

The Chronicles of Paddy Taylor

Book One

Tinker Taylor

and

The General's Eyes

By

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# Prologue / Two Fateful Meetings

Boston – March 1776

It was a clear day. Bright sunlight was streaming through the windows, and yet a heavy gloom had settled over the room. The youngest of those gathered, a stout fellow with shoulders so broad he'd barely fit through the door, wore a deep frown that creased his young face. Opposite of him stood two other men, both many years his senior, with lined faces of their own, each wearing the distinctive crimson uniform of those in service to the King of England. Both soldiers had an air about them too, a

confidence gained from long years of being in charge of people and events. In fact, the younger man's very presence before them was an act of obedience, a bending of his will to theirs. And looking at him it was clear for anyone to see that the only reason he was even there was because he had no other choice.

“Tom, you're making much too much of this,” the senior of the two soldiers said, his voice low, but filled with impatience. Gray hair at his temples gave him a distinguished look, while the gold braid woven garishly into his red coat proclaimed him to be an officer, and a very high ranking one at that. “You should be looking at this as a wonderful opportunity...not acting as though *you've* been given a prison sentence.”

“An *opportunity*?” the young man looked back at him with astonishment. “You think I

should be *grateful*, general? Locking me up, or stealing my life...*is there a difference?*”

The general’s lips lifted in a tight smile, but his eyes flashed with unspoken anger. Instead of answering, he turned to look over his shoulder. “What do you think, Provost Marshal Cunningham...is Tom here right? Is my offer comparable to a sentence in one of your prisons?”

The tall soldier at the window might as well have been a statue up to that point. After a moment, he slowly turned around, letting his dark eyes sweep across the room until they came to rest on Tom’s face, where they locked with a coldness that caused the younger man to drop his gaze to the floor. Victory birthed the first sign of emotion within the Provost Marshal, who gave a quiet chuckle, while he regarded the young civilian with a mocking smile.

“I didn’t say I wouldn’t do it,” Tom’s words echoed the defeat written on his face. “I just don’t see why you’d put a gun in the hands of a man skilled with hammer and forge?”

“My dear boy,” the general’s laugh was suddenly lighthearted. “I don’t intend to do any such thing. I have more soldiers than I know what to do with. Oh no, it’s your skill with metal that I need. As far as I’m concerned, you need never even touch a musket.”

The answer surprised Tom, but it also lit a spark of determination behind his eyes. “If I do this...whatever it is you want from me...?” He riveted his gaze on the general. “Do I have your promise...your *word* as a British Officer, that you’ll let my brother go?”

“Of course, Tom...just as we agreed,” the general assured him, giving a dismissive

wave of his hand. “He’ll be set free immediately.”

“And yours, Marshal Cunningham...?” Tom demanded, forcing himself to look at the prison warden.

The Provost Marshal stood silent, his face a blank mask once more, but this time he was the one to look away. A moment later, he gave a shrug while turning back to the window, speaking over his shoulder as he did, “Just do what you’re told, Taylor, and as far as I’m concerned...I’ll forget you and your whole family ever existed.”

The grudging words seemed to lift a great weight from Tom’s shoulders. With a quiet sigh and a nod of resignation, he faced back to the man sent by King George to squelch the American uprising, and told him, “All right then, General Howe...I guess you’ve got your man.”

Many days later, and hundreds of miles away, another gathering took place between three other men. But that meeting wasn't held in a windowed room on a sunny day. The setting was a musty army tent, chilled by the lateness of the day and the season of the year, where a lone lantern hanging from the pole at its center did little to push back the darkness within. The lantern's amber light washed over the faces of two of the men, showing them to be drawn and tired, etched that way by the past they'd just lived through and the uncertain future that awaited them. The third man, seated in the background and hidden by shadows, would have displayed nothing different, even though for the time being he was only a spectator, come to watch and to listen...and most of all, to pray. In contrast to the previous meeting, everyone within the tent's



narrow confines wore the uniforms of their country; but there was no red, only patriot blue. And where there had been discord before, these three soldiers were bound together with a unity of purpose that reached well beyond the canvas walls.

“Nathan, I wish you didn’t need to do this,” the elder of the two men standing under the lantern spoke gravely, his words hanging unacknowledged in the air for long seconds while the young soldier he’d addressed stood looking off into space, his thoughts a million miles away. Just as the older soldier was about to repeat himself, Nathan’s eyes refocused and a wry smile crossed his lips.

“Respectfully, Colonel Knowlton, to quote you, sir... *‘if wishes were horses, then beggars would ride’*,” the late reply was delivered in a feigned solemn tone. “I can’t just stand around and let you and the

generals drag this war out forever, I'd like to have a family someday...*before* I become a dried up old man like the rest of you."

The humor was forced, but the young man's smile was infectious and the colonel found himself returning it. "Well, we certainly can't have that, can we?"

Knowlton laughed, but his tone quickly became serious once more. "Even so, promise me you'll be on your guard at all times...trust no one! If anything goes wrong...if it's found out that you're really a captain in the Continental Army...there'll be nothing any of us can do to help you. Honestly, Nathan, I've never ordered anyone to do something this difficult and dangerous in all my years of service."

"I understand, sir," the captain gave a solemn nod, the lightness was gone from his voice as well. "But you haven't *ordered* me to do anything, colonel. I volunteered...*and*

I'm privileged to take on a task so vital to our cause. No matter the outcome, I'm honored you and General Washington would trust me with this mission, sir."

There were a thousand more things Knowlton wanted to say; advice on what to do, warnings of things to avoid, promises he had no way of backing up; but the time for talking—*like the time for wishing*, was past. Circumstances, desperate as they were, called for action, and the colonel was just grateful the Lord had blessed them with a man like Nathan Hale who was ready to step up to the challenge.

"Then I'll wish you Godspeed, Captain Hale," Knowlton said as he extended his right hand. "And, Nathan, on behalf of General Washington...and *myself*, thank you! You've done your country proud today."

“Thank you, sir,” the young officer reached out to give the colonel’s hand a firm shake. “I won’t let you down.”

Then, with a final, crisp salute, Captain Nathan Hale turned and strode purposefully out of the tent into the foggy September night. Knowlton watched after him for long seconds, his thoughts and prayers going out to the young soldier. Finally, after heaving out a heavy sigh, he turned to face the darkness at the back of the tent.

“Your thoughts, General Greene?” he asked, calling out to the shadows.

The man hidden there leaned out into the lantern light, looking at Knowlton with eyes as haunted as his voice. “God help him, colonel...God help us all.”

## Chapter One / Trial of the Sentry

Lightning split the inky darkness with a blinding arc of jagged light. The accompanying clap of thunder came rolling in right on its heels, crashing with such violence that it felt like the very earth had been cracked in two. In that instant, the rain, heavy and unwavering for the past several hours, suddenly became a full deluge. And through it all, I, Paddy Taylor, tin-smith's apprentice by trade, road-weary traveler by circumstance, sat and shivered, and wished I was somewhere—*anywhere* else. Boston was days and miles behind me, and my goal was but a few hundred yards in front of me, but as things stood, I might never reach it. To come so close only to have it dangled out of reach was irritating in the extreme.

Crouched there beneath a spindly pine tree that was acting more like a funnel than the umbrella I wanted it to be, I decided that I'd never detested anyone as much as I did the man standing a dozen paces off to my left under a guard post lean-to.

It wasn't that he was dry and I wasn't, or even the fact that he was guarding the fort I was trying to sneak into; or at least it shouldn't have been. The inexcusable thing was that he was actually doing his job. To him the word sentry was obviously more than just a title. I'd been dealing with soldiers and sentries for half my life—since the day King George spoiled my eighth birthday by sailing a fleet of occupying troop ships into Boston Harbor. And in all of that time I'd come to rely on the fact that as a rule, sentries generally *stopped* doing much of anything but sleeping the moment you left them alone for more than a

heartbeat. Granted, those had been British soldiers and the man in front of me was one of General Washington's patriots; but still, the color of a man's uniform couldn't make all that much difference, could it? I mean, if the men in blue were truly better soldiers than those wearing red, shouldn't we be *winning* the war?

Another flash of lightning showed me that my tormentor was still standing at his post, a broad shouldered silhouette poised behind a wooden barricade, musket at the ready and eyes probing the darkness. You'd have thought the whole British Army was lurking just beyond his sight. They weren't, but I was; and the situation was becoming desperate. So desperate that I finally had to give up and do the unthinkable.

"Hello the camp," I shouted, forcing the words out with as much volume as my chattering teeth would allow. The sentry's

reaction was instantaneous and as demoralizing as the incessant rain.

“Halt! Who goes there?” he croaked with alarm, swiveling his rifle around and bringing it from half-mast to full alert. Incredibly, though there was ground cover and yards of darkness separating us, a spot over the bridge of my nose began to tingle. The fellow must have had bat senses. I only hoped his finger on the trigger was steadier than his voice.

“Hold up there. You’ve nothing to worry about, it’s just me, Padrick Taylor...tinker by trade,” I called back, seeking to calm him while stretching the truth only a little. “I’ve come to offer my humble services...if you’ve something made of tin in need of repair, I’ll be happy to fix it right up...for a fair price, of course.”

If my words reassured him at all, they weren’t enough to get him to lower his rifle.



Long seconds ticked by while I tried to make myself skinnier behind my tree. I found myself wondering if I'd even hear the report of the rifle if he decided to pull the trigger. Finally, just as I was beginning to think he might never answer, he shouted back, "We've no business for a tinker here...be on your way now."

And that was why I hadn't just approached the guard post in the first place. The man might not be as lazy as his British counterparts, but predictably, he was every bit as unaccommodating. And maybe if all I was truly doing there was stopping by to fix a pot or two that would have been acceptable. But given that I'd spent the last week dodging red-coats and trudging through ankle deep mud to gain an audience with a certain Continental Army Officer, I didn't take the sentry's summary dismissal well at all. Truthfully, I doubt the fellow

could have offended me any more if he actually had taken a shot at me. I felt my Irish temper began to rise—that's never a good thing. The next thing I knew I was out from behind my tree, charging straight toward the guard post. Moonlight glinted off the sentry's rifle barrel as he tracked my progress, but for some reason the loud boom I was expecting never came.

“Is that a pot cradled there in your hands?” I demanded as I drew up before his barricade.

“What...? No, of course not...it's a musket,” the sentry blinked with confusion. That's when another lighting flash showed me his white knuckled hands gripping the rifle. They were visibly shaking too. Granted, both could reasonably be contributed to the harsh weather, but taking a closer look at his face, I doubted it. He was young to be wearing a uniform; I judged him

to be only a little older than my sixteen years. But having said that, there was still an air of innocence about him that I'd left far behind. I had to hold back a laugh. To think that I'd nearly froze to death worrying I was up against the Continental Army's most dedicated soldier, when in reality he was just some poor fellow scared half out of his wits. Of course that didn't make him any less dangerous.

“Why would I have a pot?” the sentry asked with puzzlement, his fear apparently forgotten.

“Precisely my point, you wouldn't,” I said with satisfaction. “You're a soldier...not a cook.”

“Right...?” my answer made him tilt his head to one side.

I reached out to tap the end of his musket. That wasn't hard since it was centered on my chest. “If you'd have told me to go away

because you've no need of a *gunsmith*, I'd have gladly taken you at your word. You're a soldier, you should know about guns. But you're not the camp cook, so saying there's no need for a tinker here...that's a straight up lie."

"I'm no liar!" he retorted angrily.

"Oh really? Can you say with certainty that there's not a single pot inside this camp that needs repaired?" I challenged.

That furrowed his brow, but he just shook his head. "I've got my orders...*nobody* gets into the fort."

I gave him a sad look of disapproval, but I'm not sure how well it came off in the darkness. "And that's just another fabrication," I said. "Tell me, what if Mister John Adams or someone else from the Continental Congress should happen by? Would you turn *them* away?"

“*No*...I should think not,” the man’s eyes went wide at the thought.

“Of course you wouldn’t,” I affirmed. “There are some people you’d be expected to escort into the fort...not keep them out. Now isn’t that so?”

“Well, you’re not one of them!” he replied adamantly.

“You can’t know that,” I argued. “Just let me run inside and check with the cook. If he has no need of my services then I’ll be back before you can whistle the first bar of Yankee Doodle.”

Thinking I’d made my point, I put a winning smile on my face and tried to make my way around the barrier, only to find the forestock of a musket barring my path. It wasn’t gently applied either. I stumbled back a step while the sentry gave me a hard glare, telling me, “No one gets into the camp

unescorted...and I can't leave my post. Captain Carver would have my hide.”

Now some would look at that as a setback, but I took it as progress. If nothing else, having a rifle barrel across your chest beats looking down its bore any day. Plus, now I knew that all I needed to do was convince the sentry to totally disregard a lawful order. Fortunately, while I was still scrambling to put together a plan on how to do that, the weather, which had so vexed me for the past week, came roaring to my rescue.

A sudden gust of wind brought with it the echoing crack of a breaking tree branch giving way, followed a moment later by a thunderous crash as it impacted the earth a dozen or so yards behind me. The sentry gave a sharp intake of breath and whipped his musket up, pointing it over my shoulder into the darkness, seeking out the invisible

enemies his imagination had conjured up—it was just the opening I needed.

“You needn’t worry about anything back there,” I assured him calmly. “There’s not another soul within ten miles of us back that way.”

“H-how do you know that?” he asked as his eyes continued to scan the shadows for hidden intruders.

“By any chance did you happen to notice that I just came from that direction?” I *tried* to keep the sarcasm out of my voice.

“That doesn’t necessarily mean anything,” he retorted, sparing a nervous glance in my direction. “Are you a trained scout?”

“No...no I’m not,” I admitted. “But...”

“That’s right. You’re a *tinker* not a soldier,” the sentry chided, his eyebrows arching smugly. “Which means you know about as much about scouting as I do about cook pots.”

Realizing the fellow might not be quite as short on lamp oil as I'd pegged him to be, I spun together a quick little lie. "That may be true, but I *am* observant...*and* I've been searching this entire area for the past two days looking for work. You can't do that without getting a pretty good lay of the land. Lucky for you...and your superiors, scout or no scout, I know exactly where King George's men are *and* where they *aren't!*"

"Hmmmph," my soldier friend didn't sound nearly as impressed as I'd hoped, but that just meant I needed to keep talking.

"I'm guessing your Captain Carver might be *very* interested in that type of information." I suggested.

That brought a scowl and a firm headshake. "I'm not supposed to disturb Captain Carver."

The soldier had regained much of his composure after his earlier fright and that



wasn't working in my favor. And it wasn't helping that he seemed even more afraid of his superior than the entire British Army. But then again, maybe I could turn that to my advantage.

“Bringing him important information about enemy troop movements would hardly be *disturbing* him?” I countered. He was no longer waving his flintlock over my shoulder, so I leaned in to accentuate my point. As I did, some of the rainwater pooled in the brim of my hat washed down over his musket, but as wet and dreary as the night was I don't think he even noticed. “Why I'd imagine your captain would be impressed with your initiative if you provided him with something so critical to the war effort. On the other hand, how do you think he'll take it when I eventually *do* meet up with him and he discovers *you* withheld something so vital from him?”

My thinly veiled threat seemed to make him waver, but then he set his jaw again and shook his head. “No, I can’t do it. I have to stay at my post. It will have to wait until morning. Come back then and *maybe* you can see him.”

If I had believed it to be an honest offer, and I wasn’t chilled to the bone, I might have taken him up on it. But as things stood, I decided I’d had my fill of standing on the outside the fort; it was past time for me to find out if what was waiting on the inside was more to my liking.

“I can’t let you pass up such a golden opportunity,” I told the sentry. Before the words were out of my mouth, I’d vaulted over the barricade, dashing past him to start marching briskly up the path leading up the hill that I assumed led into the fort. My hope was that the soldier would simply fall in

behind me, but a moment a loud shout rang out from behind me.

“Halt or I’ll shoot!” The sentry cried. When I didn’t, there came another very distinct sound—the sharp click of the soldier’s finger engaging the trigger of his musket.

## Chapter Two / An Ironclad Argument

An instant after I heard the trigger being pulled, there came the even louder snap as the hammer released, driving the piece of flint clenched in its jaws home. My back was turned so I couldn't see if it created a spark or not, but even if it had the water from the brim of my hat had drenched it beyond igniting. The sentry let out another yell—of frustration, and I heard his heavy boots sloshing after me. He was a long legged fellow, so, fast as I ran, he eventually caught up with me, but by that time we were already into the fort proper and apparently only a short distance from his superior's shelter. I countered the sentry's offer of marching me back out of the camp, giving him his choice of two options; he could either escort me to see his captain or I'd start

yelling at the top of my lungs and we'd meet him anyway.

The sentry, Private Quigg, wasn't happy about the situation, but he turned and stalked off, leading us farther into the fort. In short order we arrived at the part of the camp housing the officer's quarters, though to my eye the only difference was that the rows of white canvas tents surrounding us were slightly bigger than the ones we'd already been seeing. And the tent we arrived at seemed no different than its neighbors either, but according to Quigg, that wasn't true of the man inside. By his account, Captain Clifton B. Carver was overbearing and quick tempered; though he didn't say that in so many words. I wasn't too worried though, I'd had a few dealings with gruff military types in the past, and in my experience, once you got through all their bluster, they were usually fair-minded,

decent fellows. Usually. It only took a matter of seconds after stepping inside the tent for me to realize that both Quigg's and my assessment were woefully inadequate.

“Quigg, if you're here, then obviously you're not at your post, now are you?” Captain Carver's growl cut off his subordinate in mid-sentence. He'd finally left off swearing at being disturbed, but hadn't yet bothered to crawl out of his cot, or to even look around for that matter.

“No...no sir, I'm not,” Private Quigg stuttered. He'd just finished lighting the lantern hanging from the center tent pole and its glow showed his face to be drawn with worry. “I didn't want to leave my post, but I knew we couldn't have this fella in the camp unattended.”

“Right...exactly my point,” Carver finally levered himself up on one elbow to give the sentry a sour look. “Not only did you

abandon your post...but you actually *escorted* an intruder into the fort.” He let out a yawn and rubbed his eyes. “I swear, you have to be the worst soldier who ever lived.”

“I tried to shoot him,” Quigg lamented, before confessing, “but my powder got wet.”

“The reason sentries have shelters is so that wouldn’t happen,” the captain heaved a sigh of disappointment and cast a discerning eye in my direction. “What happened to your bayonet? He doesn’t seem to be leaking any blood from what I can see?”

“I bent it digging a privy,” the private admitted, dropping his eyes in shame. “The blacksmith hasn’t gotten around to straightening it yet.”

“Oh Quigg, what am I to do with you?” Carver collapsed back onto his cot and frowned up at the tent canvas. “I don’t

suppose I could convince you to turn traitor and run off to join the British, could I?”

Rather than answer, Quigg finally took up the tactic I'd been waiting for, “He says he has information about enemy troop movements...and that it could be very beneficial.”

“I don't care what *he* said...and neither should you!” Captain Carver paused to thump his chest with a bony forefinger. “*I'm* your Commanding Officer...*me*. You'll have a chance to reflect on that this next week while you're working double shifts and getting half rations.”

“Yes, sir,” Private Quigg answered forlornly. I'd heard enough at that point and stepped around Quigg to personally address my concerns to his thickheaded superior.

“Captain,” I began, keeping my voice low and friendly. “I think you're making a bit of a mistake here. Honestly, if you'll just take



me to see the general, I assure you, he'll be very grateful to hear what I have to say. I can provide him with extensive information on what the British are up to between here and New York."

"*I'm* making a mistake...*really?*" Carver balanced on one elbow and smiled at me—it wasn't a pleasant thing. "Well now, we certainly can't have that...can we?"

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he turned to lean over the side of his cot and came back up a moment later holding a pistol, which he calmly pointed in my direction. That spot between my eyebrows started to tingle again and it was my turn to frown.

"Speaking of mistakes..." Carver continued, cocking back the hammer on his weapon. "You'll be making a rather large one if you don't shut your mouth and follow

Private Quigg to the stockade. Now would be a good time to do that!”

I was getting really tired of everyone I met sticking a gun in my face, but looking past the pistol barrel into the eyes of the man on the cot, I decided the time for arguing had indeed come to an end. Captain Carver motioned Quigg over and handed him his pistol. “Take him *directly* to the stockade, Private Quigg. Don’t deviate or hesitate, and if he even steps one toe out of line on the way, I’d better find out that this time you did more than just *try* to shoot him.”

It’s hard for me to back down from anyone, but when Private Quigg started prodding me toward the tent flap again, I went. We made our way back out into the damp night. The good news was that most of the storm had finally passed, leaving the air heavy but relatively calm under a crescent moon. It would have made for a pleasant

evening walk if the circumstances and my mood had been better. I wasn't the only one upset with how things had gone either. Understandably, Private Quigg was quite put out at the way Carver had treated him, even if he was a little misguided in where he placed the blame for his troubles.

“It's not my fault you work for a tyrant,” I pointed out as we walked along. “In my opinion, you need to start standing up for yourself. Bullies like your captain only get worse when all you do is whimper and cower anytime they glance in your direction.”

I thought it fine advice, but Quigg just huffed and reminded me he'd been ordered to shoot me if I gave him any more trouble. I should have known better than to waste time trying to help the hopeless. We moved along in silence after that, with Quigg using Carver's pistol barrel like a cattle prod while

treating me like someone named ‘Old Betsy’. Through the heart of the sleeping encampment we went, passing by row after row of staked out tents, so many that it was impossible to count them all. That was impressive enough, but then we came upon the biggest log cabin I’d ever seen. It wasn’t just long and wide either, but also boasted a second story. That caught my full attention, making me remember what I was really doing there. But despite my best persuasive efforts, my escort refused to take even the tiniest little detour.

“I already don’t get to eat or sleep for a week because I listened to you once,” Quigg grumbled. “I guess you won’t be satisfied until I’m locked up with you in the stockade, or stood in front of a firing squad.”

By then I’d decided the only way I was ever going to win an argument with a soldier was to have a bigger gun than he did. So, I

just bit my lip and we trudged on ahead in silence. Eventually we ended up on the far side of the camp, near the stable and the stockyard by the smell of things, at a different log structure. This one was much smaller and unless I missed my guess, I was looking at the *stockade*. It was a paltry thing, really nothing more than a wooden box with boarded up windows and a reinforced door. Well, and of course there was the jailer—you hardly even needed a door with a man that big to block the way. In his hurry to be rid of me, Quigg neglected to introduce us, so I decided to call the oversized soldier Brute.

As we drew near a massive arm reached out and gave the heavy door a tug, ripping it open as easily as if it was fashioned out of old newspaper. Private Quigg gave me one last jab with Carver's pistol, encouraging me to cross the threshold, but I held back,

wanting to discuss the injustice that was being done. Quigg's face got all red and twisted up, and the jailer, he just reached out a massive paw and snatched me off my feet. Then without a word—from him, I let out a yell—he snapped his wrist and I went sailing through the doorway. It was a short trip, but I still learned a lot. To begin with, the structure itself was quite well made, at least the wall I crashed into was sturdy enough. And my initial impression of the stockade being nothing more than a converted chicken coop, thankfully that turned out to be false. At least I didn't taste a hint of manure in the mouthful of dirt I swallowed. I lay there for a moment wondering if the crack I'd heard when I hit the wall was the sound of splintering wood or bone? But before I could come to any sort of conclusion, the sound of heavy footsteps came lumbering toward me in the darkness.

I tried to scramble away but a moment later a vise clamped down on my upper arm and I was airborne again—apparently Brute hadn't been satisfied with where I'd landed on the first toss. This time I impacted dirt instead of wood, which was a welcome change, and ended up splayed out on my back, but at least most of my limbs were pointing in the right directions. I tried to sit up, but before I could even get my arms working to lever myself up, someone dropped a ship's anchor on my chest.

Had my jailer realized how bad of shape I was already in, I doubt he would have bothered pinning me down with his foot. I tried to let out a yell of protest, but of course that would have required air in my lungs. In the end I had to settle for wildly beating my fists against the tree trunk that was crushing the life out of me—I doubt Brute even noticed. Mercifully, things started to go dim

at that point, but I do recall hearing a distinctive metallic clanking sound right before everything went completely black.

I'm not sure how long I was out, but when I woke up I could breathe again. That didn't keep me from wanting to scream though; both of my legs were in agony, feeling as if I'd stepped into twin bear traps. I wondered what had happened while I slept until I remembered the metallic sound I'd heard just before I lost consciousness. Then, despite the pain, I got a smile on my face. Reaching down, my searching fingers found exactly what I'd hoped for—the jailer had fitted me with a nice set of leg irons. The pain was caused by the fact that he'd clamped them on much higher than untended, causing the metal to bite into my calves and shins. It took some effort, and I



lost a few layers of skin, but I was eventually able to work them down around my ankles where they belonged and that alleviated most of my discomfort. Not that I was happy about wearing them, but that was just a temporary inconvenience —locking a tinker up in any kind of mechanical device is about as practical as gluing a bear's paws together with honey. Once I retrieved a couple of the items I always carried in my pack, I'd have myself free in no time. I reached up over my shoulder to pull the haversack off my back to get at my tools, and—it was gone! That made my heart skip a beat, and for the first time since Captain Carver had said I was to be locked up, I truly felt like I'd lost my freedom. Fighting down panic, I began to frantically search around in the darkness for my missing pack. My hope was that the loose fitting haversack had simply slipped off in all the commotion

of the jailer locking me up, but the area surrounding me held nothing but loose dirt. And as far as the rest of my prison went, there was no telling, because my shackles were tethered to the wall of the stockade by a short chain. But then the more I thought about it, the more I was convinced that my haversack wasn't on the inside of the building at all. It was much more likely that the jailer had relieved me of it while I was unconscious. That's what I would have done. Which also fit perfectly with how the rest of my miserable day was going.

*At least you're not still out in the storm getting soaked, Paddy,* the thought came unbidden into my head. The voice behind the words belonged to my brother, Tom. Ever the optimist, Tom seemed to believe that all of life's catastrophes were simply God's blessings in disguise. The greater the calamity, the more blessed you were. He'd

positively beamed the day I broke my leg scaling the Christ's Church bell tower attempting to shut down the infernal clanging of the bell that was ruining an otherwise pleasant Sunday morning. Tom insisted it was the Lord's way of providing me with time to devote to my studies. And study I did, but I spent my days down at the docs instead of with my nose wedged inside some useless book. The knots and other useful 'skills' I learned from the sailors and other denizens of the wharf were certainly an education, and I ended up counting that time as a blessing, though I'm not so sure Tom did.

“Leave me alone,” I grumbled aloud. “It's all your fault I'm even in this mess. If it wasn't for you I'd still be in Boston, cozied up to a nice warm fire.”

Almost as if in answer, someone on the other side of the stockade wall started to

sing. Whoever it was had a rather nice baritone voice too. I didn't recognize the song or the singer, but after a moment I realized it had to be my brutish jailer. Who would have thought such a beast of a man capable of making such beautiful music? I was actually starting to enjoy my unexpected serenade until another sound caught my attention—the quiet rustle of fabric, accompanied by a faint metallic tinkling. Brute was pawing through my haversack! No wonder he was in such a whimsical mood. And why would I have expected anything else? In the short time I'd been around the Continental Army, they'd already managed to insult, assault and wrongfully imprison me. Why not add robbery to the list? It was enough to make you think the British occupation hadn't been such a bad thing after all.

The more I listened to the sound of singing and clanking coming through the walls the angrier I got and the more I wanted to pay back a little of the misery I'd been receiving. My situation was bleak, but I wasn't about to admit defeat either. Many people think the most important part of being a tinker is your training and tools. Those are important, especially for the common tasks that fill a tinsmith's day; pot repair, utensil crafting, polishing, shaping and the like. But there are times when a tinker runs headlong into a situation which has no ready-made solution. In those cases, there is no substitute for having a good imagination and the ability to improvise something out of almost nothing. I'd lost my haversack with all the needful items it contained, and while that was far from an ideal situation, I still had my wits and the clothing on my back. All I had to do was figure out how to combine those two

things into a way to dissolve metal and walk through walls.

Of all the things working against me, my most immediate problem was the leg irons, and while I'd already put hands on them it was time to do a more detailed inspection—as much as I could in the meagerly lit stockade. Reaching down, in short order my fingers told me what my eyes couldn't. I might be in a military lock-up but the leg irons were typical of what you'd expect to find in any jail. A pair of stirrup shaped cuffs circled my ankles, with a short length of chain running between them, and another, heavier chain connecting them, and me, to the stockade wall. With my brother being a blacksmith, I was quite familiar with the design—plus I'd had a few more *intimate* encounters during my dealings with the British. Unfortunately, the key to getting them off was literally a key; a very special

one that fit the little square studs residing within the recessed ends of the shackle's two locking mechanisms. My jailer had a key, but I couldn't see Brute sharing it with me, so I'd have to make one of my own. Having concluded what was needed, I sat back for a moment and took stock of what I had on hand to tackle the problem.

The possibilities weren't endless; air, dirt and cloth I had plenty of—but they were all useless against forged iron. Only metal would do, which left three options available to me; my shackles, the chains attached to them, and my belt buckle. From there it only took a moment to narrow the list down to one, with the buckle being the only thing I had that was both thin and pliable enough to attempt reshaping. If I had Brute's strength creating a key out of it would have been no harder than folding a piece of paper; but if that were the case I'd likely have just ripped

the shackles in two and been done with it. As it was, without my haversack, I knew I'd need to improvise some tools. After giving it a little more thought, I decided the top of one of my shackle stirrups would make a serviceable anvil, and for a hammer, I balled up a section of the chain running between the shackles. Then, to prevent the pounding I needed to do from alerting the jailer of what I was up to, I pulled off my coat and wrapped one of the sleeves around the chain link hammer to help muffle the sound. After that I got to work, and it was precise work too, made especially difficult by the dark, and the fact that I was fettered to the objects I was using for tools. Still, crafting delicate items was nothing new to me and I quickly settled into a good rhythm; measuring and bending, measure again and adjusting as necessary. And so it went. I lost track of time, but somewhere along the line Brute's



singing faded off and became a raucous snore. After that, things sped up considerably since I was able to put a little more force into my hammering. The first time I tried my new key it didn't quite fit in the opening, but after a few more gentle taps to square it up, it slipped into the lock and a few moments later I was finally free to explore the rest of my prison.

There wasn't much worth noting to be found. Besides three more sets of leg irons and a pair of wooden buckets—one for water and the other in place of a chamber pot, the room was empty of furnishings. The walls were just as I remembered, built of stout timbers and even though I couldn't tell in the dim light, I suspect the same would be true for the roof overhead. I had no intention of going anywhere near the door with the jailer on the other side of it, so that left me with two choices—dig my way out, or

remove a plank to climb out a window. I considered both of those to be reasonable options; the deciding factor coming down to expediency and digging seemed the simplest and fastest means. Using one of the shackle cuffs as an ill-shaped shovel, I tested the ground at the base of the wall furthest from the door. It worked, but what I found was hard, rocky soil. It wasn't the hard work that made me abandon my effort though. What I couldn't accept was the grating sound of metal on stone each time the shackle contacted a rock. I might have found a more cooperative place to dig had I searched but I doubted it, besides, something I'd noticed about the windows when Private Quigg had marched me up to the jail made me turn my attention there. They had a weakness. Whoever had shuttered them had used nice thick boards to close up the windows, but they'd also used *green* lumber. No doubt

they'd been as impenetrable as the heavy door at first, but time, rain and sunshine had taken their toll. Even by moonlight it was plain to see that the boards had shrunk and split as they dried, especially around the peg holes securing them to the window frames.

With that in mind, I made my way around the room, testing each window, and as expected the planks on the south side of the building—the one that caught the most sun, had more give to them. That was also the window opposite the door, which worked in my favor too. The middle of the three planks was the most pliable and I was able to start working it free just by pushing on one side, then the other. That went along fine and I quickly gained almost an inch of movement before the board hung up and refused to go any further. If I judged correctly, I still needed another half inch on each end to get the board free of its pegs. Since Brute was

still snoring away I decided to risk a little hammering. This time I used one of the shackles as my hammer, again wrapping my coat around the metal to deaden the sound. While I'm sure that helped some, the hollow thud that came with the first blow made my breath catch in my throat. I might as well have been beating on a drum from the way the board echoed when I'd struck it. Somehow the jailer had slept right through it, but the plank hadn't budged and I wasn't willing to risk another attempt. Once again it was time to adjust my plan.

Checking my progress, I found I'd created a narrow gap between the plank and the outer wall, just enough to squeeze my fingers into. Not that it did me any good; the pegs still had a solid grip on the board and I wasn't at a proper angle to apply any pressure to them. But after reflecting, I decided that if I had a lever of some sort it

should be easy to convince the plank to continue on its journey. And as simple as that, the wooden buckets I'd earlier categorized as worthless, suddenly became very important. Either would have worked, but for obvious reasons I selected the water bucket over the one intended as a privy. Its design, being crafted of wooden slats, each two inches wide and twelve inches tall, gave me not just one lever but my choice of a dozen. All I needed to do was free them from the metal rings binding them all together. For that, I carried the bucket over to the window to get access to one of the sets of shackles. The bucket was well made, but it only took a few minutes of prying and tapping with the end of the shackle to disassemble it. As soon as the rings slipped free I had my lever. Elated, I climbed to my feet and started working my new wooden pry bar into the gap between the sill and the

plank. My biggest fear at that point was of tearing the board completely free of its pegs and sending it crashing to the ground. Using extra care to avoid that, I worked the lever the rest of the way into position and began to pry at the plank. Once I'd moved it outward another quarter inch or so, I switched sides and began to work the other end. Alternating that way, I was finally able to work one side completely loose, where it just hung, held in place by the remaining pegs at the far end of the board. Things took a turn for the worse moments later as I got ready to work the remaining two pegs. I was still in the process of sliding my lever into place when one of them let go and the plank arced down like it was hinged, impacting the ground with a hard thud—almost as loud as the hammering of my heart in my chest. I froze in place, waiting for the sound of heavy footsteps to come storming through

the door. But as the seconds passed with nothing but the sound of chirping crickets and Brute's deep breathing to be heard, I started to think that things might finally be going my way.

The best news was that weak moonlight was now filtering through the new gap in the rear window. And when I leaned in to inspect my handiwork, I found that removing the one plank was indeed all that was needed. It was time to take my leave of the stockade, but as I turned to retrieve my belt and coat a thought occurred to me. I wasn't planning on ever coming back to the stockade, but then again, I hadn't intended to be there in the first place. With that in mind, I took the time to work my way back around the room, pausing at each set of shackles to pack the keyways with as much dirt as they would hold. It wasn't a permanent fix, but hopefully it would pay

the jailer back for some of the irritation he'd caused me.

After sliding out the window, I found myself humming one of Brute's tunes while I paused to look up into the starry night sky. There's just something thrilling about breaking out of jail—it was almost enough to make a you want to go out and get arrested. The fact that the last vestiges of the storm had blown through only added to my good mood. I let myself enjoy the moment for a bit, but not too long, there was still one last detail to attend to before I left the stockade behind. Being careful of where I stepped, I crept around to the front of the building and peeked around the corner. Sure enough, there was the jailer, his massive body leaned up against the barred door, slack-jawed in slumber and I was relieved to see my haversack lying on the ground beside him. And best of all, he'd apparently been a



good little thief and put everything neatly away; probably just to make it easier to take everything with him once his shift was over, but I found myself hating him a little less anyway.

He looked to be out cold, but I still crept forward on tiptoes. I hesitated to do even that. The smart thing would have been to abandon my haversack, but there were just too many valuable things inside. It had taken me years to acquire my tools and some of them were nearly irreplaceable. I held my breath the whole way, ready to bolt back around the corner of the stockade, but the jailer didn't budge, and his chest kept rising and falling in rhythm with his loud snores. Eventually, I was forced to step over his outstretched legs to reach my haversack and teeter there precariously as I slowly lifted the pack off the ground. After all my hard work, I could just see myself losing my

balance to topple into the slumbering jailer, but a moment later I was hoisting the pack onto my shoulder and slipping away into the night, following the same path Private Quigg had marched me down a few hours before. And this time I promised myself that no one would stop me from visiting a certain oversized log cabin, or finally having my long overdue meeting with the man I was sure I'd find inside.

## Chapter Three / The General's General

I hadn't started the evening with an abundance of patience, and what little I'd had got squashed by a giant boot and a pair of leg-irons. Given my mood and the late hour, I decided a direct frontal attack to be as good a tactic as any. I stalked back through the sleeping camp, past row upon row of sagging rain-soaked tents, all the way to the huge log building I'd earlier begged Private Quigg to let me visit. The closer I approached the more impressive it got, to the point that I wondered why the Continental Army bothered with tents at all? Why not just house all the soldiers inside the gigantic cabin? Then I had a thought—*what if they had?* That might even explain why there was no sentry standing outside the door. My heartbeat kicked up a few notches but I'd come too far to tuck tail and run.

Steeling myself, I marched straight up the steps and jerked open the front door only to find Captain Carver was standing on the other side. From his expression he was as surprised to see me as I was him.

He immediately started glaring over my shoulder and bellowing for Private Quigg, but I didn't hesitate. Since he'd been in the act of reaching for the door handle, he was a bit off balance, so you couldn't really blame me for what happened next.

“Excuse me, I've an appointment inside,” I said, grabbing his arm to help pull myself through the doorway. The captain let out a startled cry, and that was followed by three loud thumps. I tried to feel bad about his tumble down the steps, but I was in too much of a hurry to go back and check on him. My hope was that he hadn't broke more than a dozen major bones in the fall. But, just in case he came through unscathed,

I raced forward as fast as my feet could carry me.

Once inside, I quickly discovered that the cabin was nothing but a giant wooden maze. The long hallway I found myself in had a number of doors lining either side, all of them closed, and none of them looked very inviting. Not to mention that loud snoring could be heard echoing from behind several of them. The faint light coming from the far end of the hall seemed a better choice, so I ran on ahead. Unfortunately, all I found when I got there was yet another hallway running off in both directions. Naturally, it too was lined with closed doors. I did find the source of light though, a sconce attached to one of the walls, but that proved no real help at all. Time seemed to be pressing down upon me. I couldn't hear Carver chasing after me yet, but that didn't mean that he wasn't. On impulse, I turned to the

right and took off again. This time when I reached the end of the hall instead of ending up at another intersection I found myself standing in front of a door, and while it was closed like all the others, the new sound of boots echoing down the hall made me reach for the doorknob.

The room behind the door was a bit on the smallish side, but it was still spacious enough to hold a large desk and assorted other furnishings. Candles on the desk and a flickering fireplace bathed everything with yellow light, showing me among other things that I wasn't alone. Two uniformed men were at the far end of the room. A stately looking fellow with a touch of gray at his temples, but with sharp arching eyebrows, was seated behind the desk. The desk itself was a mess; littered to overflowing with stacks of papers, and from what I could see, a very large, hand-drawn

map. The map had his full attention. He didn't even cast a glance in my direction as I entered. Meanwhile, the other man, tall and thin, and a good decade younger, was hovering at the other soldier's side, looking eager to do something while actually doing nothing at all. *He* did look up when I stepped into the room and from his expression he wasn't happy at my interrupting whatever the two of them were about either.

“Good evening, sirs,” I said, taking the initiative and stepping forward to introduce myself. I'd intended to march right up to the desk to do everything right and proper, but the younger soldier had taken a quick step to block my path.

“General Washington, I presume,” I said confidently, leaning to the side to peer around the fellow I assumed was the general's aide. “I'm Padrick Taylor,

reporting for duty, sir. I'm a Tinker by trade, patriot by choice, and every inch of me is at your service!"

Now I wasn't expecting handclapping or anything, but you would have expected him to at least acknowledge my existence. Instead, he just sat there, studying his map—for an uncomfortably long time.

"Presume all you like, young fellow," he finally said sourly. "But I'm happy to report that the burden of leading our nation's army rests firmly upon other, much mightier, shoulders than mine."

I didn't like the sound of that, but before I could even formulate my next question, Captain Carver finally caught up to me and came blustering into the room. That was enough to convince me I was in the wrong place and I did a quick about-face. Carver had planted himself directly in my way, but he wasn't nearly as worrisome without his



pistol. I was ready to spill him onto his backside again when a hand clamped down on my shoulder locking me in place—the aide had quite a grip for a man so slightly built.

“Your pardon, General Greene...sir,” Carver was a bit out of breath, but he had enough energy to give me a nasty glare. “*This* is the very miscreant I was just telling you about, sir.”

“Yes, I gathered that when he barged in here and introduced himself,” the general said, finally lifting his head to frown at Captain Carver. His eyes were dark and intelligent, but not overly patient looking. “But why have you brought him...*here*?”

“Ah, well...actually, sir, *I* didn’t,” the captain stammered. “I ordered one of my private’s to lock him in the stockade. I have no idea why he failed to do that, but I assure you, sir, I *will* find out!”

Hearing that, the general finally turned his eyes on me and I drew myself up to meet his gaze. Try as I might, I couldn't guess what he was thinking, but it only took a moment before he spoke his thoughts. "Were you really intending to lock this boy in the stockade? Why he can't be more than fifteen years old at most."

"Actually, sir, I'm only six months shy of my seventeenth birthday," I tried to interject, but General Greene and everyone else seemed to have gone deaf to the sound of my voice.

"Exactly the point, general," instead of being cowed, Captain Carver got more adamant. "He's nowhere near old enough to be the tinker he claims to be. If nothing else, he's a liar...and who knows *what else*. As I was telling you earlier...he's shown great interest in our military plans. He may only be a child, sir, but spies come in all shapes,

sizes...*and* ages. I thought it only prudent to lock him up until I could give the matter my full attention.”

“Hmmm, that didn’t work out so well, did it?” The general observed, then he looked back to me. “And what do you have to say for yourself, Mister Taylor?”

“Sir, I’m only here because I have important business with General Washington,” I answered truthfully. I was happy that I’d managed to find myself standing in the presence of a high ranking officer, especially because I sensed that General Greene was a man of reason. “Is there any way that I might meet with him now, sir?”

“No, I’m afraid not. My hope is that General Washington is taking full advantage of this rare opportunity to get some rest,” General Greene replied gravely. “And if he’s not sleeping, then he’ll be praying, and

I'd certainly not interrupt that either. Besides which, he's not actually here at the moment, but located at his own headquarters. So, whatever this *business* of yours is, young fellow, you'll either have to conduct it with me, or not all."

"But this *is* Fort Washington isn't it?" I asked, confused that I could be so far off track after all the effort I'd put forth to get there.

"Indeed, it is," General Greene acknowledge, nodding his head. "And so named for our illustrious leader. I like to think he's here with us in spirit too. But physically...he's decided to forgo our nice, drafty fort and setup his headquarters in a stuffy old mansion down the road."

"I don't suppose you'd point me in his direction?" I ventured hopefully.

That drew a scowl. “Did you hear the part about the general not needing to be disturbed this evening?”

I didn’t like it, but it was plain that General Greene wasn’t going to be persuaded. While my mind raced, the general’s aide found his voice.

“Young fellow, you are addressing *Major General* Nathanael Greene,” he chided. “For your information, there is no one under God’s Heaven that is closer with, or more trusted by, General Washington. I assure you, for all intents and purposes, you might as well be addressing George Washington himself.”

It was the type of remark one might expect a subordinate to say in order to garner his superior’s favor, but in this case I suspected it was the simple truth, and that made up my mind. “Very well then, sir,” I said, drawing myself up to look the general straight in the

eye. “My reason for being here is that I, and I alone, possess all the information necessary for General Washington to rally and take New York back from the British!”

Captain Carver let out a snort, but it was the smirk on the aide’s face that set my blood to boiling. If it hadn’t been for General Greene himself calmly waiting for me to continue, I would have told both his lackeys exactly what I thought of them. Instead, I clamped down on my temper and focused on finding just the right words to try and convince the general to take my offer seriously.

“You see, sir, I’ve only just left New York, and I have detailed knowledge of every encampment and sentry post between here and the town common,” I stated confidently. “In fact, if you’ll allow me the privilege, General Greene, I can lead your whole army to the edge of the city itself without a single

king's man knowing we're even in the neighborhood."

"*There...did you hear that, general?*"

Captain Carver cut in with triumphant cry.

"There's no denying the boy's true motives now...*he's here to lure us into an ambush!*"

The aide suddenly stopped smirking and I watched all the kindness wash out of the general's eyes. Carver's accusations were ludicrous in the extreme; I just couldn't figure out why I was the only one who thought so. The temperature in the room felt like it dropped ten degrees and yet beads of sweat started to break out on my brow. All I could do was stand there frozen, afraid to say anything, but I was also very aware that my silence was making me look guiltier by the second. My mind was racing, but it was General Greene who finally broke the silence.

“Captain Carver,” he lifted his eyes to the man behind me, his voice low and measured. “Would you be so kind as to see if Major Walsh is available to join us?”

“*Major Walsh...?*” Carver sounded surprised, almost startled, but his next words were dripping with fervor. “Why yes, sir...of course. Right away, general!”

Carver turned and hurried off, leaving me to brood about what had gotten him so excited. Whatever it was I doubted it could be good news for me. General Greene eyed me speculatively for a moment, then went back to fussing over his map while his aide nonchalantly wandered over to station himself between me and the opened door. He kept one eye on his superior but the other was locked on me. With nothing else to do, I made my way over to the fireplace, thinking its heat might take some of the chill off my wet clothing. And it did, though that did



nothing to change the atmosphere in the room itself which remained as frosty as ever. As I watched the dancing flames, I had to wonder what General Greene had in store for me—was this Major Walsh some sort of expert torturer summoned to rip the truth from me. Images of flails, gouges and hot irons flashed through my mind and my heart started to beat a little faster. Surely that couldn't be the case. I hadn't heard of the Continental Army using such tactics; nor could I imagine General Greene ordering them, or even allowing something so barbarian to happen? Still, what else could it be? As if he could read my thoughts, the aide strode over and locked his eyes on mine.

“Here's the truth of it, Taylor,” he said, leaning in close. “If you're hiding something, you might as well say it right now. Ezra Walsh can see all the way down

into a man's very soul. If you're lying, boy, he'll know it the moment he lays eyes on you."

Obviously he meant to scare me, but his words were a salve to my bruised spirit. If the general's plan was to have some fellow with a reputation for picking out lies question me...well, let's just say I was confident my worries were over. I had to bite down on a smile as I gave the aide the worried look he was wanting. Satisfied, he returned to his self-appointed station at the doorway, leaving me to consider what I'd just learned.

Finally, a ray of sunshine in my bleak day. I did my best to appear pensive and nervous, which was hard since I was so anxious to tell this Major Walsh the *truth*. Not the actual truth mind you—in my experience doing that just tends to drag things out. And it so rarely achieves the satisfying results a

finely crafted fabrication will produce. Even if the fellow Carver was fetching truly had a knack for picking out a lie, I was convinced there wasn't a man alive who could catch me out on a story; not after I'd spent some time spinning it. And whoever this Major Walsh was, he was about to hear a tale I'd been working to perfect for the better part of a month. My small eternity of waiting finally ended when the sound of boot steps came echoing down the hall and a moment later Captain Carver strode back into the room. Right behind him came the man who would bring more trial and frustration into my life than any single person should ever have to bear.

## Chapter Four / Major Complications

I looked up with my best winning smile only to have it smashed flat against a stonewall named Ezra Walsh. Physically, the major wasn't much to look at. He was slightly built, of middling height, with salt and peppered brown hair worn middling long. And well...overall he was just middling. But his bearing, the way everyone stopped to look at him when he entered the room—there was nothing middling about that. I could tell it wasn't something he did on purpose either. There was just something about the man that made you pay attention to him. Stranger yet, there was a part of me that wanted *him* to pay some attention to me. I actually found myself wishing he'd turn to look at me—*and then he did.*

They say there are people that can look right through you. Or, as the general's aide

had threatened—*see down into your soul*. That was *not* how I felt—looking right through or seeing down into, implies that some things are looked past and missed. The major's eyes were twin fillet knives, whittling away at my very essence. It felt like my whole life was laid bare before him, with nothing I could do about it but stand there and squirm. Of course, that was just nonsense; or so I told myself.

I ripped my eyes free of the major to see Captain Carver flash me a nasty smile as he hurried over to report back to the general. General Greene gave him a perfunctory salute, then stood up and walked around the desk. "I'm sorry to call you out so late, Ezra," The general apologized, clasping the major's arm affectionately. "But I'm afraid something has come up that requires your special attention."

“I understand, sir. I’m happy to help in any way I can,” Major Walsh replied. “Captain Carver explained the situation to me on the way over.”

“Excellent,” General Greene exclaimed. “Then I’ll leave it to your good judgment on how we should proceed.”

Major Walsh nodded and turned to survey the room while the general went back to his seat behind the desk. I dropped my head, eyeing the major surreptitiously, but he wasn’t interested in me, at least not just yet. Apparently he needed to setup his interrogation chamber first. A moment later he crossed the room to retrieve a rickety looking three legged stool. As expected, he carried the thing over and dropped it down beside me. Since I’d already made up my mind that I wasn’t going to cooperate with his silly game, I didn’t even glance at it. I simply held my ground and waited to see

what he would do about it, but I'm not sure he even noticed my bold act of defiance; he was still busy rearranging the furniture. In short order, a comfy padded chair was placed a few feet in front of the stool, naturally in such a way that it had much better access to the heat radiating off the blazing fire. Then, finally satisfied with his efforts, the major got down to business. The surprising thing was that he stepped past me to take a seat on the hard wooden stool. While I puzzled over that, he just sat there and looked at me.

With a shrug, I took him up on his silent offer and plopped down in the chair. I decided the seating arrangement must be a tactic; a show of false compassion to soften me up for the questions he was about to throw my way. I held back a smile, amused that he would try such a base ploy. But the simple truth was that Ezra Walsh would

never ask anyone—man, woman, *or* child to take a seat lower than himself. Had I known that then, I think there's a chance I wouldn't have tried to use guile against the guileless.

“Captain Carver has told me a little about you're coming here,” Major Walsh began, his eyes locking onto mine. “But I'd prefer to hear your version of things. Shall we start at the beginning?”

“Why yes, I'd be happy to, sir,” I said, fighting down a nervousness I'm normally immune to. “I'm Padrick Taylor...but my friends call me Paddy, and I'd be happy if you would too.”

The major just nodded, so I launched into the story I'd been crafting since I'd left Boston more than three weeks before. It was a harrowing tale, detailing my time spent in New York working with a small but courageous band of Patriots, men and women who had valiantly fought on after



the Continental Army had been forced to flee the city. Once I was into it, the words just rolled off my tongue, and even Ezra Walsh's prying eyes were forgotten. In fact, I'd rehearsed the story so often I couldn't have known it better if I actually had lived it. And I was happy to see that my listeners, even Captain Carver, seemed riveted by my narration, especially as I reached the point where disaster struck. Emboldened by my audience, I painted the dark and dreary picture of the night the British had come upon us, surrounding our secret headquarters and bursting through the doors to take everyone by surprise. When I explained how I was the only one out of our entire band to escape, and then only because I'd been small and limber enough to crawl up the chimney, I was satisfied to hear an angry growl emanate from General Greene's throat.

I dropped my voice down for what came next. Lamenting my foolishness, I confessed that the British had tracked my soot laden trail to my home, and that while I'd already moved on by the time they arrived, rightly thinking that I was a wanted fugitive, they'd arrested my poor widowed mother and crippled brother as Patriot sympathizers. I got a little choked up during that part and paused to wipe away a tear.

Since things seemed to be progressing so nicely, I sped things up a bit, moving through the particulars of my escape from the city with only a smattering of detail. I did ensure I highlighted certain key points; like the fact that during my desperate flight I'd still managed to make note of their most critical outposts and fortifications. I finished off by professing my belief that it must have been providence itself that delivered me. Why else would I suddenly find myself

standing on the doorstep of the very people who could use the valuable information I'd gained?

Emotionally spent, I leaned back in my velvet cushioned chair and surveyed the faces around me with satisfaction. That lasted for a heartbeat. The moment they realized I'd finished, every eye in the room turned and riveted on Ezra Walsh. You'd have thought he was about to impart some great and ancient secret to them. For his part, the major's demeanor hadn't changed in the slightest, he just sat there on his stool with one finger laid up against his nose, gently tapping, while never taking his own eyes off of me. He'd been that way the entire time I'd been talking, listening without offering a single comment or question. It was a little unnerving and I wasn't the only one bothered by it either.

Finally, the silence grew so thick General Greene couldn't take it any longer.

“Well, Ezra,” he demanded. “Is there any truth to what the lad is saying?”

“Yes, yes I think there is,” the major nodded and I let out a breath I hadn't known I'd been holding. My relief was shattered an instant later. “I believe he's told us his real name, general. Other than that...I don't think there's a letter of truth in a single word that's left his lips.”

I was too stunned to speak. Captain Carver let out a very unsoldierly whoop of delight and General Greene hung his head. The aide gave me a look like I was something that needed wiped off the bottom of his shoe. That should have sparked my temper, but sitting there with all the hope draining out of me, all I could do was wonder where I'd gone wrong.

“How sad,” the general lamented. He looked back at the major and asked. “Do you have any idea what he might truly be up to?”

“There’s no telling, sir,” Major Walsh shook his head. “But whatever it is, I can’t see him caring about any cause but his own.”

The general considered that for a bit, “Is it safe to let him go then? We can’t have him bringing a British brigade down upon us?”

“Would he do us harm?” the major asked. He stood up, looking like he was about to leave. “I suspect he’d give up his own grandmother for a plugged shilling. But as for *could* he...I doubt he’d find opportunity. My advice is to be rid of him as soon as possible...*before* he stirs up any more trouble.”

“Sir, I feel it’s my duty to disagree with the major on this point,” Captain Carver

interjected hotly. “The boy’s proven he’s resourceful or he’d still be locked up in the stockade. And there’s no denying he’s become quite familiar with details of this fort. Since we can’t rule out his taking what he’s discovered to the British...well, I know it’s a difficult thing, sir, but I suggest we consider...*drastic measures* to ensure the security of the camp.

General Greene rounded on his junior officer with eyes ablaze. “We don’t kill children, captain...*are we clear on that?*”

Captain Carver looked like he was trying to swallow his Adam’s apple as he squeaked out, “Yes, sir, perfectly clear, general.”

General Greene took a moment to compose himself, running his hands down his waistcoat, smoothing it along with his emotions. “Escort the boy back out to the main road and see him on his way.”

I'd become a spectator at my own trial, but the general's words woke me out of my stupor. "Hold on a minute, general. You can't just throw me out, sir! I don't care what the major here says...*everything* I've told you isn't a lie!"

He barely looked my way, and his whole demeanor was so dismissive that Captain Carver walked over and grabbed my arm. I didn't know what parlor trick Major Walsh had employed against me, but I didn't have time to worry about it either. The situation had become desperate in the extreme and I realized it was time to take some desperate measures of my own, the most desperate of all—*it was time to tell the truth.*

"Please give me another chance," I pleaded, shaking off Carver's grip and holding out a hand to General Greene. "I'll tell you the truth this time, general, I really will. And let me start by saying that I really

do have a brother, and I was being honest when I said I need to save him from the British!”

The general looked across the desk at me for a moment, then glanced over at Major Walsh. The major shrugged. “It’s the truth so far, sir. Are you willing to hear more?”

General Greene sighed and shook his head. “Despite the late hour, I’m afraid my curiosity is getting the better of my good judgment, Ezra...let’s hear him out.”

“You won’t regret it, sir,” I promised. Then I took a deep breath and launched back into my story. “The British kidnapped my brother and...”

Major Walsh cleared his throat and arched an eyebrow at me. It was enough to make me worry the man might actually be reading my thoughts. And I’d meant to tell the truth. I was just so out of practice with it that the lie had slipped out before I’d realized it.



“Well they might as well have,” I said with exasperation. “It wasn’t as if he *wanted* to enlist. He’s a blacksmith not a soldier!”

“Then why *did* he enlist?” General Greene asked curiously.

“Because he’s a pious, pigheaded idiot,” I retorted, which *was* the truth.

“*And...*because he foolishly believed the British were going to keep me locked up in prison if he didn’t.”

I said the last part in a rush, but both Major Walsh and General Greene nodded their heads as if they’d been expecting something along those lines. Which *I* should have expected—it seemed my world was filled with pious, pigheaded idiots.

“Well that’s just plain ridiculous,” I fumed. “There’s not a prison on earth that could hold me! I’d have been out before the jailer finished his morning tea. My brother, Tom, he knew that...but he went and joined

up anyway...as if a blacksmith could ever make a good soldier.”

“*I* did some smithing in my younger days,” General Greene said, frowning at me across his paper-strewn desk.

“Yes, well...and you seem to have overcome it nicely, sir, but you can’t expect every man to have your facility,” I quickly amended.

“And just *why* were the British so intent on locking you up, Mister Taylor?” General Greene pressed. I think he was still stinging a bit from my last comment.

“That’s a good question, sir, and I’m glad you asked it,” I said with full sincerity. “The truth is, I was one of the few who didn’t just stand around watching while King George snatched away our freedom *and* picked our pockets too.”

“I see...and am I right to assume you did some picking back?” the general asked.

“It only seemed fair, sir,” I said with as much humility as I could muster. “They had no right to the money they were taxing our poor Boston citizens. After all, taxation without representation is what led to this whole bad business in the first place, am I right?”

“So, this money you...liberated...did you give it back to the good people of Boston?” General Greene inquired pointedly.

I flashed a look over at Major Walsh, hoping his attention had shifted away, but his eyes seemed to be boring straight into my brain. “Well, sir, I think there’s a good chance I might have...once I was done taking care of a few necessities of my own...”

“Hah...he’s nothing more than a common thief!” Captain Carver chortled.

“A *common thief* wouldn’t have made it into a locked vault past a dozen sentries without getting caught,” I told him hotly.

“And yet you obviously *were* caught!” the captain shot back.

“Hardly,” I shook my head, then looked back to the major as I explained. “They never would have known I was even there. It was my brother...he, with his *misguided* sense of morality. For some reason he decided he needed to return the money I’d taken.”

I’d fired the ‘*morality*’ part in Major Walsh’s direction since I’d realized by then he and my brother were cut from the same cloth. Meanwhile, General Greene seemed to have taken interest in my story, but I couldn’t discern what he might be making of it. He just sat there, drumming his fingers on the desk with a perplexed look on his face. Finally, another question did occur to him—

the one question I'd hoped wouldn't come up at all.

“So, tell me this, have you ever actually been to New York?” the general asked, leveling his gaze at me. “

“Before I answer that, sir,” I began, wishing with all my heart that I could risk just one more little lie. “Let me first say that I don't believe you have to *truly* visit a place to be familiar with it.”

The general let out a sigh and brought a hand up to rub his forehead tiredly, making me rush on to explain myself. “I can assure you, general, I've talked to dozens of people who *have* been there and I've memorized every word they said. I feel I've become so familiar with the city and the surrounding countryside that I could find my way in and out with my eyes closed. Ask the major here if I'm lying when I say that!”

“But what you told us earlier, about knowing every sentry point and fortification, was there any truth to that?” General Greene asked sourly.

“I *would*...if you let me scout the way,” I assured him. “No one alive is better at detecting without being detected than me. I’ll bring your army through to New York without a single red-coat even knowing we’re sharing the same air with them.”

“Just you...all by yourself, were caught by the most inept soldier in the whole battalion,” Captain Carver guffawed.

I wanted to stuff Carver’s hat down his throat and deny his charge, but the major’s eyes were still on me. “I assure you, general, I *could* have found my way in here unnoticed. I just didn’t see any reason to stand around getting waterlogged any longer than necessary.”

“Be that as it may,” General Greene began, and I didn’t like his tone. “When it’s all finally said and done, the only real thing you bring here is your desire to rescue your brother...who, though he may have been coerced to join them, is still far from a prisoner.”

The general paused and a gentleness came into his eyes. “Son, even if he was locked in a prison and on the verge of death, there’s no way we could risk going up against the bulk of King George’s forces right now...not with our current knowledge of the situation.”

His demeanor, even more than his words, took all the wind out of my sails. I just sat there looking back at him without knowing what else to say. I felt my eyes start to sting—probably from the smoke of the fire, and looked away, busying myself for a

minute counting the knots in the log wall beside me.

“Mister Taylor...Paddy,” the general continued. “You have my deepest sympathies. This war has exacted a great toll upon all of us. And I can assure you, there is nothing General Washington, or any of us, would rather do than march right back into New York. But to do so blindly...that would be worse than a fool’s errand.”

“I understand, sir,” I said, trying to put a brave face on the situation. Still, I couldn’t help latching onto the one glimmer of hope I had left. “But if I *had* brought you the *actual* information, sir...might this conversation have concluded differently, general?”

General Greene smiled and spread his hands out over his paper-laden desk. “As you can see, Paddy, I’m *always* looking for opportunities to show the British the error of their ways.”



I think he was simply trying to comfort me, but I seized on it and jumped to my feet. “Then you shall have it, sir...every detail, right down to how many of those British beggars take sugar with their tea and which ones go to bed at night crying for their mums!”

“Now wait just a minute, lad,” General Greene held up a cautioning hand. “I’ll not have you running off to play spy. That’s dangerous business, and if you were caught, well, I won’t even say what they’d likely do to you.”

“But sir,” the general’s aide came to life with fervor. “You know how anxious General Washington is to gather intelligence on events within New York. If the boy has half the talent for subterfuge that he professes, he could prove quite useful.”

“No! I won’t hear of it,” General Greene reasserted. “The risk is too great, and

besides, as you well know, we've already taken steps to see that the general gets what he needs."

"But *another* set of eyes couldn't hurt, sir," the aide pressed, only to be silenced with a look from General Greene that he wouldn't soon forget.

"You won't stop me, general," I informed him, having set my mind to it. "I've every right to ply my trade in New York as well as anywhere else, and I intend to do just that. And after I've been there for a bit, if I should happen to wander back this way and share what I've seen...whose business is that but yours and mine?"

"I could lock you in the stockade," the general threatened.

"Captain Carver already tried that," I said, probably with more relish than I should have. "And all he got for it was some broken shackles. But I'd be happy to repair them,

sir, for the price of a few provisions to see me on my way.”

“Next time I’ll secure you with a rope and a strong tree branch,” Carver snapped back, but he was just a barking dog who we both knew wouldn’t be let off his leash.

“What should I do, Ezra?” General Greene asked Major Walsh in a worried voice.

The major sifted me with his eyes for so long I wasn’t sure he’d heard the general.

“Sir, you can’t stop the rain from falling or the wind from blowing. I suspect this boy is no easier to control than they are. All I can tell you is that he’s decided to go, and we won’t stop him...as much as the good Lord knows we’d both like to.”

It was a fair assessment, and one that leaned in my favor, but I still couldn’t help feeling offended. Even so, that seemed to settle things, and a short time later I found myself walking toward the door, with Major

Walsh leading the way and Captain Carver trudging along behind.

Once outside, the major gave instructions that I was to be found a bed for the night, and given provisions for my journey once morning dawned. I was surprised by the major's generosity, while Captain Carver was downright outraged. Not that either of our reactions seemed to matter to the major. I'd come to realize by then that the only approval Ezra Walsh cared about belonged to someone who wasn't currently walking the earth in human form.

Then, with the evening's business complete, and without so much as a 'goodnight' or 'farewell', Major Walsh turned and walked away. I was left to the *good graces* of Captain Carver, which to my astonishment, actually were good. He was even somewhat cordial as he led me to my quarters for the evening—I like to think that

he had started to warm up to me, but it's more likely he was just anxious to get back to his own bed. In either case, he dropped me off at a tent where a number of soldiers were already slumbering, but with one bedroll still open. He also mumbled something about my going to the supply tent in the morning. I didn't catch it all, but before I could ask for more details, he too disappeared into the night. The bedroll turned out to be nothing more than a pair of thin blankets looking about as worn out as I felt, but I doubt my body had finished hitting the ground before I fell fast asleep.