, and climbed the short mast to fix the mainsail. While atop the mast he enjoyed a full view of the horizon ahead – and his heart sank.

He faced half the British fleet. Six ships in all: five of them frigates, lightly armed for escort duty but still imposing in their own right. The sixth ship gave him pause – what the British called a ship of the line, and their unfortunate opponents called a man-o’-war. None had ever been defeated in combat.

Shaw made for the man-o’-war. The giant flagship was surrounded by the frigates in a protective formation, indicating that Sinclair and the stolen map were aboard. Shaw’s boat set a course to intercept the fleet from the

southeast, interposing itself between the man-o'-war and the open sea.

A lookout atop the lead frigate spotted him, shouting the news down to the main deck: "Ship ahoy!" The frigate's alarm bell sounded and its deck began swarming with sailors; the ship changed course to bear down directly on Shaw's sailboat.

Shaw hastily tightened the clew, sending his boat out of the frigate's path by the narrowest of margins. The frigate's hull missed him by mere inches, throwing up a churning wake that battered the smaller vessel.

The frigate's captain, a ruddy fellow, set his thick jaw and barked an order to his first mate.

"Starboard turn."

The first mate relayed the message, and the frigate banked around in a wide turn. As they prepared to make a second pass the first mate said, "Cap'n, might we be overreactin'? One man can't destroy an entire fleet... that's impossible!"

Indeed, this time Shaw had run out of maneuvering room – once the frigate completed its turn, his boat seemed done for. The frigate's captain clapped his first mate heartily on the back, breaking into a triumphant smile. His target grew so close that he could almost see the expression on the rebel's face.

The rebel was standing up in his boat, performing a mock salute! The captain's smile turned to a frown – what could the little scoundrel have to be so damned happy about?

Then the captain's frown turned to a look of sheer panic. The rebel's maneuvering had placed the ship on a collision course with the fleet's neighboring frigate!

"Change course!" the captain barked, but the faint tremor in his voice betrayed his grim knowledge that it was

too late. The ship's wheel spun furiously, its connecting ropes shooting downwards at a frightening speed – though not quite fast enough. As the frigate came out of its wide turn, its prow slowly plowed into the gunwale of its neighboring ship.

The captain's last-second order spared Shaw's boat, but also averted a catastrophic head-on collision with the other frigate. Shaw looked on with mixed feelings – the two ships were now incapacitated, though not destroyed. Five remained.

Aboard the largest ship, Rear Admiral Samuel Graves watched the two frigates' slow collision with increasing horror. He lowered his spyglass, unable to bear the sight any longer, allowing himself small solace in the fact that neither ship had sustained a crippling blow. He nervously said to the helmsman, "At least both frigates still appear to be seaworthy."

"Aye, for now."

"For now...?" The admiral looked out across the bow, instinctively raising his spyglass in horror – then awkwardly lowering the instrument upon realizing its target was too close to require magnification.

The collision had left the two frigates dead in the water, their entangled mass clogging the route ahead... ever closer to the oncoming man-o'-war....

The admiral whapped the helmsman's shoulder with a white glove while shrieking, "Turn! Turn! What are you doing, you useless oaf, turn the ship!"

"I am, Admiral Graves, sir," the helmsman said stolidly, indicating that he'd already rotated the ship's wheel far to port. "The *Redoubtable*, she's the largest ship in the fleet. You know well as I, she needs ages to turn. Prob'ly have to reef the topsail, an' that takes a good two minutes."

Admiral Graves backed down. Unable to stand idly by and watch the imminent disaster unfold, he left the helm cabin without another word. His heart raced furiously, a thin frown etched across his pale face.

The admiral brushed past a pair of Royal Marines guarding the cabin, who gave him salutes that he didn't return. He rushed down a short set of steps to the main deck, his hand picking up splinters from sliding along the banister. He didn't notice. He had to tell Sinclair.

Sinclair was leaning coolly over the *H.M.S. Redoubtable's* starboard railing, taking in the luxurious fresh sea air whose breeze carried with it a delicious touch of sea spray. Admiral Graves scurried up to him, avoiding his two companions: a cripple and a giant.

"Captain Sinclair, sir," the admiral gasped. "We've encountered a small problem –"

A massive tremor rocked the *Redoubtable* to the depths of its hold, sending the four men reeling against the railing. The man-o'-war plowed through the entangled frigates, snapping two of the Royal Navy's finest ships in half like so many twigs.

A trembling Van Dyke clutched his walking stick for support. He asked, "What was that?"

"Two of our ships have been maneuvered into a collision –"

Sinclair peremptorily cut the admiral off; he knew Van Dyke for the sort of weak man who requires constant encouragement, even that of the false variety. "As the admiral said, it is but a minor difficulty. Some type of navigational error."

The *Redoubtable* traveled past the crash site, and Admiral Graves raised his spyglass to survey the damage.

The two frigates lay in utter ruin, their shattered hulls already sinking into the sea, chunks of wreckage

strewn about the turbulent waters. Three frigates remained, flanking their flagship during its continuing flight from the now-distant spires of Salem. The admiral's spyglass scanned the scene – he saw movement.

The spyglass slowly lowered one last time. The admiral's hands were shaking. Sinclair drew alongside him with trepidation... the admiral pointed....

There, skimming lightly along the waves, a small one-man sailboat pursued the man-o'-war! The ocean swelled, battering the boat's small frame, but unable to stop its dogged pursuit.

Admiral Graves expressed mild bemusement. For his part, Sinclair gripped the *Redoubtable's* railing so tightly that his knuckles turned white, his face a study in raw fear.

A fear wholly irrational. Sinclair fought off his instinctive urge to flee, disgusted with himself. He regained his composure and snarled, "Shaw."

* * *

MARCH 10, 1776 *9:18 AM*

Ben Shaw closed in on the man-o'-war. The immense 84-gun ship left a broad wake that caused his own one-man sailboat to sway violently. Shaw tightened the mainsail to draw level with the larger ship, determined to sink it.

If the man-o'-war reached Boston then thousands of people would die.

A creaking sound emitted from the behemoth's side as 42 portholes swung open and 42 cannons simultaneously protruded from the starboard hull. The cannons erupted as

one, sending a first deadly volley towards the pursuing sailboat.

Through deft maneuvering Shaw managed to evade the cannonballs – even one direct hit would capsize him – but his escapes were fast growing narrower as the gunning crews found their range. He tacked towards the enemy ship. The gunners couldn't aim at a target directly below them.

The ship's chief gunner scrambled up the aft hatch and approached Admiral Graves. After a routine salute, he reported, "Only a sailboat. But it's so small it's avoiding our cannon fire."

"He can't hope to single-handedly sink a man-o'-war," sputtered the admiral, "that's impossible!"

The gunner shrugged. "We're not accustomed to targeting such small vessels."

Sinclair snapped, "I am." He drew a flintlock pistol, leaned out over the railing, and fired at the boat below.

Shaw ducked behind the sailboat's lone mast for cover. Sinclair's gunshot struck the place his enemy had just vacated, puncturing a hole in the mainsail. The sail began to deflate. The man-o'-war began to pull ahead.

Shaw drew his own pistol and held it up against the mast. He tensed himself, adjusted the brim of his tricorner hat, then whipped around the mast and fired. Sinclair's black peak cap flew off his head – a ridiculous sight, though none dared laugh. Shaw shouted up at him.

"You're going under, Sinclair!"

Clenching his teeth in suppressed fury, Sinclair nonetheless looked down on his adversary with a sense of bemusement. The colonial simply had no chance. None at all. With a wave of his hand, Sinclair summoned the man-

o'-war's contingent of Royal Marines.... who lined the railing and opened fire.

Not good. Shaw, heavily outnumbered and with a damaged boat, moved back behind the mast and started looking for a way out. And the only way out was in.

Shaw's hand closed on an object in his left coat pocket. Tallmadge's detonator would have to prove its worth now – if he could get it to work.

A small paper flap jutted out of the detonator at an awkward angle. Shaw folded it over to reveal a short twine fuse, in the process spilling a few grains of gunpowder onto the deck.

Now to light it. Shaw reluctantly regarded his spent pistol – no use to him now, since the Marines' withering hail of fire left him no time to reload it. He smashed the gunstock against the mast. He could repair the weapon later; for now, he salvaged its flintlock ignition mechanism.

Shaw struck the small piece of flint against the damaged pistol's metal handle. No spark. He tried again. This time a faint spark flew – only to succumb to a wave which washed over the boat.

The wave drenched the detonator, making its gunpowder a soggy mess. A cannon shot narrowly missed the boat to send up a jet of seawater, further soaking the powder and leaving it useless beyond all doubt.

Shaw cursed under his breath. He had but moments... he upturned his eyes to the heavens... his hand somehow found its way to his right coat pocket.

Another detonator! *Praise the Lord.* Shaw fumbled to fold back the irritating paper flap, then hastily rubbed the pistol butt dry and struck the flint against it. This time he produced a spark on the first try.

Shaw slapped the smoldering charge against the hull of the *Redoubtable*. He sprinted to the edge of his own

craft and dove overboard seconds before a lucky cannon shot blew it to bits.

Shaw and his sailboat disappeared behind a large wave less than two feet from the ship's hull. The British onlookers watched the wreckage drift back into view – empty. The admiral triumphantly exclaimed, “We got him!” Van Dyke's dog added a yip for emphasis.

Sinclair drew a quick breath. He turned to his right-hand-man and said grimly, “McClintock, take these Marines and go below decks, to the hold.” McClintock saluted, proceeding towards the fore hatchway accompanied by three heavysset Marines.

Seconds later a small explosion ripped through the man-o'-war's hull, rocking it from stem to stern. The great ship shuddered and began to sink.

* * *

Shaw swam arm over arm towards the newly-blown hole in the *Redoubtable's* hull. He dragged himself inside and narrowed his eyes to scope out his surroundings.

The hold. A storage area, littered with crates of biscuits, barrels of powder, and sand that served as ballast. A rope suspended an iron hook from the ceiling, connecting to a hoist mechanism used for moving the cargo. At the far end of the hold a stairwell rose to the next level.

Muted shouts echoed from the stairwell, as did the harsh patter of descending footsteps. *Company*. Shaw shook himself dry and found cover.

A Marine emerged from the stairwell, then a second, then a third. Then a fourth, but this man was no Marine.

Sgt. Victor McClintock strode forward, casting a contemptuous glance at the gush of seawater flowing through the hole in the hull. With two swift motions of his hand he motioned the Marines forward to search the hold.

The Marines fanned out and advanced cautiously. One of them held aloft a torch that moved about to illuminate the hold's dark nooks and crannies, though finding no sign of an intruder.

A large wave crashed through the hole, swallowing up a pile of powder barrels and knocking the nearest Marine off balance. Seconds later he collapsed to the floor, Shaw having dropped from the ceiling on top of him.

Seawater sloshed about their feet. A second Marine rushed to the scene, whom Shaw dispatched with a quick left-right combination.

The first Marine recovered and approached from behind. Shaw jerked his right elbow backwards to catch his adversary in the jaw, then whirled around while grabbing a biscuit off a nearby crate.

No need; the Marine fell unconscious. *One left.*

This one brandished his torch as a weapon, swinging it from side to side to create a curtain of flame. Shaw smiled wanly and said, "Have a biscuit."

The rock-hard biscuit struck the Marine right between the eyes, causing him to drop the torch.

Shaw leaped atop a stack of crates, grabbed hold of the dangling iron hook, and swung to safety just as the torch collided with the floating powder barrels.

* * *

The *Redoubtable* trembled under the impact of the explosion. A pyramid of cannonballs disintegrated and

rolled loose across the main deck – Sinclair struggled to stay on his feet, while at this Admiral Graves tried and failed.

* * *

The explosion also widened the hole in the man-o'-war's already-battered hull. Seawater now poured into the hold at a rapid clip; Shaw made for the stairwell, casting a hurried look back at the fruits of his labor.

He ran square into McClintock! *Forgot about him.* The hulking sergeant caught hold of Shaw by the wrist and leered, “Just what I was looking for. An intelligent conversationalist.”

Shaw struggled to break free, receiving his wish when McClintock slammed him against the stack of crates. “I recall you wanted to debate politics,” said McClintock. “I’m willing to grant last requests.”

Shaw staggered to his feet only to be brutally thrown back. This time he landed in the rising pool of seawater.

“Water, all around. A small island rules a continent, because that continent is unfit to rule itself – unwilling to pay the taxes for its own well-being.”

McClintock hefted a crate – the sort of crate that ordinary men required a hoist to lift – and hurled it at Shaw. It smashed against his bruised back.

“Those taxes are going to good causes. Worthy causes.”

Shaw groped for the broken crate's contents and flung them back at his attacker. A rock-hard biscuit struck McClintock right between the eyes, where it disintegrated. McClintock didn't even notice.

“Like warships. Britain builds them for a reason. Who else will defend you from the French and the Indians?”

McClintock plunged forward into the water and punched Shaw in the stomach. Shaw doubled over, his open mouth forming a silent expression of pain.

“You say it’s freedom you want, but there’s no freedom without security.”

Water surged through the shattered hull, filling the hold to dangerous levels. Shaw began limping for the stairwell. McClintock grabbed him by the ankle, and he fell flat on his face.

“Not that it matters. You can’t possibly win.”

McClintock forcibly stood Shaw erect, the better to knock him back down again. The sergeant closed in, drawing his saber.

“You’re alone – all alone against the full might of the British Empire.”

“All we want is to be left alone.” Shaw crab-walked backwards past a precarious pile of tar barrels. As McClintock raised his gleaming saber, a stream of tar coated the floor in front of him.

McClintock paused in confusion. “What...?”

Shaw tipped over another tar barrel, setting off a small avalanche that submerged the sergeant in a sticky black mess. Only McClintock’s sword arm remained free; Shaw reached forward to pluck the weapon from his hands.

“I was wrong,” said Shaw. “You were an excellent conversationalist.”

Shaw disappeared up the stairs. McClintock stared after the departing agent through bulging eyes, until at last he was consumed by the unrelenting tide of the sea.

* * *

Shaw jogged up the cramped stairwell, tucking the captured saber away in his belt for safekeeping, frantically piecing together his limited fragments of maritime knowledge to determine the probable layout of a British man-o'-war. He'd now be approaching... the crew's quarters? The galley? The fo'c's'le? *What the hell is a fo'c's'le, anyway?*

A gunshot barely missed him. Shaw whirled around to see a narrow doorway leading to a room with long flat tables, hanging braziers, and a huge keg of rum. Behind the nearest table, a man in a poofy white chef's hat held a smoking pistol in one hand and a butcher's knife in the other.

The galley, then. Shaw squeezed through the doorway and rushed the belligerent cook.

That was a mistake – three sailors lay in wait around the corner. Shaw skidded to a halt. A sailor said, “You’ve had a good run, mate, but now it’s over. Done in by the lowly cook.”

The sailors closed in, one wielding a broken bottle, one a plank with a nail driven through it, one a sturdy rope with which to tie up the impending prisoner.

Shaw's eyes darted upwards to the ceiling. When the sailors were almost upon him, he leaped forward and rebounded off the nearest table to grab hold of a hanging brazier.

The brazier, unable to support a man's weight, came loose in his hands! Shaw fell heavily atop the table, which collapsed under him. The sailors broke into raucous laughter – the shortest one raised a mug of rum in an ironic toast to Shaw's doomed effort, and took a drink.

Shaw forced a smile as he extricated himself from the shattered table and flaming brazier. His hand made contact with something. A rum bottle.

Shaw got to his feet, raised the bottle aloft, and said, "To England." The shortest sailor showed surprise at having his toast returned, an emotion that soon faded away when Shaw smashed the bottle on his head.

"And to the long friendship our two countries may share."

The two conscious sailors snarled and charged him. Shaw picked up a wooden chair which he used to deflect the attack, then dropped the chair and sprinted across a tabletop towards the back of the room. He reached relative safety behind the huge keg of rum.

Shaw scanned his surroundings: pots, pans, a greasy food preparation counter. Nothing appealing. And not much time – the sailors were advancing on him again, while the seawater had made its way up the stairwell to cover the galley an inch deep.

Shaw settled on a mug that he grabbed off the counter. He rebuked the sailors: "You didn't let me finish my toast."

He brought down the mug onto the keg's spigot, snapping it off to send a torrent of rum at the sailors. Immediately thereafter he vaulted over the counter and crouched behind it.

The rum-soaked sailors tried to press on, though the tallest one seemed more preoccupied with licking his forearm. The cook raised his butcher's knife in a rallying cry, only to abruptly freeze upon seeing a horrifying sight.

The stream of rum had almost approached the flaming brazier....

* * *

Four yards directly overhead, Sinclair struggled to stay on his feet amid the ensuing explosion. This time he failed. Mather's map flew out of his hands as he sprawled across the deck.

"What are you looking at?" a red-faced Sinclair bellowed at a group of Marines. "Get more men belowdecks!"

* * *

The grating over the *Redoubtable's* aft hatchway slid aside. Shaw poked up his head and scanned the main deck in time to see a column of Marines descend the fore hatchway. Smiling, he pulled himself onto the deck. The fresh sea air came as a welcome relief.

He'd emerged near the *Redoubtable's* mizzenmast. A stern of the mast was a small cabin containing the ship's wheel – a pair of square-jawed Marines guarded the cabin's open door, with two additional guards serving lookout duty above them on the poop deck.

They hadn't yet seen Shaw, thanks to the cover provided by the mizzenmast. Shaw noticed a heavy oak cleat attached to the mast's side. A hard tug and the cleat came loose – Shaw threw it at one of the lookouts, who tumbled off the poop deck.

The Marines rushed to their fallen comrade's aid. Shaw emerged from behind the mast, boldly striding up the steps to the cabin as if he owned the place. He grimly nodded at the wounded lookout, lips pursed in thoughtful concern, easing his way around the surrounding Marines through the door.

The door slammed, and only then did the Marines do a double-take. They began using their musket butts to pound the door down.

Shaw hastily dragged a heavy sea-chest into place to barricade the door, then turned to face the wheel.

The helmsman stood with his back to the door, obliviously staring through a broad window slit at the sea beyond. He asked, "That you, Admiral?"

Shaw threw him through the window slit. "No, actually."

Shaw approached the ship's wheel, looking off the stern to see one floundering helmsman and three pursuing frigates. The nearest frigate was drawing up along the *Redoubtable's* port side.

He jerked the wheel to the left. The *Redoubtable* swung to port in a slow arc that led it directly into the approaching frigate.

* * *

The frigate's hull crumpled under the impact of the larger ship's prow. The *Redoubtable's* occupants tried to keep their balance during the unexpected turn and subsequent collision.

"Shaw has taken control of the helm!" exclaimed Admiral Graves.

Sinclair snarled his reply: "Get more men on deck!"

* * *

Shaw jerked the ship's wheel back to the right. The *Redoubtable* yawed to starboard – straight into the path of

another frigate, forcing it to veer off course onto a sandbank.

Just one more. Shaw allowed himself a smile.

A Marine throttled him from behind. Gasping for breath, Shaw staggered away from the wheel to see a recently-opened side door leading down to the captain's quarters. *Carelessness, sheer carelessness.*

Shaw flung himself backwards, slamming his attacker against the cabin wall. He threw a punch at the winded Marine, but missed and hit the wall.

Wincing, Shaw dodged the Marine's counterattack and began to draw McClintock's saber. Then he stopped. A sudden lurch in the driverless ship sent the heavy sea-chest sliding across the floor, away from the main cabin door.

Shaw scrambled to replace the sea-chest, fending off a series of blows along the way. He succeeded, though noting with dismay that the battered door couldn't hold out much longer.

"There's not much room aboard these ships," remarked Shaw. "It's kind of cramped in here."

The Marine lifted Shaw by his shirt collar and shoved him against the ship's wheel. The wheel spun crazily. Objects throughout the *Redoubtable* lost their balance and slid to one side of the ship – including the Marine.

Shaw darted towards the flustered Marine and tossed him through the window slit. "That's better."

Shaw frowned. The *Redoubtable's* latest jolt had again dislodged the sea-chest, leaving the main cabin door on the brink of collapse... meanwhile, footsteps pounded up the stairs from the captain's quarters....

The door burst open and Marines flooded the cabin. They viewed the abandoned ship's wheel with bemusement.

Shaw was gone!

One Marine paced to the window slit and looked down. Nothing.

* * *

Not far above him, Shaw crouched on the man-o'-war's stern. He crawled upwards to put distance between himself and the window slit. Out of view from any point on the *Redoubtable*, he felt safe for the time being.

Shaw lifted a hand to shield his eyes against the sun. A piercing glint of light flashed from the deck of the *Redoubtable's* sole remaining frigate escort.

The light reflected off a spyglass held by the frigate's captain. The captain lowered his spyglass from the man-o'-war's stern, frowning. He shouted an order to his crew, who proceeded to line the frigate's railing and wave their arms in an effort to capture their flagship's attention.

At this they failed; Admiral Graves, staring idly out over the *Redoubtable's* starboard railing, remained steadfastly preoccupied with a neighboring flock of seagulls. Frustrated, the frigate's captain barked orders that sent his crew scurrying up the rigging to hoist a series of signal flags.

Admiral Graves awoke from his reverie with a start. He called out to Sinclair, who was busy berating a group of Royal Marines.

“A signal! We'd best fetch the code-book.”

Sinclair abandoned the Marines and rushed to the railing alongside the admiral. “No need,” he told the admiral, “I know the signals by heart.”

Graves wordlessly surrendered his spyglass, which Sinclair used to scan the signal flags of the adjacent frigate.

“Colonial... on... stern.”

Sinclair lowered the spyglass and turned to face the intimidated Marines. “You are forgiven,” he said, “this time. Get him.”

The Marines saluted and quick-stepped up the stairs to the poop deck. Shaw, lifting his head over the edge of the stern, anxiously watched them approach. His cover was blown – if only he’d been able to incapacitate that last remaining frigate. *Ah well, that’s next on the agenda.*

Shaw hauled himself onto the poop deck and drew his saber, slashing at the closest Marines to keep them at bay. He then cut the mizzen topgallant backstay. As the Marines looked on in amazement, Shaw swung on the rope over their heads.

He soared halfway across the ship, hitting the main deck near a cannon on the starboard railing. Soon afterwards the mizzenmast followed suit, slowly collapsing onto the deck now that its rigging support had been removed.

Shaw rolled out of the landing. His tricorner hat had fallen off, but he lacked the time to retrieve it – a bewildered gunner stood right beside him. He stabbed the gunner, snatched away the man’s smoldering blackmatch, and touched it to the cannon’s fuse.

The cannon roared, recoiling from the force of a shot that struck the remaining frigate squarely on the hull. The frigate reeled from the blow. *Sweet revenge.*

The Marines rushed to intercept Shaw, who vaulted over the artillery carriage cannon and ran to an adjacent

cannon near the *Redoubtable*'s mainmast. He slashed the cannon restraint rope with his right hand and lit the fuse with his left. Another shot struck the frigate.... while the unrestrained cannon flew backwards into the mainmast.

The mast cracked, splintered, and finally fell. Several sailors couldn't get out of the way in time and were crushed against the starboard railing.

* * *

Sinclair ignored the injured sailors, stalking away from the railing to stride through the wreckage. Cannons destroyed, masts overturned, small fires burning throughout the deck. Pathetic.

He did a double-take. Fires? There they were, gradually spreading towards the *Redoubtable*'s bow – and its powder stores. He whirled around and shouted at two uninjured sailors, “Put out those fires! Use the drinking water if you have to!”

Through the smoke they saw a blue-coated man sprinting for the bow. “He can't sink a British man-o'-war,” Sinclair muttered to himself, “that's impossible.”

Sinclair set off in pursuit, fingering his sword. The powder stores exploded.

He ran faster.

* * *

Shaw reached the bow first. He approached the capstan – a rotating mechanism that controlled the ship's anchor – and cut its restraint rope, causing the mechanism to spin wildly as the anchor descended.

The anchor hit bottom. The sudden change in momentum tore the man-o'-war in half.

* * *

Amidships, the Marines scrambled to leap over the newly-opened chasm between the two halves of the *Redoubtable*. They arrived at the ship's bow and met up with Sinclair.

Sinclair, having found the bow vacant, was already doubling back to the starboard railing. He shouted at the Marines, "Don't worry; he's run out of space. We've got him."

* * *

Shaw held Admiral Graves at swordpoint beside the starboard railing. He said quietly, "You're in charge here. Where's the map?"

"I – I don't have it. A junior officer has it –"

Shaw seized the quivering admiral by the scruff of the neck and slammed him against the railing, tilting his head precariously over the edge. The admiral's hat flew off into the sea.

Shaw growled, "*Who* has it?"

"Sinclair, Captain Sinclair. There!" The frightened admiral stared behind Shaw, who swiveled his head to follow his captive's gaze.

Capt. Edward Sinclair held a drawn sword pointed at Shaw's backside.

"How inspiring," said Sinclair. "A lone agent single-handedly taking on an entire British fleet in the name of freedom."

Shaw released the admiral and advanced on his enemy with drawn sword.

“Give me the map.”

Their swords clashed, once. Then Sinclair broke into laughter, stepping backwards into the ranks of his congregating Marines.

“My dear boy,” he said, wiping away tears, “if that’s what you’re after, I’m afraid your efforts have been in vain. Here is your precious map,” he continued, taking the parchment from his red coat and holding it aloft, “which I along with two subordinates have already committed to memory.”

Shaw felt his mission’s prospects sinking faster than the *Redoubtable*. He still allowed himself a glimmer of hope: *the blackguard might be bluffing*. He said, “If the map’s so worthless, why don’t you let me have it.”

“Oh, rest assured you may study the map all you wish. In captivity. Guards?” Sinclair motioned for the surrounding Marines to seize the intruder.

Shaw wasn’t about to give up that easily. He stepped forward, initiating a thrust with his saber – but Sinclair deftly stepped aside and the weapon struck nothing but air.

Sinclair smirked. “A duel? Not a chance. Unlike some people I could mention, *I don’t take needless risks.*”

The Marines ventured closer. Shaw’s eyes darted towards the foremast, the rigging, even the railing – *the ship’s all but sunk, I can still get out of this.*

“‘Needless’? Your ship’s a wreck, you’ve no way to return to Boston in time –”

Shaw trailed off. His gaze had settled on the horizon.

A whole new British fleet was arriving on the scene, fresh from Boston. Shaw stared and stared. He mumbled, "Oh, shit."

Captured.

It can't be. I've won the fight, single-handed.

Captured.

Maybe single-handed isn't good enough...

Shaw's shoulders slumped, and he felt a sense of unimaginable weariness. He offered no resistance to the Marines who seized him.

One Marine, who held a tricorner hat that had fallen off during the fighting, regarded the captive with respect.

Captured.

The Marine placed the hat on Shaw's head.

Chapter 8
THE HERO

MARCH 11, 1776

Shaw adjusted the brim of his hat, then mopped his sweating brow. He lifted a pickaxe to resume pounding at a slab of hardened earth abutting the floor.

A misty shaft of light streamed down from a window near the ceiling, illuminating the basement of the British-occupied safe house. Shaw shared the space with Silas, who was digging in the tunnel alongside him. Chains bound their feet. A watchful guard stood nearby.

“So even though I destroyed half the British fleet,” Shaw said cheerfully, “the other half picked that exact moment to show up. What choice did I have? I had to surrender.”

Shaw’s pickaxe struck a rock, which sent a tremor shuddering through the handle. He shook the blade free of the obstruction and paused before making another swing. “So how’d you get captured?”

Silas seemed distant, reluctant to respond. Through downcast eyes he kept chipping away at the sheer tunnel

wall. He looked as surprised as Shaw when someone answered.

“He was discovered hiding in a barrel in a dirty alleyway.”

At the sound of that voice Shaw involuntarily clenched his teeth and tightened his grip on the pickaxe. Edward Sinclair strolled leisurely down the basement steps, adding by way of clarification: “A barrel of *dung*.”

Seeing that his taunts of Silas weren't producing a reaction, Sinclair turned his attention to the other prisoner.

“Why aren't you digging? Van Dyke tells me you're a farmer, a man of the soil... this should be second nature to you...”

Shaw snarled and lunged at his enemy. The guard moved to intervene, too late – the heavy pickaxe swung straight at Sinclair's head.

But the pickaxe stopped in midair when it met a white-gloved hand. Sinclair wrenched the tool from Shaw's grasp and gave it a shove, sending Shaw staggering backwards against the tunnel wall.

Sinclair tut-tutted. “There, there, you've gotten my glove dirty.” He removed the stained glove, frowning down at it. “These things cost nearly a pound each.”

He suddenly adopted a sly expression and leaned towards the prisoner. With a glint in his eye he whispered, “If you help me you'll have all the pounds in England.”

Is the man mad? Shaw didn't reply.

“When I raided your hideout I found every rebel but one. Where's Tallmadge? Where would he go to hide?”

At least Tallmadge escaped. Shaw motioned for Sinclair to move closer and whispered a reply in his ear.

Sinclair's features congealed into a prolonged scowl. He slapped Shaw in the face with his glove and snapped, “So be it. 'Tis always a pity when strong men

take up arms for a weak cause; though they be strong, they be traitors nonetheless.”

“‘Tis also a pity,” Sinclair reflected, “when otherwise loyal subjects of the Crown fail to see this. Martigan is weak. He sympathizes with you rebels and intends to surrender Boston without a fight. Many soldiers have given their lives to defend this city, and those sacrifices shall not have been made in vain.”

Sinclair whirled away from his prisoners. He began pacing back and forth across the basement, criss-crossing the misty shaft of light, gradually increasing his tempo.

“Though perhaps I am too kind. Perhaps this city is sick, both with smallpox and the blight of revolution. Perhaps your precious Boston is an affront to God that deserves to be cleansed from His earth: the fruits of the Pilgrims returned to the sea from whence they came.”

Shaw had made up his mind: The man *was* mad. But only slightly.

“Have these people no right to live?” Shaw protested.

“All this claptrap about rights and freedoms. Freedom is fleeting, and yet you see it as your savior. Thus the steady flotsam of twisted ideologies washing upon these shores. I shall end it.”

Having concluded his rant, Sinclair swirled his cape and strode off towards the basement steps. Shaw interrupted him.

“You’ll do it alone.”

Sinclair turned around and gave his prisoner a final glare.

“You’re a shrewd man, Shaw, unlike the fools I’m normally surrounded with. I think you’ll change your mind. And even if you don’t, you can help me dig.”

Sinclair nodded at his guard and vanished up the stairs. Shaw looked at the pickaxe – then at the guard, who conspicuously brandished a large musket.

He resumed digging.

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:06 AM

Six days later the tunnel was finished. It was everything that Sinclair had hoped for, and that Shaw had feared.

The tunnel connected to an uncharted burial ground, just as Mather's map described.... a twisting maze of narrow passages, littered with pools of groundwater and the remains of long-dead Indians, all branching out from a vast underground cavern.

Sinclair's men immediately erected scaffolding to support the cavern's walls and torches to provide lighting. The pinpricks of light gave only a partial illumination to the murky depths, lending the cavern an eerie, supernatural quality not unlike the catacombs of Rome.

It felt like a cathedral of earth. Vast expanses of hardened dirt formed the sloping walls. Slabs of rock formed the ceiling, which intermittently leaked drops of groundwater.

Much of the water dripped into a lake – an unnatural lake, for it had been created only in the past twenty-four hours. The lake's waters lapped against a massive wall of dirt, all that stood between them and the serpentine passageways below.

"A dam," said Sinclair. "My soldiers have dug a tunnel from the sea, bringing forth that artificial lake you see below you. Once it pours through to those burial

grounds, it will contaminate the local water supply and erode the very foundations this city is built upon.”

Sinclair upraised his arms in a dramatic pose. “I shall consume Boston with the sea!”

Shaw was nonplussed. His enemy’s megalomaniacal ramblings had already sent two nearby soldiers to sleep, and he himself was dangerously close to joining them. He shook himself awake and said, “Mmm.”

Sinclair took that as sufficient encouragement to continue. He stepped out of an alcove set into the cavern’s west wall, his face momentarily moving out of the torchlight into shadow. Shaw stayed in the alcove.

Sinclair began walking atop the wall of dirt, away from the cavern entrance and towards a group of soldiers who were arming a detonator. Below the detonator, lining the top of the dam, stretched a row of powder barrels stacked end to end.

“Sadly,” Sinclair resumed, lovingly running a slender hand along the lids of the powder barrels, “my pathetic excuse for a commanding officer has ordered a general evacuation this very morning. With insufficient time to complete the digging, I must detonate this remaining mound of earth.”

He reached the midpoint of the dam.

“The evacuation shall commence at dawn; therefore, the fireworks shall commence at precisely 5:45 AM. That is thirty-nine –” here Sinclair paused to consult his pocket watch, whose minute hand had just completed a rotation – “excuse me, thirty-*eight* minutes from now.”

Shaw remained stubbornly silent. He grudgingly shuffled after Sinclair, taking care to avoid losing his step – while the dam was thick enough at its base, here at the top it tapered to a width of just six feet. To his right a narrow access path wound its way along the wall to the cavern

floor; to his right, above the dam, was a seemingly bottomless pit holding the dark waters of the lake.

“It’s fitting, in a sense; departing Boston in a blaze of glory. And our mutual friend Tallmadge has been kind enough to provide the ammunition.” Sinclair nodded towards the detonator, whose fuse had just been lit by his soldiers. It burned very slowly.

Shaw finally spoke up. “Tallmadge? You said he escaped.”

“And yet,” Sinclair said with an air of careless indifference, “I have come into possession of his trademark detonators. They’re ingenious, really. A pity this is the last batch.”

“What have you done with him?!” Shaw strained at the ropes that bound his hands, to no avail. He almost charged his enemy, but the surrounding soldiers made any such gesture worse than useless.

Sinclair didn’t immediately answer the question, pacing smugly away to complete his promenade across the dam. He now stood before an open-roofed bunker set into the cavern’s east wall six feet below them. His command center, judging by the fortress-like wood platforms – snipers’ platforms – built atop the bunker for its defense.

Sinclair surveyed the bunker with satisfaction, then swung around and swept his gaze across the entire expanse of the gloomy cavern. “What an incredible sight,” Sinclair said carelessly. “A pity that your friends aren’t here to enjoy it. They’re all de –”

Shaw charged. Two burly soldiers deflected his angry attack well before he reached Sinclair, who looked on with wry amusement.

Sinclair looked back towards the bunker, much of which was occupied by the formidable bulk of Dr. Karel Van Dyke.

“You don’t have to join them, you know,” Sinclair said softly. “There are... other paths, as the patriot Van Dyke has shown. You have been privy to many of the rebels’ secrets... if you were to share them, the rewards would be tremendous....”

Shaw stood rigid, immobile. His mouth twitched.

“Stubborn to the last,” remarked Sinclair. “Stubborn men die alone. Though in this case, you’ll have your friend from the alleyway to keep you company.”

Sinclair nodded at his two closest soldiers, who simultaneously raised their muskets and brought them down on the back of Shaw’s head. Shaw tumbled down into the bunker, landing in a heap next to Silas.

Silas shouted after the departing Sinclair, “We’re not friends!”

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:09 AM

The safe house’s front door opened, then clicked softly shut. Patrick Tallmadge slipped inside – while outside, a freshly-unconscious guard keeled off the steps onto the grass.

Tallmadge stealthily made his way through the front hall, whose opulent furnishings had been replaced by instruments of war: stacks of muskets, cases of ammunition, even a small cannon. The hallmarks of British occupation.

The hall’s guard, stationed at the basement stairwell, was careless enough to stand facing away from the front door. A dagger flashed. The guard never had a chance.

Once in the basement, Tallmadge looked around for the cavern entrance. So many abortive tunnels filled the

basement that determining the correct one would be difficult in the best of circumstances, much less in the face of this oppressive darkness.

A light suddenly appeared in one of the tunnels. Tallmadge whirled around, but his reflexes were slow and the lantern-wielding soldier saw him first. Seeing the soldier about to call out for help, Tallmadge cursed under his breath and reached into his cloak for a pistol.

* * *

Scrambling to a small ledge from which he could see over the top of the bunker, Shaw was gratified to see a distinctly flustered Sinclair: the officer was struggling but failing to maintain a calm demeanor, pacing anxiously atop the dam alongside a rat-like dog.

“What’s going on?” Silas asked blearily. His face contained numerous cuts and bruises, the signs of hours of painful interrogation. His hands were tied like Shaw’s, the taut ropes biting into the pale flesh of his wrists.

“There’s a disturbance of some kind... Sinclair looks nervous...”

“As well he should,” Van Dyke butted in. “He is about to see the realization of his life’s work.”

Shaw felt only disgust at this miserable traitor. Without turning his gaze he snarled, “Shut up, Van Dyke.”

Van Dyke sniffed, “Your defiance was to be expected. But I had higher hopes for you, Silas. Captain Sinclair is a powerful man, very influential in the British armed services –”

He hobbled a step closer, a look of strained compassion appearing on his wolf-like face. He said, “Please, Silas... all we ask are a few names...”

Silas spat in his face.

Shaw didn't notice the act of defiance, for he was preoccupied with observing the events atop the dam. An increasingly harried-looking Sinclair approached a squad of soldiers, ordering several of them towards the cavern entrance to investigate the source of the commotion.

They never reached the entrance. Shouts erupted from the soldiers as a man emerged from the basement tunnel, a man who wielded a torch in one hand and a sword in the other. He cast the torch aside and pulled back the hood of his cloak.

Tallmadge had arrived.

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:11 AM

Shaw and Sinclair reeled in shock. Van Dyke, who had drawn back his walking stick to strike Silas, stayed his hand.

For his part, Tallmadge moved with the energy of one forty years younger, dispatching the squad of soldiers with ease. He dominated the alcove in the cavern's west wall, maneuvering around the area's spare crates and powder barrels. While dispatching his final attacker his sword got caught in a button of the soldier's coat, but after a moment's work he managed to pull it free.

Muttering imprecations under his breath, Sinclair drew his own sword and trotted towards the alcove to meet Tallmadge. Their blades clashed. Tallmadge shuddered under the force of the blow, stepping laterally behind a stack of crates to regroup.

Shaw stood transfixed by the swordfight. He briefly attempted an escape from the bunker to assist Tallmadge, but couldn't hope to scale the six-foot wall with

his hands tied... so he resigned himself to the role of frustrated observer.

Sinclair took the offensive, deftly maneuvering Tallmadge around the stack of crates to force him into a steady retreat across the top of the dam. Shaw saw his mentor's broad back grow slowly closer as the older man lost ground.

Halfway across, Tallmadge made a rasping cough and stumbled. Sinclair jumped on the opening, thrusting forward in a bid to disarm his opponent. Tallmadge's sword flew from his hands, sailing through the air to land ignominiously by the detonator.

Shaw could hardly believe his eyes. Tallmadge, the invincible Tallmadge, had somehow failed.

* * *

Tallmadge stood erect, maintaining a dignified composure in the face of defeat. By contrast, Sinclair could scarcely contain his glee.

"Tallmadge!" gloated Sinclair, his sword leveled at his latest prisoner. "Just the man I wanted to see. You see, I was hoping that you could bear witness to my final triumph over the rebellion – your protégé being a poor substitute."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand." Tallmadge spoke softly; Shaw could hardly hear the man's words.

"Allow me to explain," Sinclair said expansively. "You see, this dam is all that stands between Boston and utter oblivion. My soldiers have dug a tunnel from the sea, bringing forth that artificial lake you see below you. Once it pours through to those catacombs, it will contaminate the local water supply and erode the very foundations this city is built upon...."

Not this again. Upon hearing Sinclair repeat his tedious monologue verbatim, Shaw slumped comatose against the bunker wall. His eyelids drooped. He tuned back in to catch the concluding section:

“...it’s fitting, in a sense; departing Boston in a blaze of glory. And you have been kind enough to provide the ammunition.” Sinclair once again nodded towards the detonator, whose fuse had burned a full inch since Shaw had seen it lit. Five more inches to go.

“So you were clever enough to seize my stores of detonators. You do appear to have planned for every contingency.”

Tallmadge spoke calmly, not removing his gaze from his enemy’s sword. He continued, “Every contingency but one. What would Major Martigan – your commanding officer – have to say about this?”

“Martigan,” spat Sinclair, “does not know and does not care.”

“I would humbly disagree. He does indeed know.”

“What... how...” Sinclair looked momentarily confused. Then he read the small smile on Tallmadge’s face and snarled, “*You!* You told him!”

“Yes, I did,” said Tallmadge, pointedly looking over Sinclair’s shoulder. “In fact, if I’m not mistaken, here he comes now.”

Keeping his sword pointed squarely at Tallmadge, Sinclair swiveled his head to look back at the alcove. The faint light of a torch was appearing in the cavern entrance, along with a series of voices:

A nameless soldier, asking “Who’s there?”...

Staff Sergeant Turner, Sinclair’s aide, protesting, “Sir, this is a restricted area”...

Major Martigan, Sinclair’s long-suffering commander, snapping, “I am the ranking officer here, and so long as I am the ranking officer you will stand aside!”

Martigan would be upon them at any moment. Sinclair whirled back to face his prisoner in a state of complete panic.

Tallmadge remarked, "It's fitting, in a sense; departing Boston with a court-martial –"

Tallmadge's voice trailed off into a gurgle, for he'd just been stabbed in the gut. As the old spymaster slumped to the ground, Sinclair wiped his sword clean on his red uniform and went to greet Martigan.

Sinclair said jovially, "Sir – there's been an intruder, and I'm afraid we had to kill him in self-defense."

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:13 AM

To Shaw, the ensuing conversation was like a dull dream. Tallmadge wounded, perhaps mortally... a nightmare built on Sinclair's lie of...

"Self-defense?" snapped Martigan, his thin gray hair protruding in a shock from his officer's cap. "Perhaps you would care to explain *this*."

The major gestured at the burial ground, his intentions perfectly clear.

Not clear, evidently, to Sinclair, who adopted a sweet smile of feigned ignorance. "Explain what, dear major?"

"This," Martigan repeated, again waving his arm in a general designation of his surroundings – the excavated cavern, the pent-up pool of seawater, the precarious dam rigged with hundreds of pounds of gunpowder.

Martigan left his retinue of soldiers and walked to the edge of the alcove, looking down at the artificial lake with disgust.

“As I have told you time and again, Sinclair, your schemes to destroy Boston are absolutely unacceptable, and I have repeatedly forbade them, and now I must voice my strongest objections!”

“Now, now, major, there is no cause for alarm. You are, as always, absolutely correct. Let us leave this place without delay and never speak of it again.” Sinclair spoke in his most soothing tones, reaching out an arm to place around Martigan’s shoulder.

Martigan shook him off. “No,” he said, rising to his full five feet five inches. “No, Sinclair. This operation of yours will be dismantled; this time you have gone too far. Direct circumvention of a commanding officer’s orders... if you survive your court-martial, you’ll be fortunate to return to the Irish garrison.”

Sinclair frowned. He took a step towards Martigan and said, “I shall not be returning to the Irish garrison.”

Martigan instinctively took a step back. His left foot hovered precariously close to the edge of the alcove. He said in a quavering voice, “You shall address me as ‘sir’.”

Sinclair made a mocking sneer, exuding menace. “Mind your step, *sir*,” he said, advancing another step forward. “The ground here is very treacherous... we wouldn’t want for you to... lose your step!”

With lightning-fast speed Sinclair lunged forward and tripped Martigan, sending his commanding officer flying off the alcove into the dark void beyond. Major Martigan of the Royal Army was enveloped by the waters of Sinclair’s creation, never to be seen again.

Sinclair swiftly turned to address the onlooking soldiers who comprised Martigan’s retinue. They’d watched with mounting apprehension as their leaders argued, and were now in a state of shock at the argument’s conclusion.

Sinclair shouted, "Major Martigan has fallen in the line of duty, may God preserve his memory. I have assumed his command. My first order is to set up a close watch along all approaches to this cavern, to guard against further unwanted intrusions."

Martigan's soldiers slowly shuffled off to do as they were told. Some moved to the cavern entrance, some to defensive positions in the alcove, some to a sloping pathway leading up from the base of the dam.

For his part, Sinclair stormed back across the dam to his bunker. As he passed the mortally wounded Tallmadge he muttered, "Major Sinclair. Major Sinclair. I like the sound of that."

Sinclair's figure towered over the bunker wall. Tears streaming down his face, Shaw screamed up at his enemy: "Do you expect me to stand here and watch this happen?!"

Sinclair laughed, a bone-chilling laugh. "Of course," he said, "from up close."

Sinclair motioned at a guard stationed in the bunker, who proceeded to move behind the prisoner. A sharp blow to the head brought Shaw's flood of emotions to an abrupt end. He blacked out.

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:24 AM

The world again came into focus. Shaw shook his head, scrunching his eyes to take in his surroundings. A dark damp pit, infested by the bones of Indians long-dead... or left for dead. Silas was bound by a web of ropes to Shaw's back, a particularly eerie skull staring him straight in the face.

The skull's shadow lengthened. Shaw strained against the ropes and squinted upwards, making out a pair of British soldiers above the pit. One soldier held aloft a torch. The other called out, "That should be the end of you." They departed.

As the soldiers' footsteps grew ever softer, Shaw's surroundings grew ever darker. In short order he'd been plunged into darkness.

Silas could evidently still see that skull – if only in his mind's eye – for he whimpered, "The Indians. They're staring at me."

Shaw, who was trying to locate a sharp rock with his foot, responded with disgust. "They're dead. Pull yourself together, or we'll join them."

No rocks within reach. Just a small pocket watch, left thoughtfully nearby to remind them of the time. Twenty more minutes... and then a torrent of seawater would rush down the tunnel above them, ravaging Boston's water supply and drowning them instantly.

For the first time Shaw felt a sense of panic. *If only I could see....*

His prayers were miraculously answered. Shaw's surroundings grew gradually brighter, thanks to a new source of light above the pit.

There stood a pair of men, pale as death, one holding aloft a smoky torch that flickered in the stagnant air. They wore civilian clothes. Shaw couldn't quite make out their faces, but thought them strangely familiar.

Regardless, Shaw's curiosity was overwhelmed by his sense of relief. He called up to his saviors, "At last! Give us a hand with these ropes, will you, or before long we'll all get free swimming lessons."

The men said nothing. One bowed his head, while the other made a strange half-smile – and then they vanished.

Shaw mentally berated himself; his blunt language must have scared the men off. He strained against his ropes in a futile attempt to bring them back.

No good. He collapsed back against Silas, who appeared to be in the same pitiable state as ever.

Shaw did a double-take. He could actually *see* Silas... meaning that the men had left behind their torch! There it stood, shining invitingly above the pit wall. The visitors had served a purpose after all.

With renewed vigor Shaw cast about for a means of escape. His gaze fell upon a small stream of water that trickled from the ceiling down the pit wall, just beyond Silas's skull. He tried to reach the waterfall, without success.

Shaw gritted his teeth, dreading what he was about to do.... but he had no choice.

“Silas.”

No reply. Shaw repeated more loudly, “Silas. You see that waterfall over there?”

His companion gave a feeble nod.

“Put your ropes under it, will you?”

Silas complied, maneuvering a hand into position under the trickle of water. He instantly drew back as if stung. “It’s *cold*,” he hissed.

Shaw gritted his teeth, resisting the urge to bodily shove Silas back beneath the waterfall. He yelled, “We’ll soon both be a lot colder if you don’t do as I say!”

Silas eyed the waterfall with cold fear, but reluctantly placed his hand back beneath it. He took a sharp intake of breath, summoning all his strength to keep the hand in position as the chilling water washed over him. He exclaimed, “My ropes are loosening!”

What a surprise, Shaw thought sarcastically.

“What a surprise,” Shaw said in a decidedly chipper tone. “Now you can free us –”

Silas had already untangled his hand from the soggy ropes and freed the rest of his body. With a whoop he started off towards the pit wall.

“Silas.” This time Shaw spoke softly, almost dangerously. Silas hesitated and then slowly turned around, his eyes averted.

“Major Sinclair is about to kill three thousand Americans and I’m the one man who can stop him. Also, I just saved your life, maybe you could see fit to return the favor –”

“Okay, okay.” Silas darted back and hastily undid the rope around Shaw’s wrists. “There was really no need for that, of course I was gonna free you too.”

Of course, thought Shaw, rubbing his aching wrists. After liberating the nearby pocket watch – which showed 5:27 – he thrust his hands into a crevice and started climbing.

Shaw pulled himself over the edge, then helped Silas up after him. He peered into the inky blackness. Who knew where the downward-sloping tunnel led... perhaps the very bowels of the earth.

They’d never find out, since the main cavern clearly lay uphill. Silas was crouched on his heels, out of breath – Shaw said, “There’s time for that later. Let’s go.” Silas reluctantly got to his feet and followed his old rival up the tunnel.

After several paces things began to get dark. Shaw smacked a hand against his forehead.

“The torch! I’ll be right back.”

He jogged back to the pit and retrieved the torch and rushed back up the tunnel.

He needn’t have hurried. Silas was gone.

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:28 AM

Shaw shrugged off Silas's strange disappearance, focused instead on the challenges that lay ahead of him. He rushed up the tunnel, the flame of his torch streaking backwards, slipping in his haste into a small hole filled with water. He hastily extricated himself and continued onwards, anxious to distance himself from this watery Hell of darkness and despair.

Shaw rounded a bend in the tunnel to see Sinclair's dam looming over him. Atop the dam, just above the line of powder barrels, stood a row of British soldiers.

Shaw whirled back around the corner, hands pressed tensely against the tunnel wall behind him, breathing heavily.

I don't think they saw me. But that was too close for comfort.

As Shaw's breaths became more even, he edged along the tunnel wall to peer cautiously around the corner. There stood the soldiers, as motionless as the earthen dam beneath them.

They hadn't seen him. Shaw wiped his hand across his brow, exhaling in relief.

A line of torches faintly illuminated a narrow access path that meandered up the cavern wall to the dam. Shaw dropped to all fours and crawled towards the access path, scraping his knees and muddying his trousers. The dim torchlight concealed his approach – the soldier guarding the path entrance gave no sign of alarm.

As Shaw inched towards the oblivious guard, he wished he shared Tallmadge's skill at conducting silent kills; *I'm not very good at this sort of thing.* Indeed, his left foot soon splashed loudly into a pool of water. He froze.

He needn't have bothered – the guard didn't move. Shaw made his own move, lunging forward to wrap a hand

around the guard's mouth and yank him back into the shadows. A kidney punch later the guard was out cold.

Shaw nodded in satisfaction and resumed his slow ascent up the access path. Then he frowned... around the bend, no less than a dozen additional soldiers were situated along the path at regular intervals.

Shaw consulted his pocket watch. 5:30. He muttered, "Damn redcoats. There's not enough time."

At this rate he couldn't hope to sneak up the path in only fifteen minutes. Shaw's gaze slowly shifted from the path to the dam, and his face hardened – he knew what he had to do.

Shaw gripped his torch between his teeth and began climbing the face of the dam. He strained to find handholds in the sheer wall, fully aware of the incredible risk facing him.

Halfway up his foot slipped. A loosened chunk of dirt fell fifteen yards to the ground below. Shaw slid downwards a few feet, barely clinging to a crevice with one hand while the rest of his body swayed from side to side.

Then he clenched his jaw – tightening his grip on the torch – and dragged himself upwards, managing to grab a small outcropping with his other hand. He kept climbing.

Before he knew it he'd reached the portentous line of powder barrels, the barrels that Sinclair had rigged to destroy the dam. *I must be near the top.* Shaw looked down, a grievous mistake.

He swallowed his fear.... and kept climbing.

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:35 AM

"Sir. A guard has been found unconscious at the base of the dam."

Sinclair frowned at the body which his dimwitted aide had dragged forward to their headquarters at the bunker. A large red welt protruded from the unconscious soldier's head.

"Hmm," said Sinclair. He looked quite uninterested, preferring to gloat over another body by the bunker – the fallen Tallmadge. Sinclair also busied himself with trying on a new major's insignia, which he'd fortunately kept in his coat pocket for just such an occasion.

Van Dyke asked, "Should we take additional precautions?"

"No."

Sinclair had already returned his attention to his major's insignia – the damnable thing refused to pin to his uniform properly.

"Besides the main entrance, which Tallmadge has kindly tested for us –" here Sinclair prodded the wounded man with his boot, in barely restrained glee – "and that path, which is chock-full of guards, the only way here is up the face of the dam itself. Which is completely... impossible..."

Sinclair trailed off, unable to believe his eyes. One hand, then another, reached over the top of the dam – as if clawing their way up from the underworld. A head joined them, spitting out a torch before looking Sinclair straight in the eye.

Shaw!

* * *

Shaw heaved himself atop the dam. He scanned the area until he found the detonator, which lay on a crate some ten yards and four guards away.

The guards, still in shock, reacted slowly. Shaw threw the nearest one off the dam, then advanced a few

steps and dispatched another. The guards bounced off the line of powder barrels en route to an untimely demise.

The next guard raised his musket in a defensive posture. Shaw wrenched the musket from his hands and spun the weapon like a quarterstaff, dealing the guard a rapid series of blows that forced him off the dam to join his colleagues. Then Shaw lowered the musket and fired at the final guard.

The guard crumpled to the ground before getting off a shot. But across the cavern, a squad of soldiers opened fire from Sinclair's bunker. Shaw sprinted forward and threw himself behind the crate just as a hail of gunfire erupted around him.

The gunfire then stopped – the soldiers were unwilling to risk having a stray shot strike the detonator, blowing them all to kingdom come. Shaw reached his left arm over the crate and groped around blindly. His fingertips scraped across the splintery wood until they found a smoldering paper cartridge.

Shaw was about to disarm the detonator when a group of soldiers slammed him against the crate. His extended left arm sent out spasms of pain as it connected with the crate's sharp upper edge. His right arm was pinioned, and the detonator slipped from his fingers.

Blast. Shaw lashed out with his feet to buy time, but he knew it to be a stopgap measure. He was rapidly running out of maneuvering room.

Shaw frantically looked around for help. But Tallmadge couldn't bail him out this time. He was alone... completely alone...

The soldiers stopped. Shaw, who'd grimaced in anticipation of an imminent blow to the face, gradually allowed himself to follow his adversaries' gaze.

A soldier's limp body fell out of the basement tunnel, followed by a mob of American recruits. The recruits flooded the alcove, disabling soldiers in their wake.

Shaw smiled, a weary smile. *Sinclair lied. He didn't capture my friends after all.*

And now they were here, here to rescue him.

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:37 AM

Shaw felt a surge of renewed strength and let loose a barrage of punches on the surrounding soldiers. One staggered backwards with a broken nose, one doubled over from a blow to the stomach, one slumped unconscious across the crate. Across the cavern, Shaw could see his friends making similar headway against the soldiers in the alcove.

Shaw hastily formulated his next course of action. He'd reached the detonator alone, only to be overwhelmed – so he'd reunite with the other recruits, then fight his way back across the dam. *Right. I'll do it.*

A burst of gunfire echoed throughout the cavern as the soldiers regrouped to repel the intruders. Shaw sprinted towards the alcove, determined to help take some of the pressure off his friends.

He was surprised to see his friends fall back, taking cover behind the alcove's crates. *Why aren't they returning fire?*

His heart sank when he saw the reason... they hadn't a single musket between them....

Shaw hurled a soldier off the dam in disgust. "Give up!" someone yelled from behind him.

Shaw didn't give up – he elbowed his way between two soldiers who were firing at the alcove, then sprinted the

remaining distance to the crates. Bullets ricocheted around him. He flung himself behind a crate to reach safety.

Shaw slipped into position between Arthur and Anna, as naturally as though they'd been fighting alongside each other for hours. They didn't notice him.

He cleared his throat to attract their attention.... and they still didn't notice him.

He gave up and said, "Hello."

Both his friends turned towards him simultaneously. Arthur blinked in surprise, while Anna's face lit up with pleasure.

"Ben! It's so good to see you! We thought you were..."

Shaw cut Anna off, saying grimly, "Not me. Sinclair's saving me for last."

He surveyed the rescue party – eleven of the twelve original recruits, plus the steely old lady who'd greeted them upon their initial arrival in Boston. Less one who'd just succumbed to a British bullet.

Shaw frowned. "Where's Silas?"

"I don't know," Anna said with genuine concern. "I thought he was with you."

A brief silence.

Arthur bumbled, "I'm sure he's all right."

A British bullet struck a burning crate, sending pieces of flaming wood flying across the alcove towards the powder barrels. Shaw ducked and looked away to the light of the cavern entrance.

"I'm not so sure."

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:38 AM

Ten yards above them, muffled sounds of combat wafted through the basement tunnel to the mansion's front hall. The once-opulent hall was almost unrecognizable – Sinclair had stripped it of all its furnishings, claiming them as spoils of war. In their place were heaps of surplus materiel.

Two soldiers guarded the materiel from posts at either side of the front door. Upon hearing a particularly intense burst of gunfire, the soldiers exchanged glances and hurried down the stairwell to the basement.

Behind them, a figure slowly rose from behind a heap of muskets to survey the vacated front hall. His tattered clothes were caked in hardening mud, his face was haggard and haunted, and his entire body trembled involuntarily with fear.

Silas Deane, Jr., wished to put as much distance as possible between himself and this terrible fighting. He walked to the front door and reached for the handle.

There his hand paused. Silas took a deep breath, preparing to open the door and escape to freedom.

A muted explosion rocked the front hall. Silas stumbled backwards, clutching at a neighboring cannon for balance. He still managed to disregard the explosion... though he couldn't disregard the feminine scream that accompanied it...

Still clutching the cannon, his face wracked with an inner pain, Silas slowly turned away from the front door. He looked at the foreboding basement stairwell – and beyond the stairwell to the heap of muskets.

Silas gathered an armful of muskets and bolted downstairs.

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:39 AM

The shattered crate's trail of flame had reached the powder barrels, blowing them sky-high. Bits of debris flew everywhere, raining down on the embattled recruits and highlighting their dire situation.

For the moment, Shaw was simply relieved that the explosion hadn't spread to the dam's powder barrels. He stole a glance at his pocketwatch, then shouted at Anna and Arthur:

"Only five more minutes – I'm gonna head for the detonator. Cover me."

"Cover you?" shrieked Anna, who was clearly still rattled from the explosion. "With what?"

"With these," Silas whispered. He opened his arms and a small heap of muskets tumbled to the ground.

"Silas!" The explosion forgotten, Anna raced forward to hug her former paramour. "I thought..."

"There's no time for this now," Shaw said tersely. "There's a detonator to disarm and half a regiment standing in our way. Arthur, distribute these muskets to the other agents."

Four other recruits were now grievously injured, leaving eight. Plus that old lady, who surprisingly turned out to be a crack shot.

As the recruits began to return fire, the tide of battle gradually turned in their favor.

* * *

Sinclair surveyed these latest developments with a fierce scowl. What was once a massacre had become a gunfight. But the rebels were using the alcove's crates as a

defensive position, giving them an edge over his unshielded soldiers.

He turned to his aide with the intention of giving an order, but then thought better of it – the stupid lout would just botch this assignment like all the others. Where was McClintock when one needed him? Sinclair took matters into his own hands, stalking away from the aide to address two soldiers wearing unusual green coats.

“Snipers! Take positions!”

The elite snipers issued Sinclair with cool salutes and quick-stepped towards their posts, the fortress-like wood platforms on the wall above the bunker. They climbed up to the elevated platforms and pulled up the rope ladders behind them.

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:40 AM

Shaw watched the snipers’ movement with growing apprehension. “Snipers,” he told Arthur, pointedly ignoring Silas. “They’ve got cover, and the high ground. Keep them off me.”

With that, Shaw threw himself over the protective wall of crates and charged forward, zig-zagging to evade the sporadic British musket fire. Most of the soldiers had fallen back to the access path for cover, leaving only a handful between him and the detonator. These holdouts he dispatched in short order with several swings of his musket butt.

Shaw jogged across the dam for the third time that day, keeping his head down to maintain a low profile. He resisted the urge to help the fallen Tallmadge, knowing any delay could prove fatal.

Two soldiers guarded the detonator. *Where's Sinclair?* Shaw creased his brow, feeling a vague sense of unease.

He nonetheless closed the gap to the detonator, crumpling the closer soldier with a knee to the stomach. The remaining soldier, anticipating an imminent attack, adopted a classic boxing stance whose incongruity with the desperate melee fighting struck Shaw as darkly amusing. He recognized the man as Sinclair's aide from British headquarters – it seemed an eternity ago.

“Turner, is it?”

“That's right.” The chap was nothing if not civil. He bobbed up and down in anticipation of the fight, fists clenched in front of him.

“Charmed.” Shaw decided to terminate the conversation – he aimed a solid punch directly at Turner's forehead. To his surprise the aide neatly blocked the punch and countered with one of his own, which struck Shaw cleanly on the right shoulder.

As Turner flashed him a gentlemanly grin, Shaw took a step back to weigh his options. He had neither the time nor the inclination to fight this man. Therefore he began easing himself around Turner's left flank, attempting to get closer to the detonator crate.

Turner deftly sidestepped, positioning himself between Shaw and the detonator. Frustrated, Shaw snapped, “See here, Turner. Why don't you be a good fellow and let me at that detonator before thousands of people die.”

“I'm afraid that's quite out of the question. Captain Sinclair's orders.” Turner dodged another punch, while continuing to bob his head like a demented songbird.

“I thought he fancied himself a major now.”

Turner evidenced discomfort at the mention of Martigan's murder, though he swiftly returned to his

default stance of dull unflappability. “You are quite right,” he said. “*Major* Sinclair has given me one order: to keep you from that detonator for as long as possible.”

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:41 AM

Sinclair’s two snipers were harrying the recruits with calculated musket fire. The recruits returned fire as best they could, but the elevated wood platforms were too distant and too well-protected to succumb to their limited sharpshooting skills – Anna observed, “Looks like those treehouses aren’t just for decoration.”

Only Silas achieved success. When a sniper became overconfident and leaned over the edge of his wood platform, Silas made a lucky shot that sent him plummeting into the artificial lake.

Sweating heavily, Silas crept laterally behind the row of crates, drifting away from the other recruits in the vague hope of acquiring a clear shot at the other sniper. He noted with satisfaction that the small green blob across the cavern presented an unobstructed target, and raised his musket to take aim.

Something wasn’t right. Unlike his previous target, this sniper was facing *away* from him... and towards....

Silas gulped. At the midpoint of the dam stood Ben Shaw, engaged in a slow fistfight, oblivious to the sniper who trained a musket on his exposed back.

The sniper could fire at any minute. Silas aimed his musket – but the seconds ticked by without him pulling the trigger. Sweat streamed from his forehead, mingling in his eyes and clouding his vision.

Silas ran a clammy hand across his face, then returned it to the stock of his musket. Ahead of him, the

distant figure of Ben Shaw knocked out Sinclair's aide and advanced on the detonator. The sniper tensed.

A musket report echoed throughout the cavern.... and the surprised sniper fell from his perch into the dark waters below.

* * *

Shaw stepped over the unconscious body of his adversary and at last held the detonator in his hands. He briefly regarded the device in awe, then held it aloft, waving it at his friends across the cavern in a theatric display that sent sparks arcing through the air. The recruits erupted into a hoarse cheer as Shaw hollered, "We did it! We've won!"

Arthur cried, "Three cheers for Ben Shaw!"

Anna was silent. She couldn't tear her eyes from Silas, who lay slumped against a crate as cheers for Shaw went up all around them.

In her eyes there were two heroes.

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:42 AM

Shaw fumbled with the detonator, soon deciding to set it back down on the crate. He was reluctant to extinguish the burning fuse with his bare hands.

I'll smother it. Shaw removed his coat and tossed the heavy cloth garment onto the detonator.

The coat never reached the fuse. A sword materialized out of the blackness, intercepting the coat and flinging it aside with a powerful slash.

The sword moved towards Shaw's throat. Shaw jerked backwards and lost his balance and tumbled to the

ground. His tricorner hat fell off. He looked up... and met the eyes of Edward Sinclair.

Sinclair exuded an air of smug self-satisfaction, taking delight in his newfound control over his opponent; Shaw had to continually crab-walk backwards to avoid impalement on the sword. The sharp blade advanced slowly but inexorably, still stained with the dull red hues of Tallmadge's blood.

Sinclair was irritated, though, that he hadn't yet managed to instill fear in the rebel. To remedy the situation he said: "You are lost, then."

"Lost?" Though still trapped in a humiliating retreat, Shaw managed a small smile. "It's your guards who have lost. If I can't disarm the detonator, another agent will."

This time Sinclair smiled, revealing a glimpse of yellow teeth.

"I think not, Mr. Shaw."

Sinclair put his fingers to his lips and whistled. He waved at a soldier in the alcove, who relayed the signal to the cavern entrance.

On cue, dozens of fresh British soldiers poured into the cavern. Arthur, who had ventured out from behind the crates, exclaimed "Egad!" and hastily scurried back to safety. He and the other recruits hunkered down to fend off this latest assault.

"So you see, Shaw," said Sinclair, "you are indeed lost. Undoubtedly you're hoping that I shall extend a final offer of amnesty, but I am afraid that time has passed."

Shaw didn't know what to do or say, aside from continuing to back away. His left hand slipped on something. He began to curse, then realized what the object was... Tallmadge's longsword...

He craned his neck behind him. There lay Tallmadge, draped across the bunker wall, dangerously

still. "Hope you don't mind if I borrow this," Shaw muttered to his mentor, before picking up the longsword with his left hand and tossing it into his right. When Sinclair's sword descended on him, Shaw parried the blow and then rolled to his feet.

The two duelists stood for a second in a frozen tableau, faintly illuminated by the sputtering detonator fuse. Their right arms held swords that almost but did not quite meet.

A drop of water fell from the ceiling, and Sinclair resumed his attack. He advanced steadily, without emotion, delivering a calm but potentially lethal series of blows that forced Shaw to summon all the fencing expertise bestowed by Tallmadge. *Wish I'd paid more attention.*

On the defensive, Shaw grunted, "I don't know why you keep expecting me to join your evil schemes."

Sinclair initiated an elementary thrust, which Shaw blocked. "You think I'm a bad sort," said the major, "yet really I'm no different than you. Two agents simply doing their job."

"We don't target civilians."

His direct attacks foiled, Sinclair pressed forward with a more subtle low carte. For the life of him Shaw couldn't recall the appropriate counteraction, so he took a step backwards. One step further from the detonator.

"Incidental casualties," Sinclair said airily; "regrettable, yet unavoidable. These civilians of yours have no God-given right to live, just as they have no right to conduct rampant tax evasion."

"You can't beat our Minutemen in honest combat, so you resort to picking on the weak." Shaw finally managed to scrape together an attack of his own. "You're a coward."

Sinclair flared in sudden rage. He easily swatted aside Shaw's attack and lunged forward in a vicious

flanconade. A nearby torch showed his pallid face to be gleaming with sweat.

“Don’t call me a coward, boy!”

When Shaw parried the flanconade, Sinclair shifted to a French stance popularized by the great Angelo’s rival, Danet. Sinclair continued, “I served with distinction in the Seven Years’ War.”

Shaw parried again, sloppier this time. His sword shuddered violently.

“In fact,” Sinclair said to a harsh *clang* of steel upon steel that nearly drove Shaw’s sword from his hands, “as one of General Braddock’s chief lieutenants.”

Shaw stopped for a moment. He blinked twice. He muttered to himself, “Braddock’s march...”

Then he abruptly swept his sword forward to collide with Sinclair’s. He said harshly, “What was your command?”

Sinclair also paused, having felt an encroaching sense of unease that he unsuccessfully sought to conceal.

“The left flank.”

“You’re a liar.” The two swords made a fearsome clash on the word “liar”. While Sinclair took a step back, Shaw pressed on: “It was the rear guard.”

“So what if it was?”

Shaw thrust forward with a tierce, an elementary piece of swordplay that unexpectedly caught his enemy off guard. Sinclair hastened his retreat across the narrow dam.

“Maybe you could describe the battle for me,” Shaw said, adding in a low growl, “If you saw any of it.”

Sinclair stumbled; he’d retreated all the way to the alcove, whose ground was pockmarked from the fighting. Recruits and soldiers exchanged blows around them.

“I don’t have to answer to you!”

“You have to answer to the victims of your cowardice. Many brave men died that day because you fled.”

To avoid backing into a crate, Sinclair veered off towards the cavern entrance. Thoroughly rattled, he shrieked, “So what? *So what?!*”

Shaw momentarily halted his advance. His sword lowered slightly, and his voice trembled. He took a deep breath and said, “One of those men was my father.”

Shaw redoubled his efforts, his sword flashing like an avenging whirlwind. Although the frenzied attacks were blind and directionless, Sinclair had no answer to them.

His plans collapsing around him, Sinclair twisted his features into a look of sheer hatred. He spat, “A pox on you and your father.”

Then he turned and fled.

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:44 AM

Amazed by Sinclair’s skill at plumbing ever greater depths of cowardice, Shaw instinctively charged after him in pursuit.

Sinclair was running up the tunnel to the safe house. Shaw relieved a nearby soldier of his musket and prepared to fire – only to find that the wily major had shoved another soldier in the way as a human shield.

Disgusted, Shaw shot the soldier and kept running. He slowed down when he saw Anna shouting at him.

“The detonator!”

Shaw cursed his own carelessness, then turned around and raced back across the dam. Behind him, Sinclair disappeared from view.

As he pounded towards the critical detonator, Shaw whipped out his pocketwatch in time to see the second hand reach the 12... and the minute hand reach the 9.

5:45. *Too late.*

Shaw threw himself to the ground, bracing for the inevitable explosion that would destroy Boston and himself with it. He'd failed. *Forgive me, O Lord.*

But the seconds passed by with no explosion. Shaw cautiously lowered his hands from his face and crawled the remaining inches to the detonator.

He saw the detonator, and burst into laughter – great sobs of laughter, as a vast pent-up tension lifted from his shoulders all at once. Tears of gratitude filled his eyes.

The detonator's fuse had stopped burning.... extinguished by a pool of water that had dripped from the cavern ceiling....

Shaw brushed the worthless detonator aside to retrieve his tricorner hat.

* * *

MARCH 17, 1776 5:45 AM

As Shaw returned the hat to his head, he heard an intense moan from Sinclair's former headquarters. *Tallmadge*. Shaw left the detonator and moved to the dying man's side.

The steely old lady was already there, looking down at Tallmadge through icy blue eyes. She held his limp hand in her own.

Shaw arrived next to her, still breathing heavily. "You're his wife?"

She nodded.

"Ben! We did it, eh?"

“Arthur,” Shaw replied, more than a little irritated at the untimely interruption. “Just the man I wanted to see. I need you to leave immediately, to – uh – search Sinclair’s headquarters, over there.” He gestured at the nearby bunker.

As Arthur departed Tallmadge began to cough, a hoarse, wet cough from fluid caught in the lungs. His forehead was lined with a cold sweat. His left hand fidgeted weakly with the bullet wound in his gut, smearing blood over his shirt.

While his wife tightened her grip on his hand, Tallmadge gasped, “Margaret... Ben.”

“Shh.” Margaret Tallmadge spoke in a stern authoritative voice. “Don’t talk.”

“No, I must.” Tallmadge coughed again; this time, traces of blood bubbled from his mouth.

“I’ve waited so long, for freedom... only in my dreams....”

“Look here!” Arthur barged back onto the scene, leading a nervous-looking dog and an even more nervous-looking human. “Look who turned up in those headquarters: Dr. Van Dyke!”

Huh. I didn’t expect Arthur to actually find anything. Shaw exchanged glances with Mrs. Tallmadge, whose usual stony expression had changed to sheer hatred.

Shaw drew his sword, while Mrs. Tallmadge went for her musket. Van Dyke paled.

Arthur looked more confused than usual. “What, aren’t you glad to see him?”

Shaw growled, “He’s a rat.” Mrs. Tallmadge finished loading her musket.

A twisted, strangely confident smile crossed Van Dyke’s face. He approached the fallen Tallmadge and said, “I’m a doctor.”

Shaw blanched. He shot Van Dyke a ferocious glare and lowered his sword, stepping aside to let the doctor do his work.

But Mrs. Tallmadge would have none of it. She trained her musket on Van Dyke and said in a voice of pure steel: "You lived a traitor, and so shall you perish."

Now it was Van Dyke's turn to blanch. In desperation he hobbled to the detonator, ripped it from its place atop the crate, and held it to the remaining candle.

"Now let us be reasonable. Let me leave Boston with the British like the other Loyalists. My brother and I will live out our days in Canada and you shall never hear of us again."

"No." Mrs. Tallmadge's finger went for the trigger.

"No!" Shaw ran in front of Van Dyke, shielding him. "Van Dyke's a rat, but surely we can spare one life to save another."

Mrs. Tallmadge was distinctly irritated. She waved the muzzle of her musket and said, "Step aside."

Shaw didn't move.

"My husband is dead, and we all know it! Step aside!"

When Shaw hesitated, Mrs. Tallmadge lunged forward in fury to shove him out of the way. She raised her musket....

Van Dyke touched the detonator to the candle....

Shaw tackled Van Dyke in a futile effort to stop him from lighting the detonator....

The musket shot passed harmlessly over Van Dyke's head....

The detonator bounced into Sinclair's bunker, and there it exploded.

* * *

The explosion destroyed the bunker and with it, much of the cavern's structural support. Cracks instantly began forming in the east wall, spreading to the ceiling in an ever-expanding network of interconnected lines. A low rumbling sound emitted from the deep recesses of the earth.

Amid the first shower of dirt from the ceiling, Shaw tensed himself and glanced towards the cavern entrance. Agents and soldiers alike were fleeing through the basement tunnel to safety, setting aside their differences in the interest of getting out alive.

Closer by, Arthur stood petrified in shock, too astonished even for an "Egad". Shaw shoved him forward towards the alcove in the west wall, shouting, "Go! Make for the exit!" His friend began stumbling to safety.

Shaw swiftly knelt down and felt Tallmadge's wrist. No pulse. The giant had passed.

"You'll receive a great burial," Shaw whispered, patting his late mentor's hand. A large chunk of dirt fell from the ceiling, narrowly missing them – it bounced off the dam and plummeted into the fast-disappearing lake.

Shaw stood up and ran for the exit. Behind him a slab of rock smashed against the dam. Ahead of him the alcove's crates were breaking apart from the constant rumbling.

Shaw sprinted through the alcove and jumped into the basement tunnel, where he found himself alone. *Looks like everyone else made it out in time.* He took a look back, to make sure.

The cavern was suffering the cave-in to end all cave-ins. The waves of falling earth were filling in both the burial grounds and the artificial lake – while the dam held, and the prospects of Boston's citizenry with it.

One citizen remained in the cavern: Dr. Karel Van Dyke, hobbling furiously on his walking stick towards the

tunnel, his scrawny dog struggling to keep up. A section of dam broke off behind them, causing the traitor to stumble.

Van Dyke again rose to his feet and continued onwards through a now-continuous shower of dirt. He reached the alcove – which soon began to cave in – and grasped for the tunnel entrance just as the ground collapsed from under him. With a final effort he managed to raise his walking stick.

Shaw instinctively caught hold of the handle. Van Dyke dangled from the walking stick.... while Fido the dog dangled from Van Dyke, clinging on to the traitor's trouser leg with its teeth. Shaw strained to support their weight; Van Dyke felt like a good two hundred pounds, and Fido, nearly twenty.

Shaw shouted, "Hang on!"

Van Dyke barely hung on. His gouty fingers scrabbled at the smooth walking stick, not quite able to get enough traction.

Then the dog began struggling furiously, knocking its master off balance. Van Dyke's fingers slipped from the walking stick. He plummeted downward into the void, his hands grasping desperately at thin air.

Shaw shrugged and tossed Van Dyke's walking stick after him. "Wouldn't want you to lose this."

Shaw made a final survey of the forsaken cavern: it was almost fully buried now, Tallmadge's body the only trace of humanity remaining. He waved a final farewell and departed.

* * *

Shaw scrambled through the collapsing tunnel back towards the safe house. He emerged into the basement only to find that it, too, was collapsing – much like the repeated cave-ins of two months earlier. *Not this again.*

Shaw ran across the basement and up the stairwell to the front hall, where Arthur was waiting for him. “I waited for you,” explained Arthur.

“I saw. Thanks.” Everyone else had already left the house, probably due to the minor problem of falling rafter beams. One particularly large beam landed on a stack of muskets, smashing them to pieces.

“Let’s get out of here.”

Shaw led the way to the open front door. Moments later the once-grand mansion gave a great shudder and imploded.

The other recruits had assembled on the street outside. They watched the house’s disintegrating wooden frame ripple downwards, sending out clouds of white plaster dust. They tensed, holding their collective breath for news of the outcome – Anna bit her lower lip, praying that Shaw made it out alive.

The dirt-stained figure of Ben Shaw stumbled safely out of the wreckage. A roar of applause erupted from the recruits, who began shouting or praying or crying with joy. Arthur and Caleb lifted Shaw onto their shoulders and carried him into the middle of the street where his friends mobbed him, tears streaming down their faces, the terrible stress of the past two months finally at an end.

Anna hugged Shaw, Arthur, anyone she could find. Other recruits were laughing and clapping each other on the back, Shaw most of all. He thought of objecting to the praise, but for once decided to let the moment’s emotions overtake him – he pumped his fist in the air and whooped along with the rest of them. “Thank God. Thank God.”

Only Silas stood aloof from the cheering, his head bowed as if caught up in prayer. Shaw saw his longtime rival and grew more somber. He squirmed from his position atop Caleb’s shoulders and called out to Silas, “What happened to Sinclair and the redcoats?”

“They ran off to the evacuation fleet in the harbor. Can’t say as I blame them.”

“Didn’t you try to stop them?” Shaw asked in amazement.

“We did not,” Silas said coolly.

“But they’ll just come back and we’ll have to fight them again –”

Shaw was cut off by a horde of recruits who overwhelmed him from behind. He involuntarily grinned but shook them off, returning to Silas as the only apparent levelheaded source of information.

Anna also drew closer to Silas, placing a dirt-stained hand upon his shoulder. Shaw frowned.

Shaw resumed speaking in a louder voice, shouting over the persistent cheers:

“Though did I thank you for fighting them at all. Really brave of you to come back and join the rest of us. And of course, without your help I could never have escaped from Sinclair’s deathtrap to save all those people –”

He trailed off. Silas clasped Anna around the shoulder, ignoring him. They would remain always rivals, never friends.

Arthur chirped, “Ain’t he a blockhead?”

Shaw smiled and was about to respond, when Margaret Tallmadge stormed into the rejoicing mob to accost him. “Come with me.”

* * *

Shaw and Mrs. Tallmadge climbed to the summit of nearby Beacon Hill, from where they enjoyed a sweeping view of the surrounding area. To the east the rising sun formed a vibrant orange backdrop to the British evacuation fleet sailing out of Boston Harbor.

Mrs. Tallmadge was breathing heavily from the climb; to catch her breath she leaned against a recently-abandoned British redoubt. She said, "It looks like those tunnels are buried forever."

Shaw struggled to fight back tears. "Like Tallmadge."

"Yes, my husband. It's quite sad, isn't it."

"He... he promised he'd teach me how to make those detonators of his. Now he never will."

Tallmadge's widow looked at the silently weeping Shaw with a detachment verging on curiosity. She matter-of-factly said, "Oh, I know how. I'll show you."

That did it – Shaw burst into tears. Tallmadge stood awkwardly nearby, adjusting the severe bun in her gray hair.

"Patrick was an excellent operations commander and a good man. He will be missed. But the best way to honor a man's memory is to carry his fight forward. I intend to, and so should you."

Her expression tightened. "On that point, you are not to disobey my orders ever again."

"Van Dyke? The man was unarmed! Not that it matters – we've won."

Mrs. Tallmadge stared grimly at Boston Harbor, where the faint outline of a rowboat stood out against the rising sun. A red-coated figure was rowing after the departing British fleet. Shaw took a spyglass from the abandoned redoubt and looked through it to confirm the figure's identity.

"He will return," Tallmadge whispered. "Sinclair will return, stronger than ever, and not before long."

"I sure hope so," said Shaw. "He still has my knife."

Sounds of laughter echoed from the base of the hill. Shaw lightly moved off, jogging downhill to rejoin his celebrating friends.

“You’re leaving, then?”

Shaw called over his shoulder: “Yeah, I’m leaving. Back to Pennsylvania.”

Mrs. Tallmadge shot him a worried look through her cold blue eyes.

“Oh, don’t worry,” Shaw laughed. “I’ll come back. I just have to return home for the spring planting.”

Ahead of them the sun continued to rise.