

French Drum, Book 2, New York

Chapter 40

New York, A New Friend, and Molly?

This had to be the day! Tad could put it off no longer. Ever since he arrived in New York over a month ago, Tad carried messages up Broadway Street from General Washington's headquarters to commanders of brigades and regiments. Each time, he passed by the store that had a sign which read "Van Zandt." It was a large brick building. He could easily see that there were three stories, and once, he thought he saw Molly in a second story window.

On several occasions, he paused at the impressive door to the store and almost got up his courage to the point of taking hold of the door knob and entering, but each time, his nerve failed him and he hurried away.

This was the day, and that was for certain. Tad knew he was likely to be posted as a drummer boy to one of the regiments out on Long Island or maybe even with the observation detachment stationed on Staten Island.

He must find the courage to open that door and ask for Molly.

Tad began preparing early this fine day in June. Happily, it was a warm day. All through the long winter months during the siege of Boston, he

had seldom taken off his clothes. Now, he was going to take off his clothes, bathe, and wash his underwear and the long white stockings which Molly had given him.

Tad was equipped with a bar of yellow soap that had an awful smell and a towel that had been used often and seldom washed.

He made his way to the wash house, a shed that had been made into a place where soldiers could bathe. There were several large tubs filled with water. The water in some of the tubs was soapy. There were two tubs, not nearly as large as the others. There were large dippers on a table by those tubs. A bather could ladle clean water out and pour it over himself to rinse off soapy water from the large tubs.

After a good scrubbing, Tad turned his attention to his underwear, stockings and shirt. These were clothes he had worn every day since he left Boston not long after the city was liberated from the British. The stockings, the fine, woolen stockings given to him as a present by Molly, were in the saddest condition of all. There were holes in the toes of both stockings, and the heels were about to give way. The long march of over two hundred miles down from Boston to New York had taken its toll on the stockings.

Tad remembered how some of the men had taken off their stockings and shoes and marched barefoot in an attempt to preserve both items. He tried it once, and found that his feet did not do well without the protection of the shoes.

He returned to his quarters in a warehouse near the headquarters building on Broadway. The quarters were the best he and the other soldiers had enjoyed since the beginning of the fighting. There were large windows in one end of the warehouse that let in light. The roof did not leak, and there were straw pallets for the soldiers to sleep on at

night. During most of the past year, Tad and the soldiers were fortunate if they had a piece of sailcloth over their heads to keep off rain and snow. The sailcloth did not do much to keep the soldiers warm.

Sergeant Grumley sat at a makeshift table.

Tad entered the room wearing only his breeches. He had the towel Sergeant Grumley loaned him draped over his bare shoulders. His hair was clean but matted and in need of a good combing. Since his hair had not been cut in months, he looked like he had a brush pile atop his head. Tad carried his shoes, stockings, and shirt. He thought that he could dry them in short order because the day was warm.

Sergeant Grumley watched the young drummer boy enter and laughed.

“That’s about the scariest sight I ever saw. Why, if the British had seen this, they would have high-tailed it out of Boston in a terrible fright.”

“It was a warm day, so I thought I’d get cleaned up,” Tad said as he separated his shirt and stockings on his pallet.

Sergeant Grumley nodded approval. “I ‘spect I should look into doing the same. It’s been a while. Still and all, there’s no need for me to rush into it.”

Tad laughed. “It’s not such an easy job. I worked hard on this shirt, but now it looks worse than ever.”

He held the shirt up and Sergeant Grumley leaned forward and peered at the shirt.

“Don’t think ye got much dirt out of the shirt,” he drawled. “Looks to me like ye just moved it around a little. And worse yet, it will stay wrinkled the way it is now until ye can iron it.”

Tad shook his head. "I don't know how to iron a shirt, and even if I did, we don't have any irons."

As Tad tried to spread the still wet shirt out on the table, Sergeant Grumley noticed the locket that hung around Tad's neck.

"Never saw that gold locket before." Sergeant Grumley said. "Unless I miss my guess, that locket would be a gift from that little Dutch girl who was staying with the Riddles."

Tad was sure that he was going to blush, but the first moments of his cheeks growing warm quickly passed, much to his relief.

"Molly gave it to me," Tad said.

"Wasn't she from New York? Too bad she's not here now."

"I think she is here," Tad said. "Before we left Boston, I think her uncle came and brought her home."

"I see," Sergeant Grumley said softly. "Now, ye are getting all cleaned up, and the pretty Dutch girl is here in New York. I think I begin to understand."

"I did think to call on her," Tad said. "But, now, I just don't know."

Before Sergeant Grumley could reply, Ben hurried in the door of the warehouse.

"Tad, I've been looking for you all morning. "We have messages." Ben stopped talking and stared at Tad. "What in the world happened to you?"

"I took a bath," Tad answered. "And, I washed my clothes, and everything went wrong."

Ben laughed. "Forget delivering the messages, at least for now. You'd scare everyone who saw you. What happened to your hair?"

“I don’t know,” Tad said as he tried to unscramble his hair with his hand. “I used the soap on it, but the soap just made it more tangled than ever.”

“There’s another part to this story,” Sergeant Grumley said. “Our drummer boy here needs to go a’courting.”

“What?” Ben asked.

“Ye heard a’right,” Sergeant Grumley said. “Remember that little Dutch girl who was visiting the Riddles? Well, she’s back home here in New York.”

“That certainly explains everything,” Ben said. He turned to Tad and asked, “Were you planning to go today?”

“I had thought so,” Tad muttered in reply.

“It’s nearly noon now. You better hurry about your business,” Ben said. “We can cover for you for a while, but don’t be gone long.”

“I can’t go looking like this,” Tad said. “It is hopeless.”

“Well now, maybe so and then again, maybe not,” Sergeant Grumley said. “If the lieutenant here can find a clean shirt and some stockings that don’t have more holes than cloth, we can get ye dressed up like a proper gentleman, or maybe nearly so.”

“I can probably find a decent shirt and stockings, but what about his hair?” Ben asked.

“Oh, I’ve cut it before, and I’ve got me a pair of scissors that are sharp enough. I reckon I can take off about three inches of hair or so.”

Ben laughed. “I don’t know if scissors will do the job. You may need an ax to cut through that bramble patch. I’ll get busy on my part of this mission. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

Ben turned and left. Sergeant Grumley fished around in a large leather pouch which was on the end of his pallet. He found scissors that had long blades.

“Set up here in the chair, young man, and I’ll begin whacking away at that bramble patch.”

Tad sat upright in the chair, and Sergeant Grumley began working the scissors. Tad could see large tufts of hair falling into his lap and on the floor.

“Don’t cut it all off,” Tad said anxiously.

“Oh, don’t worry about that,” Sergeant Grumley laughed. “There’s still enough left for at least two rabbits to hide in, I’d warrant.”

Sergeant Grumley continued to cut away and sometimes, a particularly tough knot of hair did not cut easily and Tad winced.

“Hold steady, now. I won’t be much longer. When the lieutenant comes back, we’ll have ye ready for a right proper courting.”

“At least the worst of it is over,” Tad said.

“That reminds me,” Sergeant Grumley said as he continued to ply his scissors. “Heard a wild story yesterday about a preacher who lives up at Lexington.”

“Where the first fight was?” Tad asked.

“That’s right. Turns out that Sam Adams and John Hancock were up there staying at his house. If the British had caught them, they’d of hanged them for certain, and probably the preacher, too.”

“Well, the British didn’t get that job done,” Tad said as he flicked several hairs from his cheek.

“True enough,” Sergeant Grumley continued. “Turns out this preacher, name of Clark, I believe, is a little teched in the head.”

Tad laughed. “The British think all Americans are a little touched.”

Sergeant Grumley replied, “They might be right about that, but this reverend is really strange.”

“How so?” asked Tad.

“Why, he believes in taking a bath every day, and by every day, I mean even on the coldest days in the winter. Worse yet, he makes his wife and eleven children do the same. That’s down right unnatural, I’d say.”

“My mother, Mrs. Stelle, would not think it so bad,” Tad said with a smile. “She thought baths were a good thing.” Tad paused and wrinkled his nose in an effort to shake loose hairs that had landed there. “I wonder what it would have been like, you know, having so many brother and sisters. I never had any.”

“More’s the good luck for ye, drummer boy,” the old sergeant answered. “I had two brothers and we fought tooth and toenail all the time.”

As he finished speaking, Sergeant Grumley stepped around in front of Tad, took hold of Tad’s chin and tilted the boy’s head so he could take a good look at his handiwork.

“Peers to me that I’ve done about as much cutting as is needed.” He took a second look and asked, “Why do ye have that string tied around the locket?”

Tad quickly lifted the locket so he could see the chain. The string was there, but the tightly folded letter the string held to the locket was gone. He realized that in his efforts to scrub himself, the letter got

soaked and fell away. What else would go wrong this day, Tad asked himself.

He looked up at the old man and replied, "I was just trying to save some string."

Tad ran his hand across the top of his head and laughed.

"I think I've been scalped!"

"Well, maybe so, but at least ye must be a few pounds lighter now, what with all the hair being cut and a few month's worth of dirt washed away, plus the loss of whatever that string was holding dear to the locket."

Tad got up from the chair and looked over at his shirt. It still looked awful, and it was still damp. He shrugged and made a face.

"What's a face like that supposed to mean?" asked Sergeant Grumley.

"My shirt's not drying very fast. I guess I'll put it on, and my stockings, too. Ben may be back by with messages for me to carry. I can't go running around New York with no stockings or shirt on." Tad was hoping that the discussion would stay on his clothes and that the string on the locket would be forgotten.

"That's true enough," the sergeant said. "Besides, they'll dry quicker if you wear them."

Sergeant Grumley's claim proved to be true. Tad was thankful that the day was warm. He was sure that by nightfall, the clothes would be dry.

The day was well advanced, and it was clear that Tad was not going to pay a call on Molly. He told himself that he would get an early start the next day, and he promised himself that when he stood in front of the door to the Van Zandt store, he would not lose his nerve.

Ben returned, but he did not have a shirt or stockings. Instead, he had orders for Tad to deliver.

“I’m glad to see you are dressed. I’ve got several written orders for you to deliver,” Ben said. “There’s going to be quite a movement of soldiers tomorrow and the day after.”

There were three messages, each on a piece of paper that was folded over and sealed with wax. The names of the colonels who were to receive the orders were written on the front of the folded papers.

“You know where these colonels have their headquarters?” Ben asked.

Tad nodded. “Yes, I’ve been to each of them before. It won’t take me long to deliver these messages.”

“Good,” Ben said. “And, don’t worry about the mission you did not get done today. I’m working on the shirt and stockings. Maybe I’ll find them later today, at least before dark. It might be best if you made a great effort to see this young lady tomorrow. You are going out the next day to Staten Island with some old friends of yours.”

“Really? Who’s out there?”

“We have a company of the Marblehead regiment out there. It was the same company that made the raid on the British prison ship with us so we could rescue David, your friend.”

“Oh, that would be good. I haven’t seen Jed since the raid.”

Ben smiled. “I remember him. The two of you made quite a pair. When you get out there, I have no doubt that it will be a lively time.” Ben paused and took a long look at Tad. He smiled as he said, “When you deliver your messages, be sure to wear your uniform coat. It will cover up most of your shirt. And, don’t take off your hat if you can help

it. People will think the Indians fighting on the British side took your scalp.”

“Here now,” cried Sergeant Grumley as he laughed. “Let’s not go throwing knives and stones at my hard work. That was quite a brush pile to cut, I can tell you.”

Ben left quickly, his laughter trailing behind him. Tad felt the top of his head and grimaced.

Sergeant Grumley picked up his long scissors and ran a thumb across one of the blades.

“Probably take me a month of Sundays to get these blades sharp again,” he said with a shake of his head.

Tad finished dressing and set off on his way to deliver the messages. By now, it was late afternoon.

He walked by several storefronts, and quickly passed by the store where he so much wanted to enter. There was another storefront with an unusually large window, and Tad could see his reflection in the window. He paused and lifted his hat so he could see what had happened to his hair.

There was an outburst of hearty laughter behind him and a voice that proclaimed in loud tones, “Now, I’d say I have met the perfect gentleman. Leastways, the only one I have seen who tipped his hat to himself.”

Tad quickly turned around, his hat still in his hand. Facing him was a young man who was several inches taller than Tad. He had strong shoulders and a weathered face for someone so young.

“I was checking to see if my hair was all cut off,” Tad tried to explain.

Again, the young man laughed. “Out in western Pennsylvania where I come from, we’d say you was trying too hard to cheat the Indians out of a good scalp.”

Tad took a quick look at the man standing before him. He was full-grown and probably about the same age as Ben. He wore a hat that was broad brimmed instead of the usual tricorne hat. He wore a shirt that came nearly down to his knees. Instead of breeches and long stockings, he wore what appeared to be long, leather leggings. He did not have shoes. His feet were covered with soft leather footwear that were decorated with colorful beads.

A wide leather belt was fastened with a large buckle around his middle. On one side was a sheathe and the handle of a long knife stuck out of the sheathe. On the other side was a loop, and in the loop was a strange-looking hatchet. Tad had used a hatchet to cut wood for the fireplace when he lived with the Stelles. This hatchet would not do well for cutting wood. The steel head was too small to make much of an impact on wood. Tad knew from the stories he had heard around camp fires that it was not called a hatchet. It was called a tomahawk, and it was a weapon, not something used for cutting firewood.

A large cow’s horn secured by a loop of leather hung over one shoulder, and crossing the leather was another loop that secured a small leather pouch.

Tad’s eyes were caught by the long gun the man carried cradled in his arm. It was longer than a musket, and had a carved wooden stock. The horn was used to carry powder and keep it dry, and the pouch contained small lead balls which served as bullets.

Tad knew that the young man standing in front of him was one of the Pennsylvania riflemen who were coming in to join the army.

“You be looking at me like I was some monster from the deepest woods,” the man said with a smile.

“Sorry,” Tad stammered. “You must be from Pennsylvania, I’d guess. I’m from Boston, and we do not have any people like you in Boston.”

“You there during the siege?” the young man asked.

“Yes, sir,” Tad replied. “I joined the army just after the fighting up around Lexington and Concord.”

The man’s eyes opened wide. “You been in this fighting since the beginning.” He stuck out his right hand. “I’m pleased to meet you. My name is Roger Stone. The Indians out our way call me “Stonebreaker.”

Tad smiled and clasped the man’s hand with his own.

“I’m Tad Wheeler, from Boston, and I’m a drummer boy attached to General Washington’s headquarters. Gad to make your acquaintance.”

“A drummer boy! You go around making a lot of noise,” Roger said.

“I can play every call the army uses,” Tad said.

“Must be a strange kind of fighting,” Roger said. “Out where I come from, the last thing in the world we want in the woods is a drum beating and making noise.”

“It would be hard to have a proper battle without drums,” Tad said with an edge of sharpness in his voice.

“Climb down there,” Roger said quickly. “I meant no disrespect. It will take me a while, I’d guess, to get the hang of this way of fighting.”

Tad smiled. “No offence taken. Now, I’ve got to get about my business. When I’m not using my drum, I carry messages from headquarters.”

“I’ll not keep you from your work,” Roger said. “I’ll be off soon, maybe in a day or two on my assignment. I’m supposed to go out to some place on Staten Island to be a scout for some outfit out there looking for the British.”

Tad was surprised. “I think I’m going to be posted out to Staten Island, too.”

Roger nodded. “It’ll be good to have a friend beside me when the fighting starts.”

CHAPTER 41

Molly’s Father Owns a Slave

The next day was surely going to be the day. When Tad awoke, he told himself that regardless of what happened, no matter how awful his shirt and stockings looked, he was going to enter the Van Zandt store and ask to see Molly.

The morning passed slowly. There was no sign of Ben. It was nearly noon, and Tad used a brush on his uniform, tricorn hat, and his shoes.

The brush did little good on his shoes, but he could see that his uniform did indeed look better.

Sergeant Grumley sat at the table and watched as Tad made his preparations.

“I ‘spect ye have done about as much good as possible,” he said. “Time’s getting on, and with all the commotion of soldiers being sent off to about everywhere, ye best make a move.”

Tad set his hat firmly on his head, and answered, “I’m on my way.”

No sooner were the words out of his mouth when Ben hurried across the warehouse floor.

“Oh, good! You are still here,” Ben said. “I was afraid I was too late.”

He had a small bundle which he handed over to Tad.

“Here’s a fine shirt and new stockings. And, you really must make use of them today, because tomorrow, you are going to sail out to Staten Island, and it is hard to say when you will return.”

Tad quickly tossed his hat on the table and took off his uniform coat. He peeled out of his shirt and held the clean and ironed shirt up for inspection.

“Thanks ever so much,” Tad said. “This shirt looks almost new. How did you come by it?”

“Don’t ask,” Ben laughed. “I’ve also got something else to give you.”

“What’s that? All I see is the shirt and stockings.”

Ben pulled a small leather bag out of his pocket. The top was secured by a leather drawstring.

“Here’s a handsome purse for you and there’s some coins inside to jingle. There aren’t very many coins, but surely enough for you to buy the young lady a treat.”

“Where in the world did ye find that many coins in this army?” Sergeant Grumley asked and followed his words with a strong laugh.

“True enough,” said Ben. “Somehow, a few coins were found because it is a worthy cause.”

And this time, both Ben and Sergeant Grumley laughed, and Tad did not reply, busying himself with quickly changing clothes and hoping he would not blush.

At last, Tad was ready, and both men inspected him and said he was indeed ready for his mission.

It was not a long walk, but Tad was surprised at how quickly he was standing in front of the Van Zandt store. He glanced up at the upper story windows, but could see no one. He stared at the door, and found that his resolve was weakening. Even so, he forced himself to approach the door, then put his hand on the knob, and then suddenly, he was in the store. There could be no running away now.

Tad was surprised at how large the store appeared to be. The large front windows provided ample light. He could see shelves laden with goods. There were several counters atop large box- like structures that he guessed held even more goods. It was much larger than any of the stores in Boston that he had seen.

A tall, young man dressed in clean clothes and bright silver buttons, approached.

“May I help you?” the young man asked in an even tone of voice.

Tad took off his hat and stammered, "I, I am here to enquire about Molly. Her father owns this store, I believe."

The young man facing Tad stepped back a pace and folded his arms over his chest.

"Really?"

The way he said the word could have been taken as a question, but Tad was sure that the young man did not mean it that way at all. He noted the young man's blonde hair, and guessed that maybe he was Molly's older brother.

"Yes," Tad replied. "I am here to call on Molly."

"And, who are you?" The young man's voice had an icy edge to it.

"I am Tad Wheeler. I met Molly when she was staying with the Riddles up near Boston. Has she returned yet? I had a letter from her saying she was returning to New York."

The young man frowned and then said, "Please wait here." He then turned and walked toward the back of the store. He paused in front of a door, knocked, and then entered the room, being careful to close the door behind him.

Tad glanced over his shoulder at the door he had just entered, and he thought that if he broke and ran now, he could escape, but his hand reached up and felt the locket hiding under his shirt, and that steadied him. He would hold his ground.

The young man came out of the door he had entered, and he was followed by a second man, an older man not much taller than Tad and with a nearly bald head. He was well dressed and would surely be judged a successful man because he was portly, which told everyone that he was accustomed to eating and eating well.

The two men stopped in front of Tad. The older man spoke.

“I am Molly’s father, and you must be the young soldier she has told us about.”

He smiled and added, “I believe she contributed a fine pair of stockings to the rebel cause. I hope they served you well.”

“Yes, sir,” Tad replied. “I am stationed now in New York, and not far from your store. I thought I would pay a call on your daughter.”

“That is kind of you, indeed,” the older man said. “Sadly, the fortunes of war have made that impossible. I have sent my daughter and my wife up to Tarrytown where they will be out of harm’s way if the British attack us here in New York.” Molly’s father paused as he noted the effect his news had on Tad. He smiled as he continued. “But maybe after this affair is settled, you may call again. Now, just where do you serve? You seem to be much too young to carry a musket, though I must say, I have seen those who were too young, and those who were too old bearing weapons.”

“I’m a drummer boy assigned to General Washington’s headquarters. Most of the time now, I carry messages.”

“I see,” said Mr. Van Zandt thoughtfully. “Well, it is noon and time for a bite to eat. You must join us for our noon meal. It is not a proper table, but we make do.” He turned to the young man standing beside him.

“Oh, I must make the proper introductions,” he said. “Mr. Wheeler, please meet Jan Heeresveldt. He has come over from Holland to work in my store. Our families have been on close friendly terms for several generations.

Tad started to extend his right hand, but stopped when he saw Jan make a slight bow. Tad nodded.

Mr. Van Zandt glanced quickly at both Tad and Jan and then smiled.

“Jan, please go tell the maid to make lunch for three and serve it in my office. Now, Mr. Wheeler, follow me. We shall repair to my office and make ready to eat.”

Tad followed Molly’s father into his office. It was not a large room, but the table was ample-sized, and the wood had been polished. There was a stack of papers on one side of the table. Mr. Van Zandt picked up the papers and put them on a counter behind the table. The counter had a cupboard underneath which had two small doors. Both doors had elaborate carvings in the wood. There was a round piece of glass sitting on a wooden pedestal, and on the glass was a wig that consisted of long white curls attached to a mat of white hair.

The chairs were ornate affairs unlike any Tad had ever seen. They had leather upholstery that was held to the polished wood frames by what looked like brass buttons.

“Sit down, young man. You will find the chairs to be comfortable, I trust.”

“Yes, sir,” Tad replied. “These chairs are truly fine chairs. I have never seen anything like them.”

Mr. Van Zandt sat down on the other side of the table.

“They were brought over from London. There are fine craftsmen there. Now, let me ask you, do you know this General Washington very well?”

“No, sir, I do not,” Tad replied. “I have spoken to him twice, but only for a little bit.”

“Well, being a messenger boy for the general, you must hear things, I trust.”

“Not much,” Tad said with a shake of his head. He paused and then smiled. “We hear lots of things, but most of them turn out not to be true.”

Mr. Van Zandt smiled. “It is clear that you are no bumpkin. I ask questions because I and other merchants here in New York are most curious about whether or not General Washington will put up a fight for the city?”

“Oh, yes, sir, that is for certain. We will fight hard to save New York. We fought hard to save Boston, and we won.”

“That was a surprise to us,” Mr. Van Zandt said. “We never thought that the ragtag militias could best the British.”

“The army is different now,” Tad said. “General Washington has made a new army. Some of the regiments are surely the equal of the British.”

Tad was not happy about the way Mr. Van Zandt spoke about the American army, but before he could add to his comment, Jan returned, and he was followed by a tall, black woman. She was an African woman with a kerchief tied about her head. She carried a large tray on which were three plates with meat laid carefully atop large slices of thick white bread, three glasses, and a small jug. From the delicious aroma, Tad guessed that the meat atop the bread was roast beef.

Jan took a chair as the African woman set a plate in front of each person. From her apron, she pulled three cloth napkins that were rolled up and held by carved wooden rings.

When she finished, Mr. Van Zandt smiled and said, “Thank you, Ebony.” She turned and left the room.

“Well, let us not waste time. Good food is to be enjoyed with dispatch,” Mr. Van Zandt said.

Jan filled the glasses from the jug. Tad guessed that it was cider.

Mr. Van Zandt reached for his plate. As he did so, he noticed that Tad was hesitating.

“What troubles you, young man?” he asked.

“I was surprised by the woman,” Tad replied.

“Who, Ebony? Oh, she’s been with the family now for a good three years,” Mr. Van Zandt said. “She comes from Jamaica, but I bought her off a family here in New York who found keeping a slave to be an expensive proposition, after all.”

“She’s a slave?” Tad asked.

“Yes, she is,” Mr. Van Zandt replied. “You have slaves up in Boston, do you not?”

Tad paused before replying. “Well, yes, I guess so. I just never saw any that I know of. There were free Africans who fought out on Breed’s Hill. That I know for certain.”

“Breed’s Hill? I do not know of such a battle,” Mr. Van Zandt said.

“It’s where the real battle of what people call Bunker Hill took place,” Tad explained.

“Oh, I see. The same battle but a different name,” Mr. Van Zandt said. “Well, I should not be surprised about Africans fighting for Boston. A number of them have fled from New York to Boston. We are quite sure of that. And Molly, she is such a headstrong girl. She adores Ebony, but keeps urging her to escape to some kind of freedom. Fortunately, Ebony does not take the child seriously.”

Tad smiled briefly as Mr. Van Zandt said Molly was headstrong. He remembered her kissing his cheek with a good part of the army watching. He felt better about Molly, knowing that she was opposed to slavery. Mr. and Mrs. Stelle would strongly approve of her opposition. He had heard Mr. Stelle speak in harsh terms about the evil of slavery.

Tad reached for his bread and meat and took a bite. The bread and meat were delicious. Bread such as this was very expensive and the Stelles had seldom purchased such bread from a bakery.

There was no talk for a brief time while they finished their meal. As Tad took his last sip of cider, Mr. Van Zandt cleared his throat and wiped his mouth with the fine clothe napkin.

“Well, that was a much-needed repast,” he said.

“Thank you very much,” Tad said. “It was very good.”

“Now, tell us how you came to know the Riddles.” Mr. Van Zandt asked.

Tad told them how the Riddles had taken in David and other soldiers who had been hurt or wounded.

“When I stayed there for a couple of days,” Tad said, “The Riddles had five or six soldiers they were taking care of while they mended.”

Jan had kept his silence throughout the meal, and now he suddenly spoke.

“Were you one of the wounded soldiers?”

“It was just a scratch,” Tad said. “A British cannon ball hit a gun carriage wheel and shattered it. A piece of wood flew off the wheel and hit me on the head,” Tad said as he pointed to the small scar on the side of his head.

Jan stared at Tad. His eyes shone with excitement. "Sometimes I think about joining this American cause. I like my work here, but I think maybe I am missing something I shall regret latter on.

Tad smiled. "I think we could find another musket and a uniform for you."

"No, no, now. I won't have my office turned into a recruiting station for the rebel army," Mr. Van Zandt said. "Besides, it is time we returned to work. Judging from the marching about by so many men today, you probably have duties to return to, young soldier."

Tad rose from his chair. "True enough, sir. I thank you for the food. It was very good. Please tell Molly that I came by."

"That I shall," Mr. Van Zandt said as he rose from his chair and faced Tad. "Good day to you. Jan will see you out."

Jan led the way out of the office. Once the door was closed, Jan turned to Tad.

"I think Mr. Van Zandt is planning for me to marry Molly in a few years. I am fond of Molly, but there is a girl back in Holland who I miss greatly. I think Molly has her own ideas."

Tad did not know what to say in answer to Jan's words, but he was greatly relieved. When Tad did speak, his words came quickly. "I am relieved to hear what you say. Whatever happens, please try to keep Molly safe. I think we can beat the British, but if it goes badly for us, well, take care of Molly."

Jan stuck out his right hand, and Tad took it in his.

"My word on it," Jan said. "We shall be friends."

As they walked by a counter, Jan suddenly stopped. "Do you like sweets?"

“Oh, yes, but we do not get them in the army. Sometimes we are lucky to get moldy biscuits.”

Jan laughed as he took the lid off a large glass jar.

“They are peppermint balls,” Jan said. He took a paper bag from under the counter and using a small silver dipper that was in the jar, he proceeded to fill the bag. He stopped and then smiled and added one last dipperful to the contents in the bag.

“Take these as a present,” Jan said.

“I can pay for them”” Tad said.

“No, no payment. It is a gift from me to you.”

Tad took the bag and again thanked the young Dutchman for his generosity.

Once outside, Tad saw that there was indeed much commotion. A regiment passed by. Tad watched as file after file of men marched by in good order.

“What regiment?” Tad called out.

“Connecticut!” came shouts from several men as they marched by.

Tad hurried on back to his quarters. On the way, he popped a peppermint ball in his mouth. It had been a long time since he had tasted a sweet, and this one seemed to be the best he had ever tasted.

He would have to think much about what he had seen and heard this day. Molly was from a well- to- do family, there was no getting around that. They even had a slave. He wondered what Mr. Riddle would think of that if he knew it.

He deeply regretted not being able to see Molly. Her father’s description of her as being headstrong was on the mark. He was happy

about her being off in someplace called Tarrytown where she and her mother would be safe.

Tad stopped suddenly. An unwelcome thought crossed his mind. Would the British burn New York? And then a second thought, equally unpleasant, followed. Would General Washington order New York to be burned to keep it from being occupied by the British? The British had threatened to burn Boston. The urge to pop another sweet into his mouth left him, and he hurried back to his quarters.

Chapter 42

A Safe Assignment Out of Harm's Way?

Ben and Sergeant Grumley were waiting for Tad when he returned.

“Well, young soldier, how did it go?” Sergeant Grumley asked.

“Not very good,” Tad answered. “Molly was not there. She and her mother have been sent away, someplace called Tarrytown, until this business with the British is settled.”

“That does not surprise me,” Ben said. “The merchants in New York are not exactly wild-eyed revolutionaries. I think they are content to sit

back and see which side wins. They'll be good friends with whoever wins."

"Maybe," Tad said as he produced the bag of peppermint balls. "I did come away with something. Have one. They are really good."

Both Ben and Sergeant Grumley quickly helped themselves.

Tad pulled out the small leather purse with the coins in it and handed it to Ben.

"I didn't spend any of the money. The candy was a gift. You can return it to the people who contributed."

Ben shook his head. "No, hang on to it. Who knows, this fight with the British may be over soon and your young lady returned to New York. You'll need it then."

"Yes, hang on to it," the old sergeant said. "It makes ye one of the few men in this army to get paid."

"True enough," Ben agreed. "There is hope that we will get some pay, though. There's talk that maybe next month..."

Sergeant Grumley shook his head. "That's what they said last month."

Ben was quick to agree, but added, "still, there's always hope. Now, Tad, you are going out tomorrow to Staten Island.

"I've been wondering about that. I met a soldier from Pennsylvania. He said he is going out to the island, too. It seems like everyone else is going out to Long Island. From everything I've heard, that's where the battle's going to be."

"Maybe," Ben replied. "We will all probably end up on Long Island. You won't need your drum. You'll be working for your old friends as a messenger.

Take your blanket roll and be down at the docks before first light in the morning. You'll sail out in a cutter to the island."

"Sail?" Tad asked. "You mean in a real ship?"

"Well, not a real ship, but a cutter," Ben replied. "It's a good-sized boat, but not made to go across any oceans."

"Glad I'm not going out there in a boat," Sergeant Grumley said. "I'll stick to my two horses and wagon, if ye don't mind. It's one thing falling off a wagon, but falling out of a big boat is another, I'd warrant."

Tad turned in early that night. His mind drifted back and forth, the attempt to see Molly was sometimes pushed out of his mind by thoughts of going out to the island and seeing Jed once again. It had been months since he had seen Jed.

Tad envied Jed for his brashness and willingness to undertake anything. David had been that way before he was held prisoner in the old hulk of a ship. David was so much more serious now than he had been when they were friends before the fighting began.

Tad wished he could be bolder, but it just was not in his character. Still, he had done well enough during his visit with Jan and Molly's father, Mr. Van Zandt.

He smiled in the dark as he thought about the slave named Ebony and Molly's attempts to set the slave free. Yes, Molly was probably the boldest of all his friends. His hand reached inside his shirt and he touched the locket.

"Wake up, drummer boy. The sun's about to come up."

Tad heard the voice and felt a hand shaking his shoulder. He opened his eyes.

Sergeant Grumley was leaning over him. There was a lighted candle on the table.

“It’s high time ye were up and on the way to the docks.”

Tad scrambled out of his blanket and quickly rolled it up and secured both ends of the roll with a stout piece of twine.

“I found a couple of biscuits for ye to make a breakfast,” Sergeant Grumley said.

“Thank you,” replied Tad. “Please take good care of my drum for me. Maybe when I return from the island, I’ll have need for it.”

“Don’t worry about the drum,” Sergeant Grumley said. “I’ll take good care of it. Be careful out there on that island. It wouldn’t surprise me none if that wasn’t the first place the British are going to come.”

Tad put on his hat. He was ready to go. “There’s not much to worry about out there. General Washington’s only got a watch set on the island. If the British come, we’ll return quick enough.”

It was still dark outside, though a touch of gray was predicting the coming of morning. There were soldiers up and about, moving to appointed destinations. There was not much talking as they passed each other on the street.

Tad knew that the British were probably on their way. Most of the officers in headquarters were a little surprised that the British had not arrived yet. There were still some who thought that maybe the British would come to their senses and not come at all. Then the revolution would be over and successful.

Tad was not all that happy about being sent out to join the small party of observers on Staten Island. He had heard enough talk around headquarters to know that the British were expected to make a strong

effort to take Long Island, just across the East River from New York's busy docks and stores. He had hoped to be sent out to Long Island to join one of the regiments preparing to defend the island. When he had seen the island on a map at headquarters, he was surprised to find that Long Island was a huge island. It was 118 miles long and over twenty miles wide. It would take a great many men to hold such a large island.

Still, there was the prospect of meeting up with Jed again. Tad had no doubt that Jed would find a way to make things lively.

By the time Tad reached the docks and found the cutter, the gray had strengthened and faces could easily be seen.

The cutter was tied by two ropes to iron cleats secured to the dock. Men were loading sacks of food on the cutter. It did not look like a very big ship to Tad, and he wondered just how it would do when they got out on the nearly fifteen-mile trip out to Staten Island.

A man was giving directions to the workers about where to put the sacks. Tad thought he must be the captain of the boat.

"Excuse me, sir," Tad said. "Are you the captain?"

The man laughed. "It's a promotion that I'd happily take. I'm the skipper, right enough, but captain might be a little higher than the length of my boat warrants."

"I'm Tad Wheeler. I've been assigned to Staten Island."

The man stepped back and peered at Tad. "Are you, now? Well, you are here in good time. I was told there would be two going out as reinforcements for the handful of men out on Staten. Now, where's the other half of your party?"

"I know who he is," Tad replied. "He's from Pennsylvania, but I haven't seen him for almost two days."

“Well, climb aboard,” the skipper said. “We can’t wait any longer. We need to catch the tide while it’s going out.”

Tad carefully climbed down into the craft as the skipper ordered his four-man crew to cast off. The ropes holding the boat to the dock were untied and tossed into the boat. Everyone was aboard and the boat began drifting away from the dock.

There was a loud shout that came from a man who was running along the dock.

“Wait for me!”

The shout came from a tall man dressed in a wide brimmed hat and a long white shirt. He had a rifle in his hand.

“He’s the one. His name is Roger,” Tad said.

“Too late,” cried the skipper.

The man running along the dock made a great leap and landed on two of the crew and all three fell to the bottom of the boat.

The skipper of the cutter stood at the stern, his arms flung up in disgust at the scene.

“Welcome aboard whoever you are, and be ready to be thrown overboard,” the skipper shouted angrily.

Tad was already laughing as the three men untangled.

Roger held up his long rifle and carefully examined it.

“I think I broke all my bones, but the real blessing is my rifle is not damaged,” Roger exclaimed.

“Before I have you thrown overboard,” the skipper said, “Do you have anything to say in your defense?”

Roger looked about the boat which was crowded with the other four crewmen and the sacks of supplies.

“I count only five of you, plus my friend here, and to my way of thinking, that’s surely not enough to throw me overboard.”

“We’ll see about that,” the skipper said as he took off his knit hat and stuffed it in his belt.

“Wait!” cried Tad. “Don’t throw him overboard. He’s been assigned to Staten Island as a scout for the observation party. He’s to be a scout and I’m to be a messenger.”

The skipper looked at Tad. There was much doubt in the skipper’s eyes.

“You sure about that, young man?” the skipper growled.

“Oh, yes sir,” Tad assured him.

“Well, that being the case, you two find some place to sit where you’ll be out of the way. It’ll take us about two hours or so to make the island.”

The craft had drifted well away from the dock. The skipper barked orders and a sail was hoisted up the only mast on the craft. It was a large, triangular sail, and the bottom was secured to a long pole that extended from the mast.

The skipper took up position at the tiller at the stern or back of the craft.

A breeze caught the sail and the boat moved forward at a good clip.

Roger sat uneasily, his back to the side of the boat. He looked worried.

Tad sat beside him. He glanced up and thought the woodsman's deeply tanned face was taking on a whitish hue.

"Are you all right?" Tad asked. "Did you hurt yourself when you jumped in the boat?"

"No," said Roger. "I did not break a single bone that I know of, but my stomach is feeling like it's about to be upside down."

The skipper, hearing the conversation, laughed. "I think he's going to be sick before too long. He's got the queasies. Land people usually get sick when they set off to sea." The skipper shook his head. "We haven't even stood out to sea yet, and in fact, we never will get out to the real sea. These are the calm waters here."

Roger moaned and then rubbed his eyes. "How fast does this thing go? We must be going faster than a horse could run. It's not natural to be going so fast."

"Oh, a horse could catch us, but he couldn't stay with us very long," the skipper said.

Tad knew his stomach was not all that happy about the boat ride, but he was more concerned about the skipper saying that it would take two hours or so to reach the island.

"You're looking a little funny around the eyes, young man. Are you going to be seasick, too?"

Tad smiled. "I hope not. I was just wondering, if it takes us two hours to get out to the island, it must take that long to get back."

"Maybe longer, depending on the tide and the wind," the skipper said.

“Then a message that the British were here would be at least two hours late,” Tad said. “We won’t be of much value as an observation party.”

“Don’t worry your young head about that,” the skipper laughed. “General Washington’s boys got that all figured out. There’s signals all set up. When the British fleet is sighted, signal flags go up, and from a tall building downtown New York, they can see those flags flying out on Staten Island.”

“They can see them that far away?” Tad asked.

“Surely, they can, for a fact,” the skipper nodded. “There’s a great hill out on Staten Island. It is the highest point of land of any I ever heard of in these parts. Why, a man with a good telescope can look far out to the ocean and see a ship when it is the better part of a day away.”

Tad remembered how he had climbed up and down the Dorchester Heights.

“That means I will have to take messages up and down the hill,” Tad said. “That is hard work.”

“Are there any woods on the island?” Roger asked. “I could use some time in the woods after all this city life.”

The skipper laughed. “There’s woods enough, though I don’t know if the hunting is any particular good.”

Tad suddenly sat up. There was a frown on his face.

“If the British ships come, how are we going to get back? We will be too few to fight.”

“Aye, that’s a problem,” the skipper said. “If the British get a following wind, and if they come with the tide, they’ll come right up this East River. People out on Staten Island would have to escape by boat to the

New Jersey shore. It's not that far away, and the people out there know how to handle a boat fair enough."

The skipper paused to pay attention to his steering of the craft.

"Won't be long now before you begin to see the hill. In a way, you people are lucky."

"How so?" Roger asked.

"Why, you are fairly well out of the big fight that's coming," the skipper said. "If the British come, you'll escape out over to the Jersey shore and by the time you get back from there, the matter should be settled."

Tad sank back, his chin dropped down almost to his chest. A big question formed in his mind. He asked himself if Ben had caused this to happen. Was this Ben's way of protecting him? He had seen Ben and Sergeant Grumley talking in low tones. He shook his head. He had not traveled all this way just to be put aside when the two armies collided on the field of battle.

"What's troubling you?" the skipper asked Tad.

"Nothing," Tad answered quickly.

"Don't appear that way," the skipper insisted.

Tad hesitated before replying. "I've been in this fighting almost from the very start. Now, it looks like I'm going to miss the battle. I'm grown up enough to do my share. I'm a good drummer boy. I stood in line out on Breed's Hill. I think my friends have not been fair."

The skipper took his eyes off the sea ahead for a second and stared down at Tad.

“You’re a good-sized lad for your age, I’d say, but what’s coming is going to be an awful business. I’d say your friends are true friends for certain.”

Tad sat in silence. His mind working with the matter at hand. He had wondered why he was being sent out to the island. There really was not much for him to do, and certainly if Jed was there, he could easily handle the messages for such a small group of men. If there were only twenty or so men in the observation party, how many messages could there be? He thought of his blue French drum, and hoped that Sergeant Grumley was taking good care of the drum.

“There away, dead ahead, see it?” the skipper shouted. “There’s the hill. You can see it now and we aren’t but about halfway there.”

Tad leaned forward and stared out across the water. He could see a dark shape that seemed to rise out of the sea.

“That’s Todt Hill,” the skipper said. “If you was to have a spy glass, you might be able to see the flags up on the top of the hill. Those signal flags can send a message clear back to Washington’s headquarters.”

Tad did not reply. He sank down even deeper in his mind and his shoulders followed suit by slumping forward.

Roger nudged him with an elbow. “Don’t be so down in your spirit. I ‘spect that if we set our mind to it, we can find enough trouble to keep busy.”

The skipper looked at Roger and laughed. “I’d not doubt that for a second.”

CHAPTER 43

A Friend's Aim Is Tested

The crew on the cutter dropped the sail and the skipper guided the craft in toward a makeshift dock that extended out from the shore.

There were several men standing on the dock, and Tad could see more men running in the direction of the dock.

Even though the great hill was some distance inland, it still bulked large in Tad's eyes, and he was sure that it was like no other hill he had ever seen. It was much higher than either Bunker or Breed's hills. It was like a dozen Dorchester Heights rolled up in one massive hill.

The dock was higher than the side of the craft and the men on the dock lent a willing hand to the skipper, Tad, and Roger as they climbed out of the cutter.

"Hope you got something good for us to eat," one of the men on the dock shouted.

"Same old beans, biscuits, and salt bacon," replied one of the crew members as he hoisted a heavy sack up for the willing hands on the dock to grab.

Tad and Roger followed the skipper to the end of the dock and then stepped down on the narrow beach which was mostly covered with small pebbles and patches of sand.

Roger knelt down and picked up a handful of sand.

“Never saw sand look so good in all my life,” he muttered. “I thought sure that boat would be the end of me.”

An officer approached. Tad recognized him. It was Captain Hamlin, the man who had led the raid on the prison ship.

The skipper made a wave like salute and said, “Got your supplies and two reinforcements. Any messages to go back to headquarters?”

“Reinforcements? I didn’t ask for any reinforcements,” Captain Hamlin said as he looked carefully at Tad and Roger.

“Tad? The drummer boy?” Captain Hamlin asked. He was surprised to see the young drummer boy.

“What in the world are you doing out here?”

Tad saluted and said, “I’m supposed to be a messenger. I don’t know for sure why I was sent out here. I should be with a regiment out on Long Island or defending the city.”

“Well, the army works in strange ways,” Captain Hamlin said. “You can get a good rest out here. The duty is easy enough.”

Tad looked up at the hill. “Carrying a message up there will be a hard day’s work. I was a messenger boy on Dorchester Heights, and that was hard enough.”

Captain Hamlin laughed. “We don’t have to run up and down this mountain. We have signal flags. That saves a lot of climbing. We have five men up on the top, and they are relieved every three days. It’s not so bad. And, you’ve got a good friend here who will be glad to see you.”

“Jed’s here?” Tad asked. “I hoped he would be here. I haven’t seen him since the raid on the prison ship.”

“I hope you two boys will stay out of mischief. Jed’s not here right now. He’s off fishing, but he’ll be back soon.”

The captain turned his attention to Roger. He walked around the woodsman and then faced him.

“What in the world are you supposed to be?” asked Captain Hamlin.

“Why, I’m a man from the western frontier,” Roger said as he drew himself up to his full height which made him taller than the other men who were gathering around to watch.

“I come from out west of Pittsburgh, and I’m a great hunter, a great woodsman, and I can shoot better than anyone I have seen since coming back east to win this fight with the British.”

By this time, Captain Hamlin had his hands on his hips and was leaning forward.

“You are not too fond of yourself, I’d warrant,” Captain Hamlin said. “I doubt that you’ve even seen a British soldier, and I’d remind you that my boys here have been fighting them for a year.”

Roger shook his head and looked downcast. “The fighting wouldn’t have lasted near so long if I’d been here. Me and my trusty rifle would have made quicker work of it.”

By this time, there was a good crowd gathered. The soldiers were joined by the skipper of the cutter and his crew.

“I’ve never seen a gun like that before,” Captain Hamlin said. “It doesn’t look like it could hold up under heavy duty.”

“Hold up? Why, this rifle can shoot twice as far as your old muskets,” Roger said. “I can put a lead ball smack onto a six-inch circle at 150 paces, and those are my paces which will be longer than yours because I’m taller.”

One of the men in the circle around the Captain and Roger laughed and said, "Your stories are taller, and that's for certain."

"The proof's in the pudding," Roger said. "If you got something I can shoot at, I'll be happy to prove my point."

The man who did the cooking for the observation team stepped forward.

"I've got a ten-pound bag of flour that would make a good target."

Another man objected. "If he puts a hole in the bag, we'll lose some flour."

Another man shouted, "There won't be any hole in the bag, not at 150 paces. That's an impossible shot."

Roger shifted the rifle so he could cradle it in his left arm.

"Fetch your bag of flour," he growled. "And, be ready to scoop up the flour that falls out."

The cook looked at Captain Hamlin. The captain nodded yes, and the cook hurried off to fetch the bag of flour.

"Whoever sent you out here, did they tell you what you were supposed to do?" Captain Hamlin asked.

"It was a captain back at General Washington's headquarters," Roger replied. "He said I was to be a scout for you."

Captain Hamlin laughed. "There's the island and that big hill, but there's not a British soldier in sight on the sea or on the island."

Before Roger could reply, the cook returned with the bag of flour.

Tad quickly took note of the fact that the bag was not more than twelve inches high and maybe ten inches wide. At 150 paces, it would

make a very small target. Such a shot would be hopeless with a musket. Tad knew that anything over 75 paces was usually safe from a musket.

Roger glanced around the area and saw a post sticking up out of the ground some distance away. The post appeared to be about four feet high.

Roger stared at the cook. "That's a generous-sized bag of flour. Now, you take it out and set it on that post yonder and make 150 paces back this way." Roger paused for a moment and looked the cook up and down. "You being a short feller, you'd best take some mighty good paces."

The crowd laughed, and one of the men said, "We thought you was going to use your paces."

"Well, I would, for a fact," Roger replied. "This is a hard shot to make with so many people staring at me. I'll need to rest up for such hard work?"

Roger's reply set the crowd to laughing and there were more than a few hoots of derision.

The cook set off on his errand. After he placed the bag of flour on the post, he returned, making a great stride with each step. The crowd called out the number of each step, and when the cook reached where they were standing, he still had thirty-five steps to go.

The crowd, Roger, and Tad followed the cook until he reached the required number.

Tad turned and looked back at the post. "That's an awfully long shot, Roger. You sure you want to do this?"

"Don't worry," Roger said in a low voice. "This is an easy shot. Why, I could probably add another fifty paces and still hit it."

Some of the men in the crowd heard him, and they were quick to respond.

“I’ve got three pennies that says he won’t hit the bag,” one of the men shouted.

Another man joined in by saying, “I’ve got a shilling that says he won’t hit the bag.”

Roger smiled. “As it happens, I don’t have any money to my name. I’d be happy to bet if you would take a note from me saying I owe you if I lose.”

That brought a roar of laughter from the crowd. One of the soldiers said, “Can you even write a note?”

Roger appeared to be angry. He leaned over and in a very low voice, asked Tad if he had any money.

At first Tad was going to say no, then he remembered that he had the small purse Ben had given to him so he would have some spending money when he went on his unsuccessful trip to see Molly.

“Yes, I’ve got a shilling and a half,” Tad said. “But, I’m not sure it’s really mine.”

“Good,” Roger said. “We’ll cover all bets up to three shillings total.”

Several of the men shouted at the same time their displeasure at Roger’s offer.

“You can’t do that,” one of the men exclaimed. “We’d have to put up twice as much as you.”

“That’s true enough,” Roger said. “But, you think it is an impossible shot, so the money should be in our favor.”

Another soldier said, "I do believe what we have here is a careful braggart!"

That brought a quick response from the other men, again, laughter and hoots.

The skipper looked at Captain Hamlin and asked, "Are you going to allow this gambling to happen? You know how strict General Washington is about gambling and swearing."

Captain Hamlin nodded. "I know, but for now, this doesn't much seem like gambling. What I don't like is our poor drummer boy here stands to take the loss."

Tad shared the captain's reservations about the gambling. As near as he could see, he was going to lose the money that Ben had given him, but just as bad, he feared Roger was going to make a big fool of himself and never be taken seriously by the men. He was glad to have Roger as a friend, but the big woodsman was making it hard to be a good friend.

Roger checked his rifle. As he did so, he announced, "The bet is as I put it. Take it or leave it."

There was some grumbling, but the men agreed. One of them put it clearly, "It makes no difference. He can't do it. Why, the ball of lead probably won't even go that far, let alone hit the flour bag!"

Roger put the stock of the long rifle to his shoulder. He took aim, and then lowered the rifle. He held it in one hand. He wet the tip of a finger on his other hand and held it in the air. There was a slight breeze blowing in off the water.

Roger again lifted the rifle and took aim. The rifle fired, and Tad jumped. He was not alone. Others flinched or jumped, too. Most

thought that Roger had not taken enough time to properly aim the weapon.

Smoke from the barrel of the rifle was still curling up as several of the men ran toward the bag to see the result.

They clustered around the target and then began jumping up and down and shouting, "He did it! He did it! He hit it fair and in the middle!"

Roger stood with the stock of his rifle on the ground and holding it by the barrel. He took off his hat and made a grand bow to the crowd.

Captain Hamlin stepped forward and said, "Well done, but there was not betting here. There is no winner nor no losers. And, I am happy to welcome you to our company. You will make a good scout for us, though for the life of me, I am not sure what there is to scout."

The skipper of the cutter laughed as he said to Captain Hamlin, "You have made a wise decision. I do have to say, I have never seen such shooting."

Roger held his rifle with one hand and put his other hand on Tad's shoulder.

"I'm sorry about the money," Roger said.

Tad laughed. It was a laugh that comes from relief at having dodged a hard problem.

"That's all right," Tad said. "That was a great shot. Can you do it every time?"

Roger nodded. "There might be a time or two when the bullet goes astray, but I can do it more often than not. I'd guess that today was a good time to be more than not."

“That’s for certain,” Tad said. “They would have been rough on you if you had missed.”

Captain Hamlin and the skipper of the cutter had been listening.

Captain Hamlin pointed at Roger’s tomahawk which was secured on his belt.

“Are you as good with that ax as you are with the rifle?”

“About the same with all three,” Roger replied. “Going against the Indians, I figure my rifle is good for one, my tomahawk another, and my knife for a third.”

“What if there’s four Indians?” the skipper asked.

“Why then I call upon my fourth weapon,” Roger said with a straight and serious face as he looked down at his feet. “I say, feet, start running!”

The captain and the skipper and several men standing nearby laughed. Tad was happy about their laughter. His friend, Roger, had a sense of humor, and even though he did brag too much, he did it in a good-natured way that kept people from being angry at him.

The show put on by Roger was over, and the men carried the supplies to a storage shed near the makeshift dock. The skipper of the cutter tested the wind the same as Roger had done and said, “We’ll have an easy run back in when the tide turns. Take us a little longer to get back, though.”

“We’ve been keeping track of the wind,” Captain Hamlin said. “British warships can’t work their way up the East River without a good following wind.”

“There’s a boat coming around the point!” The shout came from one of the men who was some distance away.

“What is it?” shouted Captain Hamlin.

Roger quickly began reloading his rifle.

“A rowboat. It’s ours. Jed’s back,” came the shouted reply.

“I’m glad to hear that,” Captain Hamlin said. “He’s been out there all day.”

“Who’s coming?” asked the skipper.

“Oh, he’s a young one,” the captain replied. “He’s about the same age as our drummer boy here. He fishes off Sandy Hook. Brings us a good supply of fish and keeps an eye on that area. It would be a good place to anchor a fleet.”

Tad stared out toward the sea in the direction where the man on watch had pointed. He could see nothing at first, and then he spotted the little rowboat. He could see Jed pulling at the oars. He did not seem to be in any hurry, and he did work the oars with a steady pull.

As he came closer, Jed called out, “Come lend a hand. I’ve got a good catch, and more than I can carry.”

Tad could see that his friend was heading for the other side of the dock where the cutter was tied up. He hurried out on the dock and waved.

“Tad? Tad Wheeler? Where’d you come from?”

CHAPTER 44

Sad News Is Heard of a Fallen Patriot

The soft late June dusk was warm and no camp fire was needed. Tad lay on the soft ground, his head propped up on one elbow and hand. Opposite him was Jed, and to one side sat Roger, his legs folded under him in what he said was an Indian way of sitting.

“I think that’s the most food I’ve eaten at one time since I joined the army,” Tad said.

“Fishing has been good,” Jed said. “That’s been my main job since we came out here. I swear it’s the best duty we’ve seen, and that’s for certain.”

“Seems like a soft life to me,” Roger said. “Those were some mighty big fish you caught.”

“Like I said,” Jed answered, “Fishing has been real good.”

There was a brief silence as dusk turned into the first dark of night. Roger broke the silence.

“Course, big as your fish were, they weren’t nothing compared to a big old catfish I caught in a backwater of a river in Pennsylvania.”

Both Tad and Jed laughed. By this time, they were aware that Roger had a nearly endless supply of tall tales to tell.

“How big a fish was it?” Tad asked.

“Why, I don’t rightly know,” Roger said. “It was surely longer than I am tall and a good hundredweight more than what I weigh. It took me

three days to land that fish, and the sun was coming up on the fourth day when its tail was still in the water.”

Tad and Jed laughed. “Oh, I wish to heaven and back that old Ebenezer Watkins was here,” Jed said.

“Who’s that?” Tad asked.

“He’s in the second company with my father,” Jed replied. “He’s the champion tall story teller in the regiment. I’d dearly like to see him go up against Roger here. That’d be something to remember.”

“I don’t tell tall stories,” Roger protested. “Every word is the gospel truth.”

“If so, you’ve got about the most stretched out gospel I ever heard,” Jed said.

A figure came out of the dark. It was Captain Hamlin.

“You boys settled in?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” Tad said. “We took the spare tent here beside Jed’s tent.”

“Good. Now you should get some sleep. You might as well figure to go out with Jed tomorrow and do some fishing.”

“Would that be going out on the little boat I saw?” Roger asked.

“Ah, yes,” Captain Hamlin chuckled. “Does being out on the water make you nervous?”

“Not exactly nervous,” Roger replied. “It’s just that I never did learn how to run on water.”

“Can’t you swim?” Jed asked.

“Course I can swim. There’s not a river in Pennsylvania I can’t either jump over or swim,” Roger said indignantly.

A sliver of the rising moon added enough illumination that the three boys on the ground could see Captain Hamlin.

“I think maybe it would be a good idea if you two boys do the fishing, and you, the man who can jump rivers, should spend the day scouting the island. That should keep you busy.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” Roger said. “Who knows, the British might have landed some soldiers and we don’t know it.”

“Oh, no, we would know it,” Captain Hamlin said. “From this mountain top, we can see the British coming when they are a day away from landfall.”

“What about at night?” Roger asked. “Couldn’t they just sail up here in the dark?”

Captain Hamlin paused. “Maybe so, but no one wants to bring a fleet in close when it’s dark. Too easy to run aground.”

“Well, I’m for turning in and some sleep,” Roger said as he rose to his feet. While he had been sitting on the ground, his long rifle barrel had rested on his shoulder. When he arose, he carefully lifted the rifle up and cradled it in his left arm.

“See you boys in the morning,” he said.

Captain Hamlin looked down at the two boys. “Time you boys were off to bed. You’ll be wanting to get an early start tomorrow. Jed, do you think you can row around to that Sandy Hook Bay?”

“That’s where I was today,” Jed replied. “Fishing is real good there. It’s a long haul with just one person rowing, but not bad.”

“I can help row,” Tad said.

“No, I don’t think so,” Jed laughed. “I’m peculiar about going the right direction.”

Captain Hamlin laughed and said good night and strode away into the darkness.

“It’s a warm night,” Jed said. “Might just as well curl up here and go to sleep. That sailcloth tent is a bit smelly when it’s warm outside.”

Tad yawned. “Sounds like a good idea to me. You notice how Roger takes good care of that rifle?”

“He sure does,” Jed said. “He reminds me of someone I know when it comes to such things.”

“Who’s that?” Tad asked as he rolled over on his back and looked up at the sliver of moon and the stars.

“Why, you and your French drum,” Jed said. “I never saw anyone so particular about polishing a drum. Why didn’t you bring it with you?”

“They are taking care of it back at headquarters for me. I’m supposed to be a messenger out here, not a drummer boy, but for the life of me, I can’t see what messages I’m supposed to carry.”

Jed chuckled. “The army does some mighty strange things like sending you and the woodsman out here. There’s no need for you two. We only have five men at a time up on the mountain top. They stay up there several days and then get replaced by another five. ‘Course, its good duty for everyone.”

“Too bad your father and grandfather aren’t out here where they could rest up,” Tad said.

There was no reply from Jed, and Tad thought his young friend had gone to sleep.

Then Jed's voice came out of the dark. His voice was low, and Tad thought he heard a snuffle.

"My grandpa is gone. He died back in March just before we got into Boston."

Tad sat up and stared over to where Jed was laying on the ground. He could barely make out the form of the young boy from the Marblehead regiment.

"How'd it happen?" Tad asked.

"Wasn't the British," Jed said. "It was the cold. He came down with a fever. He didn't last three days. The doctor couldn't do anything."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Tad said softly. "The fever is a fearful thing."

Tad waited for a reply from Jed, but there was only the darkness and silence. Tad sensed that his young friend was upset, but he did not know how to be of any help. He did not know what to say and it bothered him.

Jed's voice broke the silence. He spoke in a low tone, almost as if talking to himself.

"Pa wanted to take the old man home for burial. The army said no, so we buried him in a cemetery set aside by the army. We couldn't find a preacher at the time. Colonel Glover said words over the grave."

Jed's voice trailed off into the darkness. Tad rubbed his eyes, and he thought he heard Jed sniff, and he wondered if he was crying.

Again, Jed's voice came softly through the night.

"When we go home someday, we will stop by the cemetery and fetch my grandfather. We'll take him home for a proper burial."

Jed paused for a moment and then continued. This time, his voice sounded stronger.

“Funny thing about the army. We couldn’t take my grandfather home, but then the army ups and sends Silas home. You remember Silas?”

“Oh, sure I do,” Tad said. He was on the raid with us when we rescued the prisoners. Why did the army send him home?”

“He was picked by the army to go back to Marblehead and take charge of the militia companies around the town in case the British try to attack.”

“I was with a Massachusetts regiment that got assigned to protect Boston,” Tad said.

“Marblehead ain’t big enough to warrant a regiment, I’d figure,” Jed replied.

“Now, let’s stop talking and get some sleep. I’ve thought about this as much as I can. Pa says it don’t pay to dwell on it.”

Tad kept his silence. He knew Jed was probably right about not dwelling on these matters too much, but he could not keep his mind from thinking about David. He remembered how the doctor had listened to David breathing with a little funnel. He knew the doctor was keeping a close eye on David for signs of the fever. Tad knew that David would never again shoulder a musket and march out against the British. He knew David was unhappy about that fact, but maybe if he and Emily got married, and maybe they were already married, then he would not think so much about marching off to war.

Morning came quickly. Tad thought sleeping a little longer would be a good idea, but Jed would have none of that.

“We got a long way to row so’s we can get around to Sandy Hook Bay,” Jed said as he pulled Tad up.

“You going to let me row some?” Tad asked as he rubbed sleep from his eyes.

“Not if I can help it,” Jed replied. “With you rowing, we be like to end up in Africa or some such a place.”

The two boys quickly ate breakfast and secured a small bundle of biscuits and a water bottle for later in the day.

Jed looked up at the sky. It would be a clear day, but there were clouds up high.

“Going to be a hot day,” Jed said. “The clouds will help a little, but not much. We got to go easy on the water bottle.”

On their way to the dock where Jed’s small rowboat was tied up, Tad saw that the cutter was gone, having returned on the tide to the city dock.

Roger was standing near Captain Hamlin and a group of men who were carrying their muskets and heavy packs.

“That’s the relief party going up the mountain,” Jed said.

“I’d like to climb up there,” Tad said. “They must be able to see about everywhere from up there.”

“I’ve been up there,” Jed said. “It’s an awful hard climb. I thought my legs were going to turn to stone.”

Roger nodded at them and said, “You boys about to go fishing?”

“That we are,” Jed replied.

“Well, reckon I’ll see you toward dark,” Roger said. “I’m off to find what I can on this island. Doubt that there’s any game worth shooting. Be good if I could fetch us back a deer in case you don’t catch any fish.”

Tad laughed as Jed bristled at Roger’s words.

“You’d better get used to eating fish,” Jed replied. “Everything on this island has been hunted out a long time ago.”

Roger waved and turned and headed away from them, his rifle cradled as always in his left arm.

“He walks funny,” Jed said. “He puts one foot right smack in front of the other.”

Tad nodded. “I think that’s the way Indians are supposed to walk. Of course, I never saw an Indian, so I don’t know for certain about it.”

The two boys climbed down in the small rowboat. Tad sniffed and held his nose.

“What is that smell?” he asked.

“That’s bait. T’aint the best bait, but it’s all I got. When we cleaned the fish last night, I kept a bucket of innards out here on the boat. They’re a bit ripe, I’d say.”

“We are going to spend all day smelling that?” Tad asked.

“Oh, you’ll get used to it,” Jed said as he untied the rope that held the boat against the dock.

Once out and away from the dock, Jed began rowing. He seemed to row effortlessly, and the boat glided along with surprising speed.

Tad sat in the back of the boat and faced Jed. Tad could see where they were going, and Jed could see where they had been.

In the bottom of the boat there were two rolls of twine. The twine was wound around a stick that was about two feet long. Tad could see that there was a large hook tied to the end of the twine.

“Those rolls of twine are what we are going to fish with?” Tad asked.

“That’s right,” Jed said. “There’s about eighty feet of line on those sticks. There’s weights further down in the twine. You can’t see ‘em now, but you will.”

When the fish is on the hook, we roll up the twine on the stick. Sometimes it’s not so easy, I can tell you.”

It took a good part of the morning before Jed was satisfied with their location. He pulled the oars out of their locks and carefully laid them along the sides of the boat.

Tad watched as the young Marblehead fisherman quickly baited the hooks with the smelly fish parts that had been stored in the small bucket.

Tad thought the smell was not so bad out on the water. There was a slight breeze that carried most of the smell away.

When the hooks were baited, Jed showed Tad how to unroll the twine and let the baited hook down into the water.

Tad paid out the line. He saw the weights disappear down into the sea. It took longer than he expected for the line to unroll from the stick. Finally, he had only the stick and could see where the line was tied.

“Now, we just sit and wait for the fish to do its job, which is to take the bait, and then we haul them up,” Jed said.

An hour passed and the sun was close to overhead. Both boys ate a biscuit and had a pull at the water bottle.

“The fish seem to be passing up their noon day meal,” Tad said.

“They’re a bit slow today,” Jed said. “Don’t ease up on your grip on the stick, though. Sometimes it seems like nothing is ever going to happen, and then a fish hits the bait and can jerk the stick right out of your hands.”

The sun was warm and the boat was rocking gently. Tad’s eyelids were heavy, and he was almost asleep when Jed spoke in a low voice.

“There’s a fish messing with my bait. I can feel him nosing the bait. They do that sometimes before taking a big bite.”

Tad opened his eyes. Jed was hunched over and peering down into the water. He had a good grip on his stick.

For the first time, Tad saw that they were a good distance from the island.

“How far out are we?” Tad asked.

“What?” Jed asked.

“How far out are we?” Tad repeated.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Jed replied without breaking his concentration on the water. “Maybe a mile or so. Don’t pester me with questions now. This fish is going to strike any minute, for certain.”

Tad sat back on his bench. The sun was hot now, and he pulled his hat off and wiped his hand through his wet hair. He kept his hat off so the soft breeze could cool his head.

Several sea gulls flew by overhead. They seemed to be heading toward the island. Tad wondered where they had been. He glanced around and stared out at the sea. At first, he saw nothing. Then, the

longer he stared, the more it seemed like something was growing up out of the water far off toward the horizon.

“Jed, there’s something funny happening out on the water,” Tad said.

Jed did not answer. His attention was riveted on the fishing line and the stick he held in both hands.

“Jed, you really should take a look. There’s things growing up out of the water.”

Jed shook his head. “The only thing that’s going to be in the water is you if you keep talking and cause me to miss catching this fish.”

Tad did not answer. His eyes strained to see the far- off horizon. He was sure that he saw sticks growing up out of the ocean. The longer he watched the more sure he was about the sticks, and then he understood. He could see sails. There were lots of sticks and sails. The horizon seemed to be covered with the sticks and sails.

Tad half-rose from his bench to get a better look. The sticks and sails had turned into ships. More ships than Tad had ever seen in his life.

Tad tried to speak but the words did not come out. His voice was blocked by fear and astonishment.

He moved toward Jed, and his movement caused the boat to rock.

“Sit down, Tad. What’s got into you?” Jed said angrily.

Tad took another step and grabbed Jed’s shoulder. Jed turned and looked up at Tad. He saw his friend’s white face and the panic in his eyes. Then Jed got a glimpse of what Tad had seen.

Jed jumped up and almost upset the boat.

“Jumping Jehoshaphat!” Jed cried. “It’s the whole British navy and they are coming hard straight at us!”

CHAPTER 45

Racing the British Again

The two boys in the small boat stared out to the sea in front of them. What had once been an empty ocean was now filled with ships and just as Jed had said, the ships were coming straight for them.

Jed broke the spell, speaking quickly, his words flying out of his mouth.

“Quick now, we have to get out of here. Those ships are going to anchor where we are sitting, no doubt about it.”

Jed threw his twine stick overboard. Tad yelled, “What about your fish?”

“No time for that, now,” Jed cried. “Throw your stick over. We don’t have time to wind it up and save it.”

Tad hesitated, looked at Jed, and then threw the stick overboard. As he did so, Jed quickly grabbed the oars and fitted them into the oarlocks.

“Wouldn’t it be faster if we each took an oar?” Tad asked.

“No,” Jed said sharply. “You ain’t been trained proper. We’d more than likely row against each other. You sit tight. I’ll get us out of this.”

Jed pulled hard at the oars and the little boat seemed to leap ahead, but Tad could see that the British ships were gaining on them.

“Are they close enough to fire a cannon at us?” Tad asked anxiously.

Jed continued to pull at the oars. He saved his breath by not replying, but he shook his head, no.

Tad continued to watch. “I’m trying to count them. I’m sure there must be over twenty. It’s hard to tell, though. Some of them are the biggest I’ve ever seen.”

Jed could see the fleet as well as Tad since he was facing them. After a few more minutes of strenuous rowing, he stopped. He kept the oars in place, but the blades were out of the water.

“Why are we stopping?” cried Tad. “They will be on us if we don’t keep going. If you are worn out, let me have a spell at the rowing.”

Jed shook his head as he tried to catch his breath. “We’re safe now,” he said. “Looky there, they’re dropping anchor.”

Tad strained his eyes. He held a hand up to shield them from the glare of the sun. At first, he could not see any difference. The ships appeared to be coming on as before, but then he saw sails being furled. More and more of the masts were visible. It was like a forest of masts.

Jed had recovered by now and again he pulled at the oars, but now, it was a steady pull and the small boat moved forward.

“I never saw so many ships before,” Tad said. “And I was certain that every gun on those ships was pointing at us.”

“There’s some big ones out there,” Jed said. “I know I saw some that were seventy-four gunships of the line.”

“We need to get back to warn Captain Hamlin that the British are here,” Tad said.

“Oh, by now, the captain has known about it for some time,” Jed said. “The boys up on the mountain top would have seen the British well before we did, but I suspect that the Captain will be some worried about us.”

Most of the way back, Tad kept his silence because he did not want Jed to waste his breath replying. He did laugh, though, when he remembered the great deception back when the Marblehead regiment faced the British ships off a beach they had been assigned to guard. Tad remembered one of the men back then saying almost the same thing as Jed had said. The cry of the whole British navy being on hand was not quite true then, but it surely was now.

“What’s so funny?” Jed asked as he rowed.

“Nothing,” Tad replied.

When the two boys tied up at the makeshift dock, they saw Captain Hamlin and Roger talking nearby.

Captain Hamlin waved at the boys and said, “I’m glad to see you. It probably was not a good idea to go fishing where the British navy wants to anchor.”

“Did you see them?” Roger asked.

“Did we see them? Why, they was thick as fleas about us! There were cannon on all sides of us and in front and behind, to boot,” Jed said with a laugh.

Captain Hamlin smiled and shook his head in mock disbelief.

“How did you escape?” Roger asked.

“Why Tad and I picked the boat up and ran as fast as we could over the waves.”

“You sure you never been to Pennsylvania?” Roger asked.

Jed turned to Captain Hamlin and asked, “Are we going to make a run for it?”

“Not yet,” Captain Hamlin said. “We’ll set our two longboats in the water ready to go, but I think we shall linger here a while. The boys up on the mountain are coming down. We need to know just what the British are planning to do. If they come ashore, then we will leave just ahead of them.”

“It’s a long row back to New York,” Tad said.

“Not for Marblehead boys,” Jed said proudly. “Remember how we outrowed that British longboat when we saved your friend back there in Boston?”

“That was a close-run business,” Tad said.

“Never mind that,” Captain Hamlin said. “I want you two boys to go with our woodsman here. You will set up a post where you can see the British from a hiding place just off the beach. If the British begin disembarking, you are to run for it as fast as you can and give us fair warning.”

“Now, Captain, I don’t need these two boys to keep me company,” Roger said.

“Yes, you do,” Captain Hamlin disagreed sharply. “You may be keeping watch for two or maybe even three days. You need someone to keep watch while you sleep. Jed here knows where the British are anchored and where they would likely send a landing party ashore.

And, Tad, well, Tad has about as much experience at this war as any man in the army. He's got more sense than either of you two."

"I'll go," Tad said. He was quickly seconded by Jed.

"I wouldn't miss it for anything, but Captain, I should have a musket so's we have some protection."

"No," Captain Hamlin quickly responded. "I do not want any fighting. I want you to run, and I want you to run when the British begin lowering their longboats."

Now, pack up water bottles, and whatever you can get from the cook. I want you on the way as soon as possible."

The rations for the three were not much. There were the usual biscuits and some salted pork.

"I'd guess we'll be a little hungry when this is over," Jed said.

"Maybe not," Roger said. "I found some wild berry bushes this morning when I was scouting."

They were soon ready to begin their walk to where they could keep an eye on the British ships. Captain Hamlin had some last-minute instructions for them.

"Don't take any chances. When the British lower their longboats, run for it! Keep a sharp lookout. My guess is that there's more British ships coming. We counted forty-two of them, and we know the British have many more than that. Now, I've got work to do here. You be on your way, and woodsman, don't you even think of coming back without these two boys."

"Don't worry, Captain," Roger said. "If the British give us any trouble, why, we'll just surround them and put an end to it."

Both Tad and Jed laughed, but Captain Hamlin shook his head.

Jed led the way, followed by Roger, with his long rifle cradled in his left arm as usual, and Tad brought up the rear.

They walked easily, Jed setting a comfortable pace. They would have a good three hours of day light in which to make their way around the mountain and set up a camp where they could keep an eye on the British fleet.

After an hour's walk, Jed said it was time for a break. They sat down in the shade of a tree and had a sip from one of the water bottles.

"First thing we do when we get there," Roger said, "Is look for a spring. There's bound to be a spring or two around this mountain. That way, we won't have to worry about not having enough water to drink."

"That's a good idea," Tad said. "We don't know how long we will be there."

"Not very long, I'd say," Jed offered. "The British will be coming ashore with the same idea in mind. They'll be looking for water, too. If they got an army on board those ships, by now it's a thirsty army."

"I wonder if we can really get away if the British come?" Tad asked.

"Oh, sure we can," Jed replied. "We've got the two long boats. They can easily carry all of us."

"True enough," Tad said with a nod of his head. "What will happen, though, if the British send warships around Staten Island and block our way?"

There was a slight breeze, and Jed looked up at the tree to get an idea of which way the wind was blowing.

“That won’t happen unless the wind changes direction,” Jed answered. “To come around between us and the New York docks, the British need a good following wind. Mostly, the wind seems to blow out away from shore, leastways since we been here.”

“Well now,” Roger said as he got to his feet. “I’ve heard enough about this wind business and ships. I don’t much understand it. Fighting is a lot easier out in Pennsylvania, I can tell you. Now, let’s be on our way.”

Tad and Jed both stood up and readied themselves for the march.

“I’ll take the lead now,” Roger said. “I’ve got the idea of where we are going, and it has been some hours now since we’ve had a report on the British. They could have landed a party by now for all we know. There’ll be no more talking from here on, and I’ll be ahead of you two by a good hundred paces. You keep me in sight best you can, but don’t worry if you might not see me from time to time.”

Before either Tad or Jed could say anything, Roger turned and began a kind of shuffling trot, and before the boys could get started, Roger had disappeared.

“Must have stepped behind a tree or something,” Jed muttered softly. “It’s no problem. I know the way.”

The boys pushed ahead with Jed in the lead. They walked quickly, and after a half-hour, Jed stopped to catch his breath, and Tad welcomed the respite.

“I haven’t seen the woodsman for a while,” Jed whispered.

Tad shook his head. “He must be out there somewhere.”

Both boys jumped when they suddenly sensed that Roger was standing directly behind them.

“How did you do that?” Jed whispered.

“You boys got to pay attention to what you are doing,” Roger said in a normal voice. “Out on the frontier in western Pennsylvania, the Indians would have your hair by now, and that’s for certain. Now, there’s no one ahead of us, and we are almost where we need to be. I’ve made a good loop around, and the way is clear. Jed, you can take the lead again.”

Once more, the little army set forth. Jed was in the lead followed by Roger and then Tad.

Tad let his mind wander while his feet followed the direction set by the other two members of the party.

It was a strange war. Here they were, three people led by a man accustomed to fighting in the deep woods against a foe who was as often unseen as seen. Now, the foe was on water and easily seen. Tad knew the British navy was the most powerful navy in the world, but until the British landed, he, Jed, and Roger, owned the land where they stood. Tad wondered how in the world General Washington could figure it all out and come to the right decisions?

Jed stopped and pointed straight ahead. Tad moved up beside Roger, and he could see the ocean ahead through the trees. As they cautiously moved forward to where the forest came down to the beach, they could see a great fleet riding at anchor in the bay.

“I’d swear there’s more of them than we saw earlier,” Jed said softly.

“That’s got to be all the boats there are in the whole world,” Roger said. His eyes were wide and he was clearly surprised. “Have they all got cannon on board?”

“No,” Jed replied. “Some of them are transports filled with soldiers, but I’d warrant that there are more cannon on those ships out there than we have in our whole army and then some.”

“We’ll set up camp here,” Roger said. “We can keep a close eye on the ships, and we have good cover here where the trees come down to the beach. Don’t go out on the beach. They’ll have lookouts for sure, and with their spy glasses, they could see us if we were out in the open.”

“I’d figure they’re maybe a mile off shore,” Jed said. “If they lowered boats, and climbed down in the boats, we’d have a good half hour before they could land. By then, we’d be a long way gone.”

Roger nodded agreement. “Now, you boys keep an eye on them. I’m going to do some scouting around.”

Without waiting for a reply from the boys, Roger turned and quickly disappeared in the woods.

“How’s he do that?” Jed asked. “It seems like he just fades from sight.”

Tad answered. “I know. I think what it is, he lines up with a tree that blocks our view. He sort of moves from one tree to another.”

The two boys set to work to make their stay as comfortable as possible.

Tad glanced up at the sky. It was clear of clouds, and the soft breeze was warm. Spending the night in this camp would not be difficult. He remembered the cold nights of the past winter and was thankful for the warm weather.

It was nearly dark before Roger returned. He had his hat off his head and carefully carried it with one hand under the crown. His ever-present rifle was gripped by his other hand.

The hat was filled with berries. Roger carefully set the hat down on the ground.

“I found some berries for us, and a small spring not far away,” Roger said. “We’ll have plenty of food and water.”

“No British?” asked Tad.

“No, no sign of any one being around for the past couple of days,” Roger said.

Jed leaned over and stared down at the berries. “You sure these berries are good to eat? Seems early for berries, least that I know of.”

“Oh, I figure they’re good to eat,” Roger said as he sat down cross-legged in front of the hat and helped himself to a small handful of the berries. “The birds were feeding on them, and that’s good enough for me.”

The evening meal was water from the bottles, biscuits and berries.

“Not much of a supper,” Jed said.

“We’ve seen worse,” Tad said.

“That’s for certain,” Jed replied.

Night came and with the darkness also came a big surprise for the three watchers.

Where the ships lay at anchor in the darkness, there was the sudden appearance of lights that seemed to move slowly back and forth and up and down. Tad thought it looked like a city had come to life out on the ocean.

“They’ve hoisted lanterns up in the rigging,” Jed said. “There must be a hundred or more lanterns.”

“It looks like a city out there,” Tad said.

“I’ve seen many a strange sight when the darkness comes,” Roger said, “But I do declare this is the strangest thing I ever saw.”

“Why so many lights?” Tad wondered aloud.

“We’ve done that before,” Jed said. “Sometimes back home when we were out fishing and night came on us, we’d light lanterns so other small boats could know where we were and then we could all go home together. No one was left behind to fare for themselves.”

“Those lights then are a signal to British ships coming this way,” Tad said. “I wonder what we will see on the morrow?”

“We could get a better view if we walked down to the water’s edge,” Jed said.

“That’s not a good idea,” Roger answered quickly. “If we walked down there and back, we’d leave a trail the British could easily see if they came ashore as soon as its light.”

The three took turns keeping watch on the lights that marked the location of the British fleet.

Tad lay on his back and waited for sleep to come. It did not take long. It had been a hard day and there had been much excitement. His hand brushed against the locket under his shirt. Molly’s face came into his mind. She was safe at a place called Tarrytown, or so her father claimed. Tad had no idea where Tarrytown was located except it was on a river and some distance from the city.

All three watchers were awake and alert when dawn came. With the dawn came the arrival of more British ships. Soon it appeared to the three watchers that the British fleet must surely have doubled in size.

“Maybe we’d ought to go back and tell Captain Hamlin about these new ships,” Jed said.

“Maybe,” Tad answered, “But, I think we should wait a little longer. And, they haven’t sent anyone ashore yet.”

“Wonder what they’re waiting for?” Roger asked.

More ships arrived as the day wore on toward afternoon.

Jed was anxious to begin the trip back to rejoin Captain Hamlin and the observation party. Tad wanted to wait a little longer. While the two boys considered the matter, Roger took the water bottles to the spring and filled them with fresh and cool water.

Tad was grateful for the water. As he was about to take a second drink from the bottle, his eyes caught sight of something happening on one of the closest ships.

“I saw something,” he said quickly, “But, I couldn’t make it out.”

Jed held his hand over his eyes like a visor of a cap.

“Yes, yes, I see it. They’ve put a long boat in the water. I think they’re coming ashore.”

“Look over there,” cried Tad. There’s another long boat coming around that ship. They must have loaded it with soldiers where we couldn’t see.”

“They’re a-coming, and in some numbers,” Roger said. “Grab your things and let’s get out of here while we can.”

The two boys wasted no time in grabbing up their gear and water bottles.

Roger led the way and he set a fast pace. Both Jed and Tad almost had to break into a trot to keep up.

Tad was grateful when Roger stopped. "Catch your breath," Roger said. "We have to hurry so we can warn the captain, but we have to pace ourselves."

Tad was not quite ready to start again, but Roger was not a man to be crossed. As they ran, Tad thought of the many times he had been forced to run or paddle a boat to escape the British. He wondered if there would ever come a time when he did not have to run for his life, a time when the Americans would face the British in a real battle and drive them from the field.

When they finally came around the last part of the mountain and could see the camp and the dock, both Tad and Jed were nearly exhausted. Roger, on the other hand, seemed fresh. He had easily made the fast trip.

They saw Captain Hamlin down by the dock. The observation party's two large rowboats were in the water and tied to the dock.

"They're coming," Roger shouted as they drew close. "Boatloads of Redcoats."

Tad and Jed stood with their hands on their knees in an attempt to regain their normal breathing.

"How many boatloads?" asked Captain Hamlin.

"At least four," Roger answered. "They were loaded with soldiers. There must have been at least ten soldiers or more in each boat. By my calculations, they might be about a half-hour to an hour behind us."

"Good work," Captain Hamlin said. He turned and cupped his hands to his mouth and yelled at the top of his voice.

"Everybody to the boats, now. Hurry!"

Just as Roger was saying that they would have a good start on the British, one of the Marblehead men shouted a quick warning.

“There’s a ship coming!”

They all looked toward the west. There was a ship with sails spread and coming on in good speed.

“A British frigate,” Captain Hamlin said. “Now we are in for it. She’s probably carrying eighteen guns. We can’t row away now. They’d blow us out of the water.”

“And they’re following us around the mountain on the same path we took to return,” Tad said.

“We’re trapped like rats!” Jed cried.

CHAPTER 46

Who Is Who on A Foggy Night?

It did not take but a moment for Captain Hamlin to reach a decision.

“We may be trapped, but as long as we have our boats and the water, we have a mouse hole we might be able to escape through. Everybody

into the boats! We will row with one boat behind the other. Jed, I want you in the bow of the front boat. You got the sharpest eyes. Keep a close watch for any Britishers coming around the other side of the island. Tad, you and the woodsman come with me in the second boat. Now! Everybody, move!”

The men moved quickly and then almost at a run as there was a sharp explosion from the British ship followed by a puff of smoke.

A cannon ball screamed through the air and landed in the water about twenty paces off the end of the dock.

The Marblehead crews had the two boats moving.

Captain Hamlin shouted ahead at the first boat, “Keep close to shore and don’t stop.”

They had not gone far when there was another sharp report from the ship. This time a cannon ball overshot the dock and landed not far from the stern of the second boat. Tad could feel spray kicked up by the shot when it hit the water.

“Are you all right?” Captain Hamlin asked Tad.

“Just a little wet, sir,” Tad replied.

Captain Hamlin spoke again, but Tad was not sure if he was going over his plan aloud, or if he was talking to anyone in particular.

“That British frigate will lose its following wind if it tries to follow us. We can row away and then turn toward Long Island and make for land there. If we are clear, we can come on and return back to the docks in New York City.”

The third shot from the frigate fell short by a safe distance.

Captain Hamlin kept a close watch on the frigate behind them. He muttered, "Good, good," as the distance increased. He looked down at Tad and smiled. "We found our mouse hole, I do believe."

Roger sat near Tad on the floor of the boat. He looked a little pale.

"Are we going to make it?" he asked.

Captain Hamlin looked down at the woodsman. "I'm certain of it. When night comes, we can reverse our course and head for New York. We'll be on the water for hours, but we will be safe."

Roger replied, "We may be safe, but we surely will be sick, too."

Captain Hamlin shouted orders so the people in the boat ahead could hear.

"Ease up on the rowing. The British can't follow us. In about another hour we will make a turn to the north."

Tad suddenly realized that he was very tired. He wondered how Captain Hamlin could find the strength to continue standing and keeping close watch. Tad smiled when he glanced over at Roger. The Pennsylvanian was not tired, but he looked like he could not run a single step. On land, the woodsman was truly in his element. The Marblehead men were in their element when on the water. Everyone had so much to contribute. Tad wondered if he had much to contribute, but then he remembered how he had performed with the French drum. When he got back to the city, he would have to polish the drum. He hoped it had been kept in a dry place while he was out on Staten Island.

Night brought a sense of relief to Tad. The British could not see the two boats making their way back to the New York City docks and safety. He could hear the oars dipping down into the water and could feel the boat moving ahead. The Marblehead men must be weary, but the

rhythm of their motions did not change. He had learned from Jed just how much pride the Marblehead men had in their ability to row long distances.

Those thoughts were still in his mind as his eyelids slowly closed and without knowing it, he was asleep.

He awoke with a start. There was a damp feel to his face, and his eyes at first told him that he was inside a feather pillow.

The sea was covered with a whitish fog through which a partial moon tried to shine.

He started to speak and then caught himself. When his words came out, they were soft and meant not to go beyond the sides of the boat.

“Are we lost in the fog?” Tad asked.

“I hope not,” Captain Hamlin said. “You had a nice little catnap.”

“I’m sorry, sir,” Tad answered, still keeping his voice down so the sound did not travel out over the water and through the fog.

“Don’t be sorry,” Captain Hamlin said. “These days, a man sleeps when he can.”

“I can see nothing but fog,” Tad said. “How do we know where we are?”

“I’ve been at sea in a heavy fog more times than I can remember,” Captain Hamlin replied. “I think I have a feel for the right direction. Besides, we have Jed up in the bow of the boat ahead.”

Tad did not reply. He glanced over at Roger and saw that the woodsman was asleep or at least had his eyes closed.

The boat glided along through the fog. The oars could not be seen, but there was the constant sound of oars dipping in the water.

Then Tad heard Jeb's voice sing out, "docks just ahead," and no sooner did he shout when the echo of his voice was followed by the sound of muskets firing.

"They're shooting at us," Captain Hamlin shouted. "Back water with the oars and hold position."

Jed's voice rang out loud and clear, "Hold your fire. We ain't Redcoats. We're Marblehead men coming from Staten Island."

The musket fire stopped. A voice from the docks came out over the water. "You'd best be able to prove that! I've got a hundred muskets here and a six pounder, and I got two hundred more muskets fast on the way to my support."

Captain Hamlin cupped his hands and shouted, "This is Captain Hamlin of the first company of the Marblehead regiment. We are coming in."

There was a shouted reply, "You come in and we'll sink you for sure. We heard the observation party was captured by the British."

"That's not true," Captain Hamlin replied. "We got away without losing a single man. It will go hard with you if any of my men are wounded or killed here by their own side."

There was no answer from the docks. The two boats began a gentle drift toward the docks and Captain Hamlin repeated his order to hold place.

Another voice came out from the docks, and Tad quickly lifted his head to better hear.

"You out on the boats! Do you have a drummer boy on board?"

Tad recognized the voice. It was Ben.

“Yes, we do,” Captain Hamlin answered.

The voice came again from the docks. “Let the drummer boy answer my questions. What is your name, drummer boy?”

Captain Hamlin looked down at Tad. “Stand up and answer them,” he said. “Cup your hands around your mouth like I do and shout your answers.”

Tad stood and cupped his hands and shouted, “I’m Tad Wheeler from Boston. Is that you, Ben?”

There was a moment of silence and then the same voice came back from the docks. “What kind of drum do you have?”

“It’s a French drum, a blue colored drum my father gave me.”

Again, there was a moment of silence and then a different voice came out from the docks.

“Come on in, but come slow and don’t make any false moves or we will open fire.”

“Get your fingers off those triggers. We are coming in,” Captain Hamlin shouted.

The two boats eased on in until they bumped the sides of the dock. There were torches on the docks, but it was still hard to see in the fog. There was no mistaking the fact, however, that there was a considerable force arrayed to defend the docks against any British raid.

The Marblehead men climbed out of the boats and secured them to the dock. Tad and Captain Hamlin followed. Tad helped Roger. The woodsman was much the worse for the trip on the water. He stumbled as he tried to stand up on the dock, and Tad steadied him.

There were numerous lanterns and torches which cast an eerie glow over the scene.

Ben suddenly appeared before Tad and grabbed his shoulders in what was almost a hug.

“Thank God, you made it back,” Ben said. “I was worried about you. When you were sent out to Staten Island, I was happy because I thought it would be easy duty and a safe place to be.”

Tad smiled as he squirmed free of Ben’s grasp.

“It was easy duty until the British fleet came. And, with Captain Hamlin, well, I was safe enough.”

“Oh, yes, Captain Hamlin,” Ben said. “We have to go to headquarters. There are officers there who want to know everything you people have seen.”

The Marblehead men were led away to temporary quarters where they could be fed and bedded down for the night. Captain Hamlin, Ben, Tad, and Jed made their way to General Washington’s headquarters. Roger followed along behind. He was uncertain about where he was supposed to go, and in the excitement and urgency of the moment, he was nearly a forgotten man.

At headquarters, there was much activity as officers hurried from one place to another. There were both candles and lanterns providing light.

Once inside, both Tad and Jed were questioned by officers about what they had seen and especially about the arrival of more ships after the initial arrival of the fleet.

Captain Hamlin was taken in to see General Washington. Ben was present for the meeting.

Later, after both Tad and Jed had finished answering questions, Ben took them and Roger to the warehouse where Tad had been quartered before being sent out to the island.

On the way, Ben told them about the interview that Captain Hamlin had with General Washington.

“I think the general was pleased by the way you people performed. The general complimented Captain Hamlin. I wouldn’t be surprised if he got promoted to major.”

“The captain’s a good man,” Jed said proudly. “Wouldn’t surprise me none if he ended up being a general someday.”

Ben agreed. “That might happen. The captain gave a good report on you two and the woodsman. He said you three kept a close watch on the British, and had to run for it when they began coming ashore.”

“Roger was the one who kept us safe,” Tad said. “He’s a good scout and is by far the best shooter I have ever seen. He hit a target at 150 paces with his rifle.”

“I would have thought that to be impossible,” Ben said. “I’ve heard such tales, but I have never seen it.”

“It’s true enough,” Tad insisted. “I saw him do it.”

Sergeant Grumley was waiting at the door of the quarters. He raised a lantern up high to light the way.

“Glad to see ye, drummer boy,” the old sergeant said. “I was purely worried about ye out on that island. Come on in. I’ve got a fire going and a tea kettle set. There’s some biscuits and salt fish.”

As they started up the steps to the quarters, Jed pulled back.

“I’d appreciate some of those biscuits and fish, but I figure I’d better scat back over to the Marblehead regiment. My pa will be worried about me.”

“You know the way from here?” Ben asked.

“Oh, yes. I could find it in the dark, which is a good thing what with it being dark,” Jed laughed.

Tad was sorry to see Jed go. “It’s too bad we can’t be in the same regiment.”

“Well, it seems a small enough fight. We’ll get together again and have a go at the British,” Jed said. “I’m sure of it.”

“I hope so,” Tad said, “But, it would be a good thing if we were doing the chasing instead of always running away.”

Again, Jed laughed. “I surely hope so. Take care, oh, and keep that long-legged woodsman handy. He can teach me how to shoot.”

With that, Jed turned and walked away.

“Come on in,” Sergeant Grumley urged. “The tea will be ready.”

“I wish I could,” Ben said, “I’ve got to get back to headquarters. There will be plenty of work to do, and I doubt if I get much sleep tonight. Tad, you get some sleep. There will be plenty for you to do tomorrow.”

Before Tad could answer, Ben turned and was gone. Sergeant Grumley lowered his lantern and said, “Well, come on. That tea’s got to be drunk. Can’t waste good tea.”

When they entered the quarters, Roger looked around at the pallets and the table and chairs. He saw the small fire in the fireplace and the kettle with steam coming out the spout.

“This is about the best place I’ve seen,” Roger said. “Out on the frontier in western Pennsylvania, this would be living high on the hog, and that’s for certain.”

Sergeant Grumley stared at the tall woodsman with the long rifle. He shook his head as he poured tea into cups and took a cloth off a plate of biscuits and pieces of salt fish.

“Ye are about as strange a duck as I’ve seen in this army. Ye can put that rifle over in the corner. It ain’t cocked and ready to fire is it?”

“Of course not,” Roger replied with an edge to his voice. “Though it wouldn’t take me but a second to remedy that.”

Roger moved over to the corner of the room and carefully inspected the walls. He leaned the rifle upright in the corner and returned to the table.

“Don’t see no damp on those walls,” he said.

The three sat at the table and Sergeant Grumley watched as Tad and Roger ate biscuits and salt fish.

“They must not have fed very well out on that island,” the sergeant said.

“The food was good,” Tad replied. “The problem was the British. We spent a lot of our time out there being on the run, or so it seemed.”

“Wasn’t much chance to eat,” Roger added.

“Well, the British are here, just as I thought they’d be,” Sergeant Grumley said. “There’s sure to be a battle, and it’ll be the biggest of this war.”

“Bigger than Breed’s Hill?” Tad asked as he bit into the last biscuit.

“More than likely,” Sergeant Grumley replied. “Word around the city is that the British have got more than 25,000 men coming.”

“We must have nearly that many,” Tad said.

“We have more than we ever have had,” Sergeant Grumley said. “The trouble is we have too much ground to defend. We got a lot of men over in Fort Washington and Fort Lee guarding the landward side of the city. And, we got men out on Long Island. Then we have to defend the city itself. Like I said, there’s just too much to defend. Worse yet, the British can pick up and sail to anywhere they wish. Wherever we fight, they’ll have the most men at hand.”

“That doesn’t sound very good for us,” Roger said as he raised a cup of tea to his lips.

“Leastways, we’ve got enough gunpowder this time,” Tad said. “It won’t be like Breed’s Hill where we ran out.”

Sergeant Grumley laughed. “Drummer boy, ye might just as well give up calling it the battle of Breed’s Hill. Everyone is dead set on calling it the battle of Bunker Hill.”

“But, that’s not the way it was,” Tad protested.

“Don’t make a bit of difference,” the old sergeant said. “It’s what people believe to be the truth and no amount of argufying it makes a difference.”

“Seems to me people could at least get the place of a battle right,” Tad insisted.

Neither Sergeant Grumley nor Roger pushed the matter further, and the three sat at the table in silence and drank their tea.

Tad looked up from the cup in his hand. “Is my drum stored here?”

“Sure is,” Sergeant Grumley said. He rose from his chair and moved across the room to a large cabinet. He opened the cabinet and pulled out the drum. It was wrapped in a blanket.

Tad jumped up from his chair and eagerly took the drum. He removed the blanket and inspected the drum.

“You did a good job taking care of my drum,” Tad said. “It does need to be polished though.” As he spoke, he saw a rag tied to the strap and quickly untied the rag and sat back down and began working on the drum

Sergeant Grumley laughed as he watched the boy polishing the drum.

“When ye get tired of working on the drum,” he said, “Make sure the lantern is out, and get some sleep. That’s what I’m about, and high time. Tomorrow will surely be a busy day.”

Sergeant Grumley went to the far end of the room and curled up on a pallet on the floor.

Roger watched Tad work on his drum.

“Never saw a drum like that before,” he said.

“It’s a French drum. My father served in the French and Indian war back in 1763. He found it on a battlefield and brought it back home.”

“Well, if it’s a French drum, then it must have come from France,” Roger said.

Tad nodded. “Probably, but it could have been made in Canada by some French drum maker. When I was a boy, though, I’d make up stories about battles it had been in over in Europe.”

“When you *was* a boy? Near as I can see you are still a boy.”

“Not so,” Tad replied. “I’m thirteen and on my way to fourteen. And, I have been a soldier now since back in April of ’75.”

Sergeant Grumley lay on his pallet with his eyes closed, but he was not asleep. He listened to Tad and the woodsman. He knew the two would become good friends, and he was happy about that. He worried about Tad. He was really a boy, not a man, and yet, he had been doing a man’s job. He hoped the woodsman would keep an eye on the boy. Sergeant Grumley was not known as a praying man, but now he put together a few words asking God to keep an eye on Tad for there were terrible times coming.

CHAPTER 47

Close Friends Gather for Battle

What Tad and the others in the observation party had seen was just the beginning of a British landing in force on Staten Island.

Observers with good telescopes and stationed atop high places in the city and in other localities confirmed that the British were making a major move. After Staten Island, either the city of New York or Long Island would be the next to feel the British boots.

There was a seemingly endless stream of messages to be delivered to regiments and to brigades. By the end of the day, Tad was exhausted when he returned to his quarters.

Sergeant Grumley had news for Tad. The old sergeant announced that he was being sent over to Long Island. The American soldiers on the island were being reinforced, and he, his wagon and two horses, and Roger were going over at first light the next day.

“Ye’ll have a lot of room here with the two of us being gone,” Sergeant Grumley said.

Roger was not happy about his new role in the army.

“I’m supposed to keep a watch on a wagon? That’s not a proper role for a man such as myself.”

Sergeant Grumley responded. “Haw! And now I have to take care of a woodsman who knows nothing about horses or wagons. This army gets curiouser and curiouser by the day.”

Tad was surprised to hear this news, and he was not happy about it, either. He had grown accustomed to the ways of the old sergeant, and Roger had become a good friend. After finishing his evening meal, he took a rag and polished the blue French drum.

“I think I’m trapped here in the headquarters,” he said.

“That’s not a bad thing,” Sergeant Grumley replied. “I fear what is going to come out there on Long Island. It’s too big to be defended unless we have the whole army over there. Why, it’s over a hundred miles long. Take a man a week to walk from one end to the other.”

“I’ll miss not having you two around,” Tad said. “Maybe I can get shipped over to Long Island, too. There must be regiments over there who need a drummer boy.”

“No,” Sergeant Grumley said. “Ye stay put here. No sense in all of us going over there.”

Early the next morning, Tad went down to the docks to see Sergeant Grumley and Roger off to their new assignment on Long island.

The docks were busy. There were several barges and long rowboats being loaded with men and supplies.

One of the barges was rigged with a platform and ramp so Sergeant Grumley could drive his team of horses and wagon onto the barge. Roger sat in the back of the wagon and was holding his rifle in one hand and the other hand had a firm grip on the side of the wagon. This was going to be an ordeal for Roger. He was not happy about being in a wagon and even less happy about being in a wagon that was on a barge on the water.

Sergeant Grumley sat on the driver’s bench and he urged the horses forward. The horses moved cautiously forward until they got to the platform that bridged the dock and the end of the barge. They stopped and no amount of urging by Sergeant Grumley could get them to take another step forward.

Tad watched as the old sergeant scratched his head, then slowly climbed down from his seat.

After a brief discussion with the barge master, large rags were found and Sergeant Grumley blindfolded the horses.

Once that was done, he stood between the two horses, a hand on each bridle and talking softly to the horses, he led them forward.

Hesitantly, very hesitantly, the two horses moved forward. Finally, they stepped down the ramp and were safely settled with the wagon and a very nervous Roger ready to make the crossing.

Sergeant Grumley remained standing and he spoke softly so only the horses could hear his voice.

There was a long line of rowers on each side of the barge. Tad was sure that these were men from the Marblehead regiment. They would row the barge across the East River to Long Island. It was a mile across the water. The barge was an awkward craft. The rowers would have a daunting task. Tad knew that the Marblehead men were great rowers and would make the trip and probably several more during the day.

Tad kept a close watch for his friend, Jed, but he was not present. He wondered where the young Marblehead boy was at the moment. He guessed that maybe he was already out on Long Island.

On his way to headquarters, Tad stepped on a sharp pebble and shouted, "Ouch!"

He hopped on one foot and for a moment held his foot in one hand. Several soldiers passing by laughed, and one of them said, "Bet you have a good hole in the bottom of your shoe."

Tad sat down and looked at the bottom of his right shoe, and sure enough, there was indeed a small hole. Walking so much on paved streets was taking its toll on his shoes.

There was a stack of messages to be delivered waiting for him at headquarters, and he set off on his assignments. Shortly after the middle of the day, he was walking down Broadway on his way back to headquarters.

"Tad Wheeler!" a voice came from across the street.

Tad glanced around and saw a blond-haired young man crossing the street. He quickly recognized the young man and waved.

"Jan, how are you?"

The two boys met in the middle of the street. Jan offered his hand and Tad quickly took it and they shook hands.

The street was busy. There were soldiers marching by, and wagons pulled by teams of horses competed for space.

Tad spoke loudly so his voice would carry above the din of the traffic.

“Quick, we need to get out of the middle of the road or we will be run over.”

Jan nodded and smiled. They hurried to the side where they would be out of the way.

“I have much news for you,” Jan said. “Your friend David and Molly’s cousin, Emily, are married. They are living with Emily’s parents up near Boston.”

“David’s married?” Tad was surprised even though he knew that there were plans for just such an event.

Jan nodded. “Maybe someday he will take over the leather making business.”

“David had learned about the leather business when he was an apprentice, back before the fighting started,” Tad said.

“The war is over for him, I think,” Jan said.

Tad quickly agreed. “That time he was a prisoner nearly ruined him. I know the doctor was worried about his lungs.”

Jan glanced around and then spoke in a lowered voice.

“Are the British really here? There are so many rumors. Mr. Van Zandt has talked about closing his store and moving everything up to Tarrytown until it is over.”

“Oh, yes, the British are here. I know that to be true because I saw their fleet.”

“Really, how was that? I have not heard anyone who actually has seen the British.”

“I was out on Staten Island with the observation group. I saw them. It looked like all the ships in the world coming in to anchor there. We left in a hurry when they sent scouting parties ashore.”

Jan stared at Tad. “You have seen so much. I envy you. It bothers me sometimes. I am safe and comfortable. How will I really become a part of this new world that you and the others are making?”

Tad did not know how to reply to Jan’s question. He was about to say that everyone had to do what they thought best when Jan smiled and spoke again.

“There is another reason I have envy for you. I have a message from Molly for you.”

“Molly?” Tad asked. “Has she returned from Tarrytown?”

Jan shook his head. “She is still there, but she sent a letter to me. Her father did not open that letter. There was not much for me in the letter. Mostly it was another hidden letter inside and it was for you.”

Jan reached inside his coat and pulled out a small, folded paper that was sealed with red wax. There was no writing on the outside. Jan handed the folded message to Tad.

“Molly trusts you, and that is a good thing. I trust you, too.” Tad said as he took the letter from Jan. “I thank you for your help.”

“We are friends,” Jan said. “And, Molly has made her choice. Now, I had better return to the store. Mr. Van Zandt will be worried. He worries all the time now about the British.”

Tad nodded. "Most people do. You take care and if you see Molly, tell her I think about her."

"Of course," Jan replied. "And, you take care."

They parted and went about their business. Tad returned to the headquarters to pick up more messages, but while he was there, he found a quiet corridor where there were no people. He eagerly opened the folded and sealed piece of paper. Molly's letter was very brief. She wrote that she thought about him and was sorry she was not in New York to see him. She asked that he remember her fondly, and that he should take care of himself.

He read the letter over and over, and each time, he saw her face more clearly in his mind.

While he was happy to hear from Molly, the lingering effect of the letter was to make him feel very lonely. There was a sudden wetness in his eyes. Thoughts of the Stelles and the print shop, David and Packie, the British drummer, all the people he had been close to during his young life paraded through his mind in quick order.

He brushed the tears from his eyes and stuck the letter into a pocket inside his coat.

He continued to make his rounds, delivering messages and taking the responses back to headquarters for the rest of the day. That evening, he went to the cook's tent and got his evening meal.

After he finished the meal, he returned to his quarters. He was alone in the quarters. Sergeant Grumley and Roger were gone. He wondered how they were faring over on Long Island. He would have given anything to hear Jed's cheery voice again.

As he always did in such times, he reached for the French drum and a rag and began polishing the drum.

CHAPTER 48

A Declaration That Must Be Made Good by Battle

There was much commotion the next day at headquarters. Reports were coming in of the sighting of more British ships. There were reports that the British were landing large forces on Long Island. There were reports of landings north of the city.

Tad sat on a chair in an outer office waiting for his next assignment. A dusty dispatch rider came running into the office.

“I’ve got a message for General Washington,” he shouted. “And it’s the best news ever, I’d warrant.”

The duty officer behind the desk rose from his chair.

“Give me the message,” he said. “I’ll take it to the general presently.”

“I think not,” the man shouted. “You take it to him now. He needs to know that we are an independent people. Congress has declared independence from Great Britain, and that is the truth, so help me, God!”

Several officers heard the shouting and came out of offices to see what was causing the commotion. They heard the word, *independence*, and were very excited.

“Is it true?” one of the officers asked the dispatch rider.

“Sure as I’m standing here,” the rider replied. “I been three days on the road from Philadelphia. They signed this Declaration of Independence on July 4, and I been riding hard ever since.”

“Give me the dispatch,” the duty officer said. “We must not waste any more time.”

The duty officer left the room, the documents from Philadelphia in their canvas bag carefully held in one hand.

Word of the arrival of the news from Philadelphia and the word, *independence*, quickly spread. There were shouts of joy outside. Groups of soldiers and officers excitedly talked about the news.

Tad remembered Mr. Riddle, the tannery owner, who had been so generous when it came to taking care of sick and wounded soldiers during the siege of Boston.

Mr. Riddle had been in favor of helping the army as best he could, but he could not see the purpose in all the fighting. Where was it going to lead? Now, Tad thought, Mr. Riddle would have his answer, and the word was, *Independence*. Now, everyone would know what they were fighting for. The revolution now had point and purpose.

Then Tad thought of his father, Mr. Stelle. He had been in favor of the uprising, but he had clearly hoped that the matter would be settled, that the British would see that the colonists were in the right, and amends could be made. He wondered how Mr. Stelle would take this news, but he had no doubt that he would be in favor after all. Mr. Stelle

had risked his life by printing pamphlets promoting the rights of the colonists.

A sergeant came out the door that led back to the offices.

“Is there a Tad Wheeler out here?” the sergeant shouted.

“Here,” cried Tad.

“You are to report to Captain Morrison, now. He’s in the office to your left, third door. Follow me.”

Tad hurried across the room and through the door and followed the sergeant who went but a short distance and pointed to a door that was standing open.

As he followed, Tad wondered who this Captain Morrison was and why he wanted to see him. Then Tad realized that it was Ben. He had almost forgotten that Ben’s last name was Morrison. And, captain! Why, that meant Ben had been promoted from lieutenant to captain.

There were several officers standing around a table. They were examining several sheets of paper.

Ben looked up and saw Tad and hurried over to where Tad stood just inside the door.

“There you are,” Ben said. “We have an assignment for you. You are to report to the Whittaker Print Shop as soon as possible.”

Tad nodded, but he ignored Ben’s order for the moment.

“You’ve been promoted?” Tad asked.

Ben smiled. “Yes, I’m a captain now, but I’m still an aide. I hoped it meant that I would be given a company in the line to lead, but no, I’m still here in headquarters.”

“What am I going to do at the print shop?” Tad asked.

“We’ve got several copies of the Declaration of Independence, and we are going to have every print shop in the city begin printing it. I know you can set type. We need the copies as soon as possible so the people in New York and the soldiers will know what has happened.”

“I know where that print shop is,” Tad said. “I’ve passed it several times while delivering messages. I can be there in a few minutes.”

“No, wait a bit,” Ben replied. “We are having several copies made for the print shops. You can take a copy with you.”

Ben returned to the table where the officers were studying the declaration. Tad went back out in the waiting room. The duty officer had returned from taking the dispatch to General Washington.

“I don’t have any messages for you to run,” the duty officer said.

“I’m to wait here for a copy of the independence declaration,” Tad said as he sat down on a chair. “Then I’m to take it to a print shop.”

“That’s a good idea,” the duty officer said. “We need to know what it says and all the detail. I never thought I’d see the day when a scrap of paper makes a man free.”

Tad nodded but did not reply. He remembered the months of the siege of Boston. No, he told himself, it was much more than just words on a piece of paper.

It was not long before a young soldier came through the door into the room. He looked at Tad.

“You Tad Wheeler?”

Tad stood up and answered, “Yes.”

“Here’s your copy of the Declaration.”

Tad took the copy and quickly scanned the sheet. The letters were clearly written with a good hand.

Tad rolled up the sheet and hurried to the street.

He had a quick eye and a good memory. He repeated the words in his mind that had caught his eye when he glanced at the paper.

They were strange sounding words, not the kind of words used in everyday talk.

Tad wanted to stop and read the declaration, but he knew that time was important. There were a lot of words in the declaration, and setting them in type would require time.

It did not take him long to reach the print shop. It was a large building. He had never been inside before, but he could tell that it was much larger than the print shop owned by Mr. Stelle.

He entered and was greeted in an entry office by a young man who wore an apron and large spectacles. The apron was ink-stained, and Tad guessed that his job was inking a press.

“I’ve come from General Washington’s headquarters,” Tad said. “I have a copy of the Declaration of Independence.”

“Good,” the young man nodded. “Wait here, I’ll fetch Mr. Tomlinson.”

The young printer left the room and quickly returned with a tall man, not as old as Mr. Stelle, but not far off in that respect. He was a little stoop-shouldered, and like the young printer, he wore spectacles which sat down on his nose so that when he looked straight ahead, he peered over the spectacles.

“You’ve got the copy?” His voice was a little raspy, and he sounded as if he was the kind of a man always in a big hurry.

“Yes. They wrote out copies of the Declaration that just came from Philadelphia,” Tad said.

Mr. Tomlinson peered at Tad. “There was supposed to be a printer coming along to help with this job?”

“I am a printer,” Tad said.

“You? You aren’t much more than a boy. What were you, an apprentice?”

“Yes, but I...”

Mr. Tomlinson interrupted Tad.

“Well, never mind that. Give me the copy and we will get to work on it.”

“I can set type,” Tad protested. “I can hold my own.”

Mr. Tomlinson’s head jerked back and he stared over his spectacles at Tad.

“Well, now, is that a fact?” he said. “We will just see about that. Come along with me, and don’t dawdle.”

Tad followed the man through a door and back into the print shop. It was indeed very large. Tad saw three presses, two of which were in operation. There were men inking the two presses, and other men taking the printed sheets off the press and hanging them up to dry. Along one wall there was a long bench with windows behind the bench to provide light. There were trays of type all along the wall just below the windows, and under the shelves there were cabinets of type cases.

Six men stood along the bench. Mr. Tomlinson nodded at them and said, “We’ve got the Declaration. Work fast but careful.”

Mr. Tomlinson took a pair of long scissors and carefully cut the copy into four nearly equal parts.

“We will double set the type,” he said. Two men to a piece of the Declaration. That way we will have two sets of type and can print on two presses.”

He handed over the pieces of the Declaration and they quickly turned to the type cases and began setting type. He kept one piece.

“You work here next to me,” Mr. Tomlinson said as he handed Tad a long, narrow composing tray. “It’s already set to the proper line length so you can start right to work. Do the best you can.”

Tad took off his uniform coat and picked up an apron that was lying on the bench. With the apron secured and the composing stick in his left hand, he took a long look at the tray of type leaning upward on the bench. The tray was full of type. Mr. Stelle’s shop did not have such a large supply of type.

He studied the paper strip that both he and Mr. Tomlinson were using, and reached for the type case with his right hand.

He began picking pieces of type from the tray. He did not trust the type tray at first. He peered at each letter before setting it in the composing tray. Sometimes, in the distribution of type used on a previous job, the wrong letter might be put in the wrong compartment in the tray.

He quickly noted that the letters that came from the trays were correct, and he was able to speed up his work.

“Been a while since you set type?” Mr. Tomlinson asked.

“It was last March or April,” Tad said as he continued work. “Just after we freed Boston from the British. I worked for a while until the army marched down here to New York.”

“Were you an apprentice in Boston before the fighting started?” Mr. Tomlinson asked.

“No, my parents own a print shop there,” Tad replied. He kept his silence for a moment and then added, “They were not really my parents, but they adopted me after my father and mother died from the pox.”

“You’ve got clever fingers,” Mr. Tomlinson said. “If you are picking the right type, then you are going to be a fine printer. After this war business is over, you come to New York and you can go to work here.”

“I’ll probably go back to Boston and work for my father and mother for a while,” Tad said. The thought had crossed his mind before. He was not really so certain about wanting to return to Boston. Sometimes, he thought about far off places. That had started during the long march down from Boston. He had no idea that the colonies were so large, and he was learning that he had seen only a very small part of this new world.

“It’s good to see a boy who can read and write, and on the writing, I’m guessing that if you can read, you can write,” Mr. Tomlinson said.

“Oh, yes,” Tad smiled. “Mrs. Stelle was a good teacher. “It took me a while, though, to make a quill do what I wanted. And, I did spill my ink, but not very often.”

They worked in silence for a while, and then Tad put down his composing tray.

“Are you done?” Mr. Tomlinson asked. “You do have a fast hand and eye. What is it you do in this army?”

“I’m a drummer boy,” Tad replied. “I’ve been doing it since just after the British marched out of Boston on to Lexington and Concord.”

“That’s a long time. You can’t be more than about fourteen, maybe thirteen- years- old.”

“There’s quite a few of us in the army,” Tad replied.

Mr. Tomlinson set his tray down. He was finished.

“Now we will pull proofs on our work and see what corrections have to be made,” Mr. Tomlinson said.

Once the proofs were pulled, Tad found that he had made three mistakes. He quickly made the changes in letters.

Mr. Tomlinson was impressed. “You do a fine and clean job of typesetting, young man. You are wasting your time being a drummer boy.”

Tad was surprised to hear Mr. Tomlinson say those words, and he replied sharply.

“I’m a good drummer, and it is an important job. I’ve stood in line against the British.”

Mr. Tomlinson quickly said he was sorry, but what he meant to say was that Tad had a skill, and a fine future as a printer, and then he quickly changed the subject.

“Have you had anything to eat today?”

Tad shook his head and replied. “Not very much.”

“We have food coming in for the printers. They will be working all night at the presses on this Declaration. Come with me.”

Tad was hungry, but he hesitated, and then asked, “What are you going to do with the strips of paper we used to set the type?”

“Why, I suppose we will just throw them away. We will have lots of printed copies.”

“Could I have them?” Tad asked.

“I don’t see why not,” Mr. Tomlinson said. “Do you think they will be of any value?”

“I’d like to save them and send them to my father. He will be happy to know that I set some of the type, and he will closely study the words in the Declaration.”

Mr. Tomlinson nodded. “It’s not unusual for printers like your father to be thinking men. Of course, you can have the strips of paper.”

It did not take long to collect the strips and Tad folded them and tucked them in the pocket on the inside of his uniform coat.

After eating and while on his way back to his quarters, Tad had an idea. Molly had sent him a letter. Why couldn’t he send a letter to the Stelles. He could tell them about the Declaration of Independence and enclose the slips of paper that had been used by himself and the other typesetters. He was not sure how such a letter would reach Boston. Molly’s letter was hand-carried from Tarrytown and only arrived in his hands because Jan was a good friend.

Instead of going to where he stayed, Tad stopped at the headquarters. There was a duty officer there at the front office. He listened to Tad’s request and smiled.

“A letter home to your parents is a good idea, but I don’t know how it can be delivered.”

It had been a long day and dusk was at hand. The duty officer had a lighted candle and Tad was invited to sit at the desk and compose his letter.

The duty officer found a large sheet of paper and there was a quill and a small bottle of ink on the desk.

“You can keep an eye on things here while you write. I’ll be back in a few minutes,” the duty officer said.

Tad stared down at the paper. He reached for the quill and dipped it in the ink container.

He did not really know how to write a letter. He had never written a letter before. The only two letters he had ever received came from Molly.

He wrote to his father, mother, and Packie and in that order. He wrote that he was fine and he hoped they were likewise. He told about the Declaration of Independence and why the scraps of paper in the letter were important.

He paused for a few moments, and then began writing again. He told them that there was going to be a big battle soon for New York. They should not worry about him, because he was safe in General Washington’s headquarters.

He stopped writing and considered what he had just put down in ink on the paper. What he had written might not be true. He knew that there was every good chance that when the battle started, he would be in the line somewhere with the French drum.

Tad had been taught from a very early age that telling a lie was a terrible thing. He hoped the Stelles would forgive him for this one transgression. Then he realized that by the time the letter reached them, the battle would have been fought. He shook his head. This was a confusing matter, and he was tired. It had been a long day. He finished by signing his name and after a brief pause, he added under his name, "New York."

CHAPTER 49

British Broadsides Are Frightful

The next several days in July passed quickly. Tad was happy to learn that his letter was going to go to Boston in a packet of dispatches being sent there from General Washington's headquarters in New York.

Ben, now Captain Ben Morrison, instead of lieutenant, was able to make the arrangements.

"I think the army owes you a favor or two," he told Tad. "You've served long and faithfully since the start of this revolution. And, I have no doubt that the 6th Massachusetts regimental commander remembers you fondly for your service with his regiment. He will see to it that the letter will be delivered to your folks."

When Tad inquired about how long it would take, Ben thought for a moment before replying.

“I’d say not more than a month or so. It’ll get there faster this way than any other I know.”

Tad gave thought to writing a second letter. Molly had written him two letters. He was sure this one could get to Molly much faster. Jan could pass the letter along to Molly. He wondered how often Molly’s father was able to send letters or even go visit Molly and her mother up at Tarrytown. He did not know for sure just where Tarrytown was located. It was up river, the Hudson River. He knew where the Hudson emptied into the East River, which really was not a river at all. The New York area was very confusing. Every time Tad thought he was sure about a river or island, he found he was often wrong.

He shook his head as he returned from delivering a message to an artillery battery along the bank of the East River. It was all so confusing. There were rivers that were not rivers, and rivers like the Hudson that were big enough for large sailing ships. He wondered how in the world General Washington and his officers could keep things straight.

He stopped short when he heard the sharp report of a cannon. Then another cannon fired. When the third cannon fired, Tad realized that these were signal guns and he knew what they were signaling. British ships were coming!

He ran down a side street and came out on the docks. There were men running in different directions. Some were hurrying to man a pair of cannon that were sited not far from where there were boats used to ferry passengers and supplies over to Long Island.

He saw two friends standing side by side at the docks. It was Captain Hamlin of the Marblehead regiment and the man who was in charge of the cutter that had taken him and Roger out to Staten Island.

Both men had telescopes and were studying the water that led out to Staten Island.

Tad did not need a telescope to see two British ships coming. They appeared to be on a course that would take them right up the East River.

“I make it out to be the Phoenix and I think the second ship in line is the Rose,” Captain Hamlin said as he continued to peer through his telescope.

“From what I count, they must have broadsides of about 18 guns on the Phoenix and maybe sixteen on the Rose,” replied the captain of the cutter.

“There, look at that!” Captain Hamlin cried. “They are running their guns out.”

“Running their guns?” Tad asked.

Captain Hamlin glanced around and saw Tad standing close by.

“Ho, it’s the drummer boy. Well, I’m not surprised to see you. You seem to show up whenever the British have their guns ready.”

“What does it mean, running out the guns?” Tad asked.

The cutter skipper answered. “They keep the guns inside the ship. When they are going to fight, they open their portholes and push the guns out so they can fire.”

Captain Hamlin motioned Tad to come closer. “Here, have a look at some fine British ships.” He handed Tad the telescope.

Tad fitted the telescope to his eye and peered out at the water. He had never looked through a telescope before. He was astonished to see how large the ships appeared and how much he could see. He noticed water being pushed away from the bows. The water was making good sized waves and appeared to be frothy.

“They look to be coming on very fast,” Tad said.

“Indeed they are,” Captain Hamlin said. “They are carrying full sail and they have a good following wind and the tide favors them.”

Tad handed the telescope back to Captain Hamlin. The Marblehead captain put the telescope to his eye.

“Where do you think they are going?” Tad asked.

“That’s a good question,” Captain Hamlin replied. “I’m not sure where they are going, but I do believe they plan to make it hot for us here along this side of the city.”

“They’ll be coming in range of our batteries in a few moments,” the skipper said.

Tad remembered how the American artillery men had fired a shot across the bow of a British warship seeking to pass Dorchester Heights back during the siege of Boston.

“Our artillery will give them a bad time,” Tad said.

“I hope so,” the skipper said, but Captain Hamlin shook his head.

“The British are coming on fast. Our batteries will only get one shot from each cannon. By the time they reload, the British will be by them.”

The skipper laughed. “You have to lead them. It’s like shooting at a goose in their air. If you shoot where he is, you’ll miss. You have to shoot where he’s going to be.”

There was a tremendous roar of cannon fire. The first American batteries had opened fire on the two ships.

“There’s some hits, I think,” Captain Hamlin said. “Nothing vital, though. We’ve got to hit their masts, knock down their sails so they lose way, and then we can pound them!”

There was an even larger roar from cannons being fired as the Phoenix let go a tremendous broadside. The side of the ship was covered with smoke which for a moment hid most of the ship from view. Then the ship glided forward leaving the smoke behind like a brief mist for the Rose to pass through.

Tad watched as the ships came on and were greeted with more cannons from the shore batteries.

“Still no real damage!” Captain Hamlin muttered as he peered intently through his telescope.

“Maybe they should try to hit the hulls of the ships,” the skipper said.

The British ships opened with broadsides against the shore batteries. Now, the action was close enough so that Tad could easily see the strikes of the almost forty cannon balls coming from the ships. He could see that some of the cannon balls did not strike the walls protecting the shore guns. They passed overhead and were landing somewhere in the city.

The ships were close now. In a few moments, they would pass directly to the front of where Tad was standing. They were close enough so that he could see men on the ships.

The skipper suddenly shouted, “Down. Get down!”

Captain Hamlin dropped to the wooden deck and as he went down, he reached out and pulled Tad down.

The three watchers were no sooner flat on the dock when there was a tremendous roar from the ships followed by the eerie sound of iron cannon balls hurtling through the air and passing overhead. Some of the cannon balls hit parts of the dock and pieces of wood from the dock flew through the air.

Tad's mind instantly recalled the moment when he had been struck by a piece of wood during the last days of the Boston siege. Tad knew he had been fortunate in that the piece of wood only struck him a glancing blow.

As he thought about it, his knees began shaking and he fought to regain his composure.

Captain Hamlin rose to his feet and helped Tad up.

"It's a bit unnerving to face broadsides from British ships."

"I've faced British cannon before, but nothing like this," Tad replied.

"We are well out of it now," the skipper said. "They can't turn around because of the tide and wind. They have to keep going. I'd warrant that our batteries ahead will give them a lick or two."

Tad looked around. There were two men that he could see lying on the ground. They had been hurt either by the cannon balls or the flying pieces of wood. Several soldiers moved quickly to tend to them.

"Those British ships are a terrible thing," Tad said. "I did not know they had such powerful guns."

Captain Hamlin looked at Tad and nodded agreement.

"Terrible is a good word when broadsides are at hand, but we were fortunate. Those were not the big ships. The British have ships with sixty-four guns. If we had faced those, it would have been something to remember for certain."

“How many cannon do the British have on all their ships?” Tad asked.

‘I’d expect maybe a good six hundred or so on the fleet they have gathered around us,” the skipper said.

Tad was a little shaken by the number. “We thought we had a lot of cannon back at Boston when we got the fifty or so cannon down from Fort Ticonderoga.”

The sounds of more firing from the north caused them to stare in that direction, but by now, there was little to be seen.

“They are still making their way up the East River,” Captain Hamlin said. “It won’t be long before they have successfully run by all our batteries. Now, I’ve got business to attend to. I do not believe any of our small boats were hit. We have to resume ferrying men and supplies across to Long Island.”

“Yes,” Tad said. “I better return to headquarters. There’s bound to be messages for me to deliver.”

Captain Hamlin waved and said, “Take care, drummer boy.”

Tad hurried away from the docks. When he got on Broadway, he could see there were many people out in the street. Some of the women were weeping. He could see where the cannon balls had hit the upper stories of buildings, and he wondered if Mr. Van Zandt’s store had been hit. When he passed by, he could see no damage. He thought about stopping to see Jan, but decided against that idea. It might not be good for Mr. Van Zandt to know that Jan was a good friend.

The front office of the headquarters was filled with men and boys bearing messages from the various batteries that guarded the long waterfront.

Each one was clamoring for his message to be delivered to General Washington. The duty officer was yelling at them, trying to get them into an orderly group.

The duty officer saw Tad and yelled, "Go get something to eat. There's nothing to go out. Everything is still coming in!"

It was not yet time for the evening meal, but Tad had not eaten since early in the morning.

At the cook's quarters, he found the cook and several helpers working on the evening meal.

"You look like a hungry boy," the cook said. "Sit down at the table. I think I can find a plate of food for you and a cup of tea, too."

Tad sat down and it was not a long wait for the cook to put food and drink on the table. The cook sat down opposite Tad.

"Now, what in the world happened out there? We could hear the cannon fire and there were people screaming. No one ever tells us anything. Why, this army wouldn't last for two days without us, but no one ever tells us anything."

Tad recounted the movement of the British ships up the East River and how the American shore batteries were unable to stop them.

As he ate his early supper, he told the cook how scary the British broadsides were and how so much damage had been done to buildings in the city.

"That's a shame," the cook said with a scowl on his face.

Tad's meal was interrupted by a distant sound of cannons. The cook jumped up from his chair.

"Are there more ships coming?" he cried.

Tad stared in the direction of the sounds. There were no more cannons fired.

“It sounded like it came from far out in the harbor.” Tad said.

A man came running by, and the cook stopped him.

“What is happening?” the cook asked.

“I don’t know for sure. Someone said that a big British ship came up and fired a broadside, but they were too far out to do us any harm.”

The man shook free of the cook’s grasp and continued to run away.

“There’s a foolish man,” the cook said as he returned to the table. “He’s running and he doesn’t even know why.”

“He must have seen a broadside or two from the ships that passed by us.” Tad said. “It’s not like anything I’ve ever seen before.”

“Maybe so, the cook answered, “What we need to do is find a good hill and get on top of it. Ships can’t climb a hill, I’d say.”

Tad returned to his quarters. It was too early to sleep. He began polishing the French drum. While he polished the drum, he thought about Molly. Was she really safe up at Tarrytown? His mind moved to the sight of the British ships advancing up the river. It was a sharp image in his mind and one that he would not easily forget. He smiled when he thought about the cook’s idea. It made sense. He strongly believed that if this American army had been out on Breed’s Hill back at Boston, and with the proper amount of gunpowder, the British would never have taken the hill.

He thought about the letter he had sent to the Stelles. He hoped they were all right. Packie would help them. The British drummer believed the Rebel army should not try to face the British in open battle. Surely Packie would change his mind if he could see how much the American

army had changed from a militia force into a regular army, what was called now the Continental Army. His belief in the strong army was melted almost away when he pictured again in his mind the broadsides from the British cannon.

“Tad!”

The voice nearly caused Tad to drop his drum on the floor. He looked up and saw Ben standing in the door.

“I didn’t mean to startle you,” Ben said as he came on into the room and sat down in one of the chairs.

“I was just thinking about the British ships,” Tad said.

“That was an awful mess,” Ben said. “We must have fired over two hundred shots at them, and we did little enough damage to them. Now, they are up the Hudson River somewhere. There are rumors that they are near Tarrytown.”

Tad looked up in surprise. “Is that possible?” he asked.

“Could be, but no one knows for certain yet. “

“There was another broadside fired not long ago. I heard it when I was eating supper at the cook’s quarters.”

“Indeed there was another broadside,” Ben said angrily. “The Eagle, one of the biggest of the British ships, sailed close and fired a salute. They were taunting us.”

Tad sat his drum down on the floor as he asked, “Are the British going to land soldiers here in the city?”

“It doesn’t seem that way,” Ben replied. “There are reports that they are landing whole brigades on Long Island. I think that is where the real battle is going to be, and that’s why I stopped by. You should get a good

night's sleep for tomorrow we are going to cross the East River and be a part of Lord Stirling's brigade. I tried to keep you assigned here in the headquarters, but it was decided to send over as many soldiers as possible. I think we are going to be in a terrible battle!"

CHAPTER 50

Tad was awakened before dawn by a cook's helper. Tad quickly secured his gear and then slung his drum strap over his shoulder.

At the cook's quarters, he ate a hasty breakfast of porridge and biscuits. The cook made sure that he had two extra biscuits to stuff in his pocket for later in the day.

As he rose to leave for the dock, the cook stepped forward.

"You take care, drummer boy. I fear you are going in harm's way."

"Thanks for the extra biscuits," Tad replied. "I'll be fine. Don't worry. It won't be long before I'll be back looking for an extra biscuit."

"I pray it will be so," the cook said.

It was still dark when Tad arrived at the docks. There was a light mist hanging over the docks and the water. Numerous lanterns gave much needed light.

There were several boats tied up to the docks. Men were loading supplies into some of the boats. The boats had oarsmen along both sides waiting for the boats to be loaded so they could begin rowing men and supplies across the East River.

Tad saw Ben talking to Captain Hamlin. He approached the two officers.

Captain Hamlin saw Tad. "You are going over to Long Island? Well, then that settles it, there will be a battle there for certain."

Ben saw that Tad was ready to board a boat. "You've got your blanket roll and drum. Did you get something to eat?"

"Yes, I did," Tad replied. "And I got a couple of extra biscuits for later in the day."

While they were talking, the boat that Tad had started to board shoved off from the dock and began the mile-long trip across the East River.

Tad looked at Ben. "I thought I was to go on that boat."

Ben shook his head. "There will be more boats. That one was mostly supplies. You probably should wait until Lord Stirling arrives and cross over with us."

"Lord Stirling? How did we get a British lord in this army?"

"It's really complicated", Ben replied. "He is actually a lord. He's an American, but he inherited a Scottish lordship and lands in Scotland. Since he sided with us, his chances of keeping those lands are very slim."

"He's a general in our army and a Scottish lord at the same time?"

"That's right," Ben said. "General Washington seems to think very highly of him. He's to command a brigade out on Long Island. There will be four regiments in it, one each from Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut. About sixteen hundred men in all."

“I’ve seen the Marylanders,” Tad said. “They are a smart looking regiment. They have better looking uniforms than we do.”

“Some of the officers at headquarters believe they will be a fine regiment, but they have no real experience.”

There was a commotion to the rear caused by the arrival of several men on horseback. They dismounted and handed the reins of their horses over to orderlies who led the horses away.

Ben quickly stood at attention and saluted as the officers came toward them.

“Captain Morrison, it is good to see you at hand. I shall look forward to having such an experienced aide at my side during this upcoming battle.”

Tad stood at attention. His eyes stared straight ahead, but he could see this general who was also a lord. He was a man of good height, but not overly tall. He was slim. His uniform was clean and fit him as if it had been tailored to his exact size. Like Ben and the other two officers who had accompanied him to the dock and were part of his staff, he wore a sword, and even though Tad could only see a small part of the sword, he was aware that the weapon was of a very high quality.

“What have we here?” Lord Stirling asked as he glanced at Tad.

“Sir, this is Tad Wheeler,” Ben said. “He is a drummer boy who has been in service since the beginning of the revolution.”

“Indeed, so. That drum is a French drum, is it not?” Lord Stirling asked.

“Yes, sir,” Tad replied. “My father brought it back when he served in the French and Indian War.”

Lord Stirling smiled. "It is a fancy drum, and you can trust the French for that. But, tell me, can you really play this fine drum?"

"He served with Colonel Stark out on Breed's Hill," Ben quickly said.

"Did he now, well, that is a good recommendation indeed. Enough of this, gentlemen. We need to be on our way. The sun will soon be up, and the quicker we take advantage of this mist and dark, the better off we shall be. I would not look forward to being caught out in the middle by a British warship."

As he spoke, the general moved to a nearby boat and climbed down from the dock. Tad and the others followed. With the rowers on each side and a man at the tiller, there was not an excess of room. And, as was the case with the other boat that had just left, there were bags and boxes of supplies.

The general moved all the way to the bow of the boat and found a seat there. Tad and Ben found seats on boxes of supplies as did the other two officers.

Once they were aboard, the boat was pushed off and the journey across the East River was begun.

The sky was turning gray and dawn was not far behind. The mist still hung like an endless lace curtain, but when the sun arose, the heat would burn the mist away.

The rower to Tad's left nodded at him. "This is the third time I've rowed for you, lad."

"I know you are from the Marblehead regiment," said Tad. "I have a young friend in the regiment..."

"Aye, young Jed," the rower said. "He's a favorite of the regiment, that boy is for certain. He's about somewhere at the landing place."

“I hope to see him there,” Tad replied.

“Don’t doubt it for a moment,” the rower said as he moved his oar through the water. “This be the third time I have rowed you, like I said. “Cept the other two times, we were rowing away from the British. This time, we are going at them.”

“Were you on the raid when we rescued the prisoners held on that British hulk in Boston Harbor?” Tad asked.

“Aye, that I was, and again out on Staten Island when we rowed for our lives.”

“Well, drummer boy,” Lord Stirling said. “I do understand that you have seen much service, but can you play the calls we need on that fancy drum?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Tad. “I was taught how to play the calls by a British drummer. That was back in Boston before the fighting started.”

“I see,” General Stirling said. “Since we have the better part of this voyage to go, and there are no British at hand, please entertain us with the calls. It will help pass the trip.”

Tad hesitated for a moment and then quickly stood up and shifted his drum around in position and pulled the drumsticks from their loops on the belt.

“Yes, sir,” Tad said to the general. Then he began to play the calls. After several calls, he moved to his favorite, the drum beat calling for the soldiers to rally.

Tad’s hands flew about over the drum, the sticks making a staccato beat that could not fail to stir men’s blood. As he repeated the beat over and over, the rowers bent their shoulders and drove the boat forward at a rapid pace.

Finally, Lord Stirling shouted, "Stop, stop! Enough!"

Tad ceased beating the drum and sat down.

"Young man," Lord Stirling said, "You can indeed make that drum work. I was fair well to leaping ahead at the enemy, except if I had done so, I fear I should have nearly drowned. You shall indeed be a drummer boy in my brigade. And, I think you shall be the drummer at the point of honor."

Ben paid close attention to the general's words, and he frowned when he heard the general say that Tad would be at the point of honor.

Tad saw the frown and guessed at what Ben was thinking. He knew that Ben was trying very hard to keep him out of danger. Tad was sure that Ben had somehow arranged for him to be sent out to Staten Island as a way of keeping him from battle. Tad smiled as he thought how Ben had miscalculated the risks of being out on the island.

When they were about halfway across the East River, the sun was up and the mist disappearing. Tad scanned the waters that led out to Staten Island. There was no sign of any sails. They would be safely across the East River before any British ships could reach them, and everyone seemed to be at ease, except for the rowers who kept a steady, almost rhythmic beat with their oars now that the French drum was silent.

Tad listened as Lord Stirling talked to his aides. Lord Stirling told them that there were reports of the British landing soldiers on Long Island and in great numbers, but the reports were often vague and probably not to be trusted.

"Once we are back in our camp, we shall have to put out several outposts to keep watch," he said. "We are surely going to be badly outnumbered. We cannot afford to be surprised as well."

The docks at Brooklyn Heights were not as elaborate or as large as back in New York harbor. Boats were lined up and rowing crews found places to rest where they could before beginning the trip back to New York.

Other men worked hard at unloading the boats, stacking up supplies to be sent out to the brigades some distance from the Heights.

As Tad climbed out of the boat, he saw Jed hard at work two boats away. The young Marblehead boy was struggling with a heavy sack of meal which would be made into porridge.

“Jed!” he cried out.

Jed nearly dropped the heavy sack as he looked around. He knew that voice well enough. Jed gave up trying to hold the bag and let it slip to the dock.

“Tad! I wondered how long it would be before you showed up. Welcome to Long Island.”

Tad hurried over and bent down and took hold of one end of the heavy sack.

“Here, let me help you,” Tad said.

“It’s little help you’ll be what with your drum and blanket roll,” Jed laughed. “Never mind the sack. I’ll worry it to where it’s supposed to go. Where are you assigned?”

“Lord Stirling’s brigade,” Tad answered.

“Well, it’s a good thing you are not with the Marblehead regiment,” Jed said. “They are like to work us to death, and that is for certain.” Jed paused for a moment and then added, “Course, you are going to be in the thick of it when the battle starts.”

Tad realized that the general and his party had passed by and he needed to catch up with them.

“I’ve got to go,” he said. “We’ll get together soon.”

“Take care, Tad,” the young Marblehead boy said. His tone of voice was different. Tad noticed that his friend was, for a moment, not his usual almost bantering, happy go lucky boy.

Tad dismissed the matter as he caught up with his party as they passed a loading platform where supplies were stacked. Tad thought he heard Ben telling Lord Stirling about the raid on Boston. Tad forgot about the two officers. He was looking for other old friends. There was a roof overhead to keep the rain off the supplies. The platform made it possible for men to load directly onto the backs of wagons.

Again, Tad saw an old friend, Sergeant Grumley, his wagon, and the team of horses. Sergeant Grumley’s wagon was backed up to the platform, and men were loading the wagon.

“Ho, there, drummer boy. It’s good to see ye again,” Sergeant Grumley said.

Tad responded. “Where is Roger?”

“He’s around somewhere,” Sergeant Grumley answered. “Never know from one minute to the next where he’s likely to be. He’s supposed to be protecting me from the British, but I think it’s the other way around.”

Tad nearly fell over as a heavy hand clapped him on the back.

Just as quickly, the heavy hand steadied him, and Roger stepped in front.

“Here I am. And that old wagon driver couldn’t protect anything. He’d be a British prisoner right now if it weren’t for me. He like to drove us right into a pack of British.”

“There was a heavy fog.” Sergeant Grumley protested.

Tad moved away, shouting over his shoulder, “I’ll see you two later. I’ve got to march now.”

Tad heard Lord Stirling laugh and say to Ben, “I must have the most popular drummer boy in the army. He seems to know a great many people.”

“Tad has been in almost every skirmish and battle since the beginning. He has never shirked from duty,” Ben replied.

Lord Stirling took hold of Ben’s arm. “Come with me Captain.”

Lord Stirling led Ben away from the marching column, and speaking very quietly so that only Ben could hear.

As they walked to one side of the column, Tad could barely hear Lord Stirling ask Ben, “Tell me about the two boys in Boston. As I understand it, they passed themselves off as apprentices?”

Chapter 51

Lord Stirling Has a Plan

After about two miles, the sun was proving to be hot, and Tad wished he could take off his uniform coat, but he was sure that Lord Stirling would not be pleased. Somehow, the heat did not seem to bother the general, even though he was on foot just as the rest of the party.

After three miles of marching, they came upon a group of men resting under a large tree that provided welcome shade.

The small column stopped. Lord Stirling approached the men. Ben followed close behind.

Several of the men stood up at attention, having recognized the fact that they were facing a senior officer.

“Who is in charge here?” Lord Stirling asked sharply.

“I guess I am, sir,” said a young man who presented himself to the front of Lord Stirling. The young soldier hesitated for a moment, and then saluted.

Lord Stirling returned the salute and said, “Well, who are you people? Why are you lying about in the shade? There’s work to be done.”

“Yes, sir,” the soldier stammered. “We are part of the sixth company of the Connecticut regiment. I’m the sergeant in charge. We are on our way to join the regiment.”

“Are you now?” Lord Stirling replied. “Please be so kind as to fall in your men. They surely stand the need of a good inspection.”

The young man was surprised. “Inspection?”

This response drew a cold stare from Lord Stirling.

“Indeed, sergeant, an inspection. How long have you and your men been in service?”

“Not very long, sir,” the sergeant said. “We’ve just come from a training camp where we spent the past month.”

“And, how long have you been a sergeant?” Lord Stirling asked.

“Why, since we enlisted,” the sergeant answered. “I got made sergeant even though I am the youngest in the company because I can both read and write. And besides, no one else wanted the job.”

Lord Stirling turned to Ben. “You can see the gravity of our situation, Captain Morrison. We are going to face the British regulars with such as this motley collection.”

“These are late comers needed to fill out the Connecticut regiment, sir,” Ben replied. “From what I have seen, the Connecticut regiment is a solid body of men.”

“Perhaps,” Lord Stirling said doubtfully. He then turned back to the sergeant. “Well, order your men into formation. We shall get on with the inspection.”

The sergeant looked over his shoulder and yelled at his men.

“Come into formation facing me.”

The men got to their feet and moved into three ranks facing the sergeant. They stood with their muskets at their side.

The sergeant turned back to face Lord Stirling and said, “The men are ready for inspection, sir.”

Tad watched with great interest. He could see that all the men had at least parts of uniforms, though most were in their shirts because of the July heat. They were all armed and their muskets looked to be clean. Better yet, most of them had bayonets. He remembered the jokes he had heard about the British favoring the bayonet and the Americans favoring the shovel.

As Lord Stirling and Ben passed by each man in the detachment, Tad saw riders approaching from the direction they were marching.

“Ben!” Tad called out. “There are horsemen coming our direction.”

Both Lord Stirling and Ben stopped the inspection and gazed at the approaching horsemen. There were three men on horseback and one of the men was leading a riderless horse.

“Ah, part of my staff, I’d judge,” Lord Stirling said. “They are late, very late, but I needed a good walk in the cool of the morning.”

Several of the soldiers standing in the ranks glanced at each other. There were drops of sweat on their faces from the heat.

When the officers rode up, one of them dismounted and approached.

“General Stirling, I mean, Lord Stirling, I apologize for being late. We had reports of British scouting parties in our front which we had to investigate.”

“I see,” Lord Stirling said as he returned the officer’s salute. “And what of the scouting parties?”

“We could find nothing, sir. It must have been a mistake.”

“Perhaps,” said Lord Stirling. “Well, the arrival of my horse puts my mind at ease, and particularly since I have come to some conclusions.”

Lord Stirling paused and stared at the detachment drawn up before him.

“Captain Morrison, you are looking at your first field command. March them on to our camp. From there, you will move out in front and establish an outpost at a suitable place. From that outpost, you shall send out scouting parties and one particular party I have in mind. Oh,

and please instruct our drummer boy here as to how he is to address you. Explain to him that you are Captain Morrison, if you please.”

Lord Stirling then mounted his horse and as he wheeled around, he called out to Ben.

“Bring your command along as best you can, Captain Morrison. Teach them whatever is possible in the next seven or so miles you have yet to march.”

Ben and Tad watched as the small party trotted off. Two of the horses being tasked to each carry two officers.

Tad smiled. “Well, Ben, you’ve got what you always wanted, your own command.”

“I suppose so,” answered Ben. “It’s not exactly the kind of command I had hoped for, though. Oh, before I forget it, be careful about calling me Ben when other officers are around, and especially when Lord Stirling can hear you.”

“Yes, sir, Captain Morrison, sir,” Tad said as he snapped to attention and saluted.

“Keep that up,” Ben said, “and I’ll use those drumsticks to beat knots on your head.”

It took a good quarter of an hour for Ben to organize the detachment of forty men into a column of fours. The young sergeant watched closely as Ben put the soldiers into a proper marching order.

When he was satisfied, the soldiers were ordered to shoulder their muskets. The young sergeant took up the rear and Ben moved out in front of the column with Tad behind him.

“Drummer boy, give us an easy marching beat,” Ben ordered, and then in a strong and clear voice, he ordered the formation to march.

Tad set an easy pace with his drum beat. After another quarter of an hour, Ben stepped to one side and watched as the column passed him. Several times, he told men to straighten their musket or to keep in step. After watching the column pass, Ben hurried back to take his place at the front of the column.

Tad could hear him muttering to himself, "They look like a militia outfit."

The sky was clear and the sun was hot. Tad was happy to see a stream ahead with several large trees that meant welcome shade.

When they reached the stream, Ben called a halt and told the men to get a drink from the stream and rest for a few minutes in the shade.

The water in the stream was cool, and Tad drank his fill and then splashed his face and neck with water.

The young sergeant sat down under a tree near Tad.

"You really do know how to play that drum," the sergeant said.

"I learned how before the fighting started," Tad replied.

"I learned how to shoot before the war started," the sergeant said.

"Oh, I am Harmon Smith."

Tad nodded. "I'm Tad Wheeler, out of Boston."

"Boston! Then you must have been there during the siege. My father and my older brother served there for a while. They were in the Connecticut militia."

"I was in almost at the start." Tad said. "I never did carry a musket, though. I think they thought I was too young. For that matter, you are the youngest sergeant I ever saw."

“I’m sixteen,” Harmon said sharply. “And, I can read and write as well.”

“Well, I’m going on fourteen, and I can read and write, too.”

Both boys stared at each other for a moment and then laughed.

“Maybe we will both end up being generals someday,” Harmon said.

After a long drink from the stream, Ben said, “It’s time to march. Sergeant, put your detachment in proper marching order.”

Harmon and Tad rose to their feet. Harmon saluted and turned toward his men. They guessed what was coming and began rising to their feet.

Harmon turned back to face Ben. “Sir, it is powerful hot today. Could the men roll their uniform coats up with their blanket rolls?”

Ben looked at the two boys in front of him. Even though they had been in the shade, their faces were sweaty.

“It’s not proper to march out of uniform,” Ben said. “Well, maybe since we are in the heat of the day, and just this once.”

“Thank you, sir.” Harmon said. He turned to his men and gave the order to roll up their uniform coats.

Tad quickly took off his uniform coat and rolled it up with his blanket.

“You, too?” Ben asked. “I thought you were a regular and not militia.”

“Maybe I’ll be militia until it cools off a little,” Tad said. He held his arms up to let what little breeze there was drift across his sweat-soaked shirt.

The detachment resumed the march in their shirts. Tad again set an easy marching beat. Ben strode on ahead of the column, still in his coat.

For a moment, Tad felt remorse about taking off his coat. He knew that the British regulars, the finest infantry in the world, would never take off their hot coats. He knew what his British friend, Packie, would say about this business. There was no doubt, however, that Ben was a regular and as good as any soldier in the British army.

The column reached the camps of Stirling's brigade by midafternoon. Ben and Tad reported in at brigade headquarters. While Ben went inside a large tent to meet with Lord Stirling, Tad gazed about the camp. There were a great number of tents and they seemed to be in some kind of order. On open meadows, the soldiers were being drilled in the many evolutions that they had to learn in order to fight in line against the British. The commands were followed without hesitation. The drilling was not much appreciated by the men, and of that Tad was certain. He had heard many complaints about the endless drilling. Ben had explained the need for it to him. The soldier had to be able to react under gunfire, cannon fire, smoke, and great noise.

Tad saw that the soldiers drilling were dressed in their uniform coats despite the great heat. He sighed and unpacked his coat and shrugged it on over his still wet shirt. He smiled as he thought about Sergeant Grumley's oft repeated wisdom, "When it comes to war, the weather's never right. It's always too cold or too hot, and don't forget rain and snow."

There was a big surprise for Tad the next day. Toward evening, Sergeant Grumley and his wagon appeared the camp. The wagon carried supplies for the brigade, and Roger, still acting as a guard. Also in the back of the wagon was Jed.

"What are you doing out here?" Tad asked. "I thought you were assigned to unloading boats."

“I’m on special assignment,” Jed announced proudly as he hopped down from the wagon.

A few minutes later, Tad, Jed, and Roger were summoned to Lord Stirling’s headquarters. There, Lord Stirling and Ben were waiting for them.

Lord Stirling wasted no time in explaining his plan. Tad, Jed, and Roger would go out in advance of an outpost which was to be manned by Ben and his detachment of Connecticut soldiers. The three friends were to act as local boys out fishing. They would keep an eye out for advancing British patrols or even a serious British advance and thus give ample warning. The British would not pay much attention to such a party, thinking they were simply local lads and not really old enough to be soldiers.

Ben was doubtful. He noted, “The British are quick to hang people for being spies, and I don’t think they pay a lot of attention to the age of those to be hanged.”

“The British are our enemies, and I have no doubt they have a noose ready for me, especially, since I am of their class as far as officers are concerned. But, I do not believe they would hang boys.”

“What about my drum?” Tad asked.

Lord Stirling looked at the blue drum which Tad carried on the strap slung over his shoulder.

“Ah, yes, the antique drum. Do not worry young man. I shall keep the drum and your uniform here in my tent where they will be safe.”

He then turned his attention to Roger. “And, I shall also keep that long rifle here with the drum. You could hardly pass as a farm boy if you have that long rifle in your possession.”

When Ben started to protest, Lord Stirling raised his hand and in a sharp voice said, "The matter is closed."

With Ben in the lead, the outpost detachment marched out of camp and headed out into the countryside. Since they were going out into an area where there might already be British scouts, Ben had men scouting out in advance and several men on each side out just beyond musket range. They would not be surprised.

Tad, Jed, and Roger were kept on the inside ranks of the marching men where they would not be easily seen by someone watching from a distance.

Tad and Jed were in their shirts and did not have hats on their heads. Roger was dressed as usual except for the moccasins he wore on his feet. Now, he walked barefooted, and Lord Stirling had laughed about the transformation, saying that now he looked like a backwoods farmer instead of a hunter.

They marched for nearly an hour before Ben called a halt. He had found the perfect place for an outpost.

There was a stand of small trees beside a stream. There would be cover from being observed and at the same time, fresh water which the soldiers wasted no time in sampling after the march in the morning heat.

When evening came, small fires were lighted for cooking a meal. Roger showed the soldiers how to make a small fire that could not be seen from even a few feet away. Guards were posted and just before night, when there was still a dusky light, Ben led Tad, Jed, and Roger out from the outpost. They followed the stream which wound back and then out to the front. After about a mile, the stream joined a larger stream which was more like a small river.

“This is a good place for you,” Ben said in a low voice. “You can easily find our outpost by following the smaller stream if you have to leave in a hurry.”

“Can’t tell for certain,” Roger said, “But, it looks like we got good cover here.”

Ben took hold of Tad’s arm. “You be careful out here.”

“We’ll be fine out here,” Tad said. “I just hope we won’t miss the big battle. I thought that might happen when you had me sent out to Staten Island.”

“I thought I was doing you a favor,” Ben answered. “My favor nearly got you taken by the British.”

Jed moved closer and whispered, “I hope there’s some fish in this river. I’ve got fishing line and some hooks. We should eat just fine.”

“And there’s sure to be berries out here somewhere,” Roger added. “It’s surely berry season here just like back in Pennsylvania.”

Ben took his leave and began his walk back to the outpost.

The three boys spread their blankets on the ground.

“You boys get some sleep. I’ll take the first watch,” Roger said.

Neither Tad nor Jed argued with Roger. It had been a long day, and both boys were ready for sleep.

Tad felt a hand on his shoulder and opened his eyes. The sky was gray and he could see the dark forms of trees around him.

“Time to get up,” Roger said softly. “Sun will be up directly.”

Jed awoke when he heard Roger’s voice. “You let us sleep all night? You sure you didn’t sleep, too?”

“Not for a second,” Roger said. “I did slip out and scout about for aways. There’s nothing out there except a farm house and barn, but both are abandoned.”

Tad sat up and rubbed his eyes. It had been a good night’s sleep and he knew that he had needed it, but he shared Jed’s concern.

“You have to get some rest,” he told Roger.

“Don’t worry about that,” Roger replied. “I plan to lay about in the shade and sleep while you two keep an eye on things and try to catch us some fish for supper.”

They ate biscuits for breakfast, and then hunted for suitable sticks to use for fishing poles. Just as Roger had promised, he found a shady place to lie down. Then he pulled his hat over his eyes and was quickly asleep.

Tad could see why Ben had picked this place. There was a flat, open area out in front, and a British regiment could easily march through the area. The river would provide ample drinking water. Wherever else the British might come, this was certain to be one of the ways they would approach.

Days passed, and Tad was sure that he had not enjoyed such an easy time of it since he became a part of the revolutionary army. The fishing was good, and Roger set snares for rabbits, and so they had rabbit to eat as well. Roger also kept them well supplied with wild berries.

Ben visited the little camp often, each time bringing out a fresh supply of biscuits. On this last trip out, he also brought a small bag of tea. Unfortunately, they did not have anything that could be used to heat water.

“You can’t put it on the end of a green stick over a fire,” Roger said.

Ben was puzzled over the fact that they had not seen any British.

“The British are all over the place,” he said. “They must surely be within a few miles of here. I wonder why they are waiting to attack us. There’s even reports that they have landed north of the city and are massing soldiers there.”

“Near Tarrytown?” Tad asked as his right hand moved toward the locket under his shirt.

“I think they already have Tarrytown,” Ben replied.

Tad was troubled by this news. He hoped that Molly and her mother had returned to New York.

As Ben prepared to leave the camp he said, “Well, you people keep close watch now. Otherwise, enjoy your vacation while you can. I wish I could be out here with you. It’s so quiet.”

Chapter 52

Trickery Saves the Day

Another week passed, and the little camp by the river was becoming quite comfortable. Roger had rigged up a lean-to shelter which was a good thing because the heat of the day turned into thunderstorms on

two nights. Even with the cover overhead, enough rain blew in the front and the sides to make sleeping nearly impossible.

The blankets got wet, but the next day's hot sun dried them by nightfall. The weather was so warm, even at night, that blankets were not necessary except to lay upon.

The river was not only a source of drinking water and fish. It provided welcome relief from the heat of the day.

Roger and Jed were both good swimmers, but Tad had never learned how. Roger took charge of teaching Tad how to swim. There was only one lesson. Roger and Jed took hold of Tad and flung him out into a deep part.

When Tad spluttered that he could not swim, Roger replied, "You'd best learn right quick, else you will surely drown!"

Tad somehow got back in to where he could stand on the bottom with his head out of water, whereupon Roger and Jed once again flung him out into the deep water. This time, Tad made his way back without too much trouble.

That night as they ate a rabbit for supper, Roger said, "I never knew soldiering could be so much fun."

The next morning started just as the other mornings. The boys kept close watch, but they were relaxed. It would be another day of swimming and fishing. Roger would go off on one of his scouts, and another day would pass.

On this morning, there was an argument between Roger and Jed. Tad watched as the two faced each other. Jed wanted to use Roger's tomahawk for cutting some new fishing poles.

“That’s a tomahawk, not a hatchet for farmers,” Roger said indignantly. “You don’t use a tomahawk to cut wood.”

“T’aint much use for anything else,” Jed said. “You are lucky that our general didn’t make you leave it behind with that rifle of yours.”

Tad laughed. “Jed, I think you are going to lose this battle.”

Jed shrugged and started checking the trees surrounding most of the camp for branches that might make good fishing poles.

He suddenly stopped and said, “I see something.”

Both Roger and Tad were quickly by Jed’s side.

“Where?” Roger asked.

Jed pointed and said, “Look down alongside my finger. There’s something out there.”

“I can’t make it out,” Tad said. He could not see anything except for what had always been there, but he knew very well how Jed could see beyond what most people could see. He knew the high esteem that the Marblehead men had in Jed’s ability to see long distances.

“There! Looky there, horsemen!” Jed said.

“I see them,” Roger said. “They’re heading this way sure enough.”

Tad saw them, too. There were at least eight men on horseback, and there was no doubt that they were Redcoats.

“It’s a British patrol,” Tad said. “We had better run for it.”

“No,” Jed said firmly. “If we run, they’ll see us for certain, and we can’t outrun horses. Stay put. Roger, hide that tomahawk. Most farmers don’t carry a tomahawk.”

The horsemen headed right for the camp.

“They must know we are here,” Jed said. “Our only hope is to fool them into thinking we are what we appear to be. Roger, get that tomahawk out of sight, quick.”

Roger stuffed the tomahawk under a crumpled-up blanket.

The three boys waited for a few moments as the horsemen pulled up at the edge of the small camp.

“Identify yourselves!” one of the men ordered.

Tad could see that the eight mounted men were British officers. They were armed with pistols and swords, but none of the British had drawn a weapon. They did not regard the three boys as a threat.

Jed looked at Tad and Roger and then back to the officer who spoke.

“Do what?” Jed asked in a tone of voice that clearly indicated he did not understand the command.

Several of the officers laughed. One of them said, “We have stumbled onto the higher intelligence among the colonials, I believe.”

Jed grinned. “Be you the British army we have been hearing about?”

“Indeed, we are, and who might you be?” asked another officer.

Jed pointed at Tad and said, “He’s my brother. Our parents died some time ago of the pox.”

“How long ago?” asked the officer who appeared to be in charge.

“Oh, I disrecollect just how long ago,” Jed replied. “Must have been back last winter or so.”

“And who is your other companion?” the officer asked as he pointed at Roger.

“Oh, him! Well, now,” Jed said, “He’s a cousin who came to live with us some time ago.” Jed lowered his voice a little and continued, “He ain’t exactly right in the head.”

Jed crossed his eyes and stuck his tongue out the side of his mouth and rolled his eyes. The British officer burst out in laughter.

Jed pointed at Tad and said, “He ain’t all that bright, either. I’m the smart one as you can plainly see.”

The officers laughed again, and one of them said, “Indeed you are, I am certain of that.”

One of the younger officers, about the same age as Roger, spoke.

“So, what shall we do? Should we arrest them and take them back to headquarters?”

“Good heavens, no,” the leader said sharply. “If we brought such as this in, General Grant would skin us alive. We would be the laughing stock of the entire division.”

“Let’s be about our business, gentlemen,” ordered the leader.

As he turned his horse about, the leader shouted to the boys.

“You should leave now. There’s going to be a great battle here, and you would be wise to keep well out of the way!”

Tad chased away thoughts of beating the rally call with his drumsticks on Jed’s head for his remarks. The officer who mentioned the name, Grant, and the word, division, might just as well have stamped the words in his mind. Ben would have to be told of this as soon as possible.

When the British were well away, Roger cuffed Jed on the back of the head and sent the Marblehead boy sprawling.

“Why’d you have to make me out to be a village idiot?” Roger growled.

“And, I’m not the bright one, either? Tad said.

Jed lay on the ground for a second and then sat up and rubbed the back of his head.

“T’aint much thanks I’m getting for saving us from a British prison camp or maybe even a good hanging.”

Tad laughed. “It was a great performance. I’ll never believe a word you say ever again. I never saw such a big lie in my life.”

Roger looked puzzled for a moment and then asked, “You mean that was all an act? You didn’t believe what you were saying?”

Jed got to his feet. He smiled and said, “Well, maybe some of it.”

Before Roger could send Jed sprawling again, Tad stepped between them.

“We’ve got to hurry. We need to get back to the outpost. The British gave us some information that might be of use.”

“Other than being snooty, I didn’t hear anything,” Jed said.

“They mentioned two things,” Tad replied. “They said, General Grant and also used the word, division. This Grant must command a division and its out in front of us somewhere.”

“Now, who’s the smart one?” Roger said as he pointed at Tad.

The boys quickly packed their few belongings. Roger tucked his tomahawk in his belt and they were on their way back to the outpost.

After they had gone a short distance, Tad waved them to a stop.

“We can’t just go straight back,” he said. “The British horsemen might be watching us through a telescope. If they see us running back to the outpost, they could ride us down before we could reach safety.”

“We should make a loop around,” Roger said.

Jed shook his head. “That will take too long. We can make it if we hurry. Can’t be much more than a mile.”

“No, this way,” Tad insisted as he quickly turned and began walking to his left. “Like Roger said, we will make a loop. We’ll start like we are getting out of the middle of the two armies and then circle back.”

Roger followed, and Jed, after some hesitation, fell into line.

Tad set a fast pace and it was not long before sweat came rolling down his forehead and into his eyes. He brushed the sweat away with his sleeve.

He knew he was going against what Ben had said. He was going away from the stream that would lead them directly back to the outpost, but the distance was not great, and it was daylight, and they could see the area. There was no chance of them getting lost.

Not far from the outpost, they met a patrol of four men from the Connecticut detachment, and Tad breathed a sigh of relief.

Tad reported to Ben, giving him the details of the encounter with the British mounted patrol. Both Roger and Jed made frequent contributions and sometimes the contributions led to bursts of laughter.

“You boys did well, very well,” Ben said. “Now, we must get this information back to Lord Stirling as fast as possible. Rest up for an hour, and then I want the three of you to make haste to report to Lord Stirling. When you report, Tad, be sure to use the proper forms, and it

would probably be best if you did not go into detail about how you escaped the patrol. I will have a written report ready by the time you leave here.”

“What about the outpost?” Tad asked.

“You mean, should we withdraw the outpost?” Ben asked. “Not just yet. We have not seen enough British to warrant such a retreat. Indeed, I have yet to see a British Redcoat to our front. I do not think Lord Stirling would look kindly upon a premature retreat.”

Tad said nothing in response. He thought that the outpost should be withdrawn, that strong British forces might be close behind the officers’ patrol, but he knew that Ben was determined to make a good showing with his first real command. He knew how much Ben wanted to be in command of a company instead of being an aide.

The three boys made the walk back to the camp in good time. Tad washed his face and slicked back his long hair as best he could before presenting himself in front of Lord Stirling and several of his officers. Jed and Roger stood at attention two paces behind Tad.

“Captain Morrison’s compliments to the general,” Tad said as he saluted. “I have a dispatch from Captain Morrison.”

As he spoke, Tad handed Ben’s written message to an aide standing by Lord Stirling.

“Captain Morrison bids me to inform the general that we have met with a British officers’ patrol. From them, we have learned that possibly a British division is to our front, and that the division is commanded by a General Grant.”

“Grant?” I know him,” Lord Stirling said. “He is a good general, very aggressive. And, a division, well, if so, then we are greatly

outnumbered, indeed. We could be facing maybe four or five thousand British regulars. They can easily flank our sixteen hundred.”

Lord Stirling paused for a moment and studied the three boys standing in front of him. He noted that Tad did a fine job of presenting his report, but he was young and a drummer boy. Jed was also young, and he gave the appearance of a lad who was far too carefree for the general’s liking. And, then, there was Roger. He was not all that much older than the other two boys, and obviously a simple man of the woods.

“Now then,” Lord Stirling asked. “Just how is it that you know of General Grant and his division?”

Tad hesitated. He knew Ben’s instructions on this matter. The general might not find the tale so amusing.

“We were taken prisoner by British officers on a mounted patrol,” Tad said. “While they were questioning us, one of the officers thought they should take us back to their line for questioning. Another officer said that General Grant would skin them alive for bringing us in, and that they would be the laughing stock of the division.”

Lord Stirling smiled. “I thought such as that might happen. You did well to remember the details. Now, I do feel you are leaving out some pertinent facts. Pray tell, how did you escape?”

Lord Stirling suddenly smiled and the smile broke into a chuckle.

Tad could see that the general was looking beyond him and he quickly looked over his should and saw Jed with a big grin on his face.

Tad shrugged and related the story about how Jed had fooled the British officers.

By the time Tad finished, Lord Stirling and his aides were laughing. Roger was staring meaningfully at Jed, and Tad could feel his face turning red.

Lord Stirling stopped laughing, and he quickly issued orders.

“You two will return now to your former duties. We have a supply wagon that will be returning to Brooklyn Heights. You can ride back. Drummer boy, you stay close at hand. You and your French drum will be of good service to me.”

Roger stepped forward. He touched his hand to his forehead which was meant to be a salute.

“Begging the general’s pardon, but I would like to stay here and serve. I’ve got a good rifle. I can hit a target at two hundred paces and maybe a little more.”

He looked down at his tomahawk and his hand closed around the top of the weapon.

“And I’ve got a tomahawk here that I can either throw or use, and I can take down any man with a musket and bayonet with the tomahawk.”

Lord Stirling looked doubtful. “Somehow, I cannot see you in line against a British line.”

“No, don’t figure to be in a line,” Roger said. “But, let me work on my own. I’ll do better than any ten musket men you got.”

The general stroked his chin with his hand.

“Two hundred yards?” he mused aloud. “I am short of artillery. You might be of service at that. Stay close to my drummer boy for the present. I shall find a use for you.”

After the meeting with Lord Stirling, Tad and Roger walked with Jed back to where the supply wagon waited.

“Well, now. Here’s three old friends,” Sergeant Grumley said. “I wonder just what ye three have been up to. I’m sure enough that there’s been mischief.”

“I’m riding back with you,” Jed said.

“And, what about ye, woodsman?”

“Oh, no. The general saved me from that,” Roger said. “I’m staying for the battle.”

“It won’t be long a-coming, I’d warrant,” said Sergeant Grumley. “And what about ye, drummer boy?”

“I’m staying, too,” Tad answered.

Sergeant Grumley climbed up and sat on the wagon seat. He looked down at Roger.

“See to it, woodsman, that no harm comes to the drummer boy.”

Roger nodded. “I’ll keep an eye on him.”

Sergeant Grumley replied, “More than likely it’ll be the other way around.”

Jed started to climb up on the wagon and then stopped. He turned to Tad.

“We been friends for a long time, now,” Jed said. “Don’t go getting yourself...” He paused and quickly wiped his shirt sleeve across his eyes. “You know what I mean.” And with that, he quickly climbed up and sat down by Sergeant Grumley and said brusquely, “Let’s go.”

“Don’t worry,” Tad called out as the horses started on the journey back to the docks at Brooklyn Heights.

Tad and Roger found their drum and long rifle, but there was no sign of the moccasins. No one could remember seeing the moccasins.

“Maybe they’ll turn up,” Roger said. “I can fight as well barefooted.”

They found food and then shade. The heat was bearing down on the camp, but for the soldiers in Lord Stirling’s brigade, there was little rest. Messengers scurried about the camp, and soldiers were busy cleaning their muskets. More ammunition for the muskets was distributed. Officers checked to see if the men were preparing for what was to come.

At dusk, Ben and his Connecticut detachment returned to camp from the outpost.

Tad could hear Ben reporting to Lord Stirling. The British had moved in force and occupied the area where the three boys had camped.

“The British are within two miles of us,” Ben said. “They are making camp and are in at least division strength. We did not retreat from the outpost until they sent several companies against us. We were greatly outnumbered, and I feared we would be taken,” Ben said.

Lord Stirling replied. “You did well, Captain Morrison. I think we shall have a lively time of it on the morrow. I think our long wait and comfortable summer is about over. A lively time, indeed.”

Later that night, Tad lay atop his blanket waiting for sleep to come. It was a very warm night. There was not even the smallest of breezes, and though he was in just his shirt and breeches, he could feel the beginnings of sweat on his back. The sky was clear and he could see countless stars overhead. His mind was busy with thoughts of the past.

He remembered how scared he had been when he faced the British on the flank of Breed's Hill. He thought about David and his new life as a married man. Molly came into his mind. He still had her letter in the little leather pouch tied to his belt.

He thought of home and the only parents he had ever known. He felt tears forming in his eyes. He blinked them away, and then he recited silently the prayers that Mrs. Stelle had taught him when he was a small child, something that he had made a habit of forgetting to do since he joined the army.

CHAPTER 53

A Terrible Price Is Paid for Liberty

Tad did not sleep very long. He was suddenly awakened by shouts and when he sat up he could see men with lanterns running about the camp.

Ben came out of the dark and shouted at him.

"Your drum, quick now. Beat the assembly and keep beating it until I say to stop!"

Tad jumped up and slipped on his shoes and slung his drum strap over his shoulder.

He began playing the call to assemble with as much vigor as he could muster.

Roger was at his side, his rifle in his hand. "What has happened?" Roger cried out.

"I don't know," Tad shouted back. "The British must be upon us."

Bonfires hastily lit soon added light to the area.

Roger looked up at the sky and said, "It's not close to dawn."

Men fell in to their well-rehearsed ranks. Not all were dressed in their uniforms, but all carried their muskets and ammunition boxes.

Ben reappeared and told Tad to stop drumming.

"Come with me, both of you," Ben said.

They followed him to Lord Stirling's headquarters. On the way Ben spoke in a soft voice.

"The British have attacked the Gowanus road. A detachment has been sent to chase them out."

A meeting in Lord Stirling's tent was underway when they arrived. Ben entered the tent. Even though it was a large tent, Tad could see that it was crowded inside.

He and Roger sat down on the ground and waited for the meeting to end.

After nearly half an hour, officers began emerging from the tent. Soon, officers and sergeants were yelling out commands. The brigade was preparing to move forward.

Tad and Roger were told to prepare to move by a young officer. "And, get into your uniform," the officer said to Tad.

By the first graying of the sky in the east, the brigade was on the march, but it was a brief march. Tad and Roger could still see the light cast by the bonfires back in the camp when they stopped.

The stop was brief. More commands were shouted, and the brigade formed line. The Delaware regiment was on the right, the Marylanders were next, and the Pennsylvania regiment was next to them. The Connecticut regiment was on the left flank. The line was three deep in men and a little more than a quarter of a mile long.

The line would have been longer but each regiment held back a small company as a reserve. These companies were in parade formation some fifty paces behind the line.

There were open intervals between the regiments and into these intervals; artillerymen pushed their small three and four-pounder cannons.

Tad was surprised when he saw Lord Stirling ride out in front of the line. He was followed by several mounted officers.

Lord Stirling was dressed as if going to a fancy ball or to a great parade of dignitaries. He wore a white wig under his hat. Tad thought how hot that wig must be on this day which he was certain must be the hottest day of a notably warm summer.

Lord Stirling was dressed in what must be his best uniform. Even his horse appeared to have been washed and groomed as if for a parade.

The mounted group rode along the line and inspected the regiments. They then returned by riding behind the line and took up station at the

left end of the Maryland regiment and next to where Ben and his Connecticut detachment stood.

Tad and Roger stood next to Sergeant Harmon Smith, the detachment's young sergeant.

Lord Stirling rode over to the front of the detachment.

“Captain Morrison, your soldiers look in fine form, sir. Now, you are to advance your command into the field and form a skirmish line between us and the British. Keep your men spread out across the center of our front. Take the woodsman with you. He is to fire as the British come within his range. If the British come at you in force, please fall back and take up position behind our center where you will act as a reserve.”

Lord Stirling glanced around at Tad. “And, you are to join the Marylanders as a drummer. The Maryland regiment is at the point of honor, and so shall you also be at the point of honor as a reward for your fine work as a scout.”

Tad saluted and hurried forward to report to the Maryland colonel.

The officer in front of the Maryland line was dressed in a clean uniform and he appeared to be very much in charge.

The officer shook his head. “Colonel Smallwood is back in New York on court martial duty. For the time being, you stay close to me. When the fighting begins, it would be best if you moved behind our line.”

Tad nodded and took his position just to the left and behind the officer.

The officer studied the field as the gray dawn picked up the first sparkles of orange from the rising sun.

“Here they come,” the officer said calmly.

Tad could see the British emerging from behind the trees and a small rise several hundred paces out.

Methodically and without much fanfare except for the occasional beating of drums, the British moved into line facing the Americans. There were murmurs of surprise from the American ranks as they saw regiment after regiment come into line against them.

Tad remembered watching the British drill on the Boston Commons before the fighting started. That was nothing compared to what he was witnessing now.

Lord Stirling rode over and stopped by the Maryland officer.

“They do make an impressive show,” he said. “Do not show concern lest your men become overly nervous at the sight of so many Redcoats.”

“Yes, sir,” the officer replied.

Lord Stirling turned his horse and rode toward the leaders of the other regiments.

The British kept coming. Soon the far end of the British line could not be seen.

Lord Stirling came back down the line. He stopped at the Maryland line and ordered the small Maryland reserve company to come forward so the line could be extended.

“But, sir, if we do that, we will have no reserve,” the Maryland officer said.

“And if we do not do it, we shall have no flanks,” Lord Stirling shouted as he wheeled his horse and hurried toward the Delaware line.

It took nearly an hour for the British to finally come into line against the Americans. The British line was still overlapping on the flank on Tad's right. This part, Tad could see, but it was impossible to see the other end. The distance was too great.

The British paused for nearly a quarter of an hour and then with a great fanfare of drums, they began advancing.

When they came to within about two hundred paces, they stopped. The Redcoat artillery men pushed and pulled their cannon forward in the open intervals between the regiments.

In the excitement, Tad had lost track of Ben and his Connecticut detachment. He was surprised when Ben and his soldiers suddenly stood up out in front of the line. They had moved out as Lord Stirling had ordered to a point about fifty paces in front of the line. They were still safely out of range of the British muskets.

Roger stood up. He had been well concealed out in front. His long shirt, now more brown and black than the soft white it had originally been, blended in well with the grass.

Ben stood beside Roger and was pointing at something in the British line.

Tad heard a gunshot and saw a puff of smoke come from the barrel of Roger's long rifle.

A British officer sitting on a horse fell to the ground. It had been a long shot, but not a particularly difficult one for Roger. The woodsman remained standing and went through the motions of reloading his rifle.

Several minutes passed and then there was a roar of cannon fire as the British retaliated with the fire of at least a dozen cannon that Tad could see.

The cannon balls came whistling in and two Maryland men were hit. They were taken back behind the line and the men in the line closed ranks.

There were two three-pounders in the interval between the Maryland line and the Pennsylvania line.

Tad jumped when they fired a return volley at the British. Smoke from the cannon muzzles drifted toward Tad and he thought there might be a small breeze, but it was indeed very small. He could feel sweat beginning to roll down the back of his neck, and the day had barely begun.

The cannonading continued, but at a slow pace for another hour. Both the American and British lines stood firm. Fallen men were taken to the rear and the ranks closed up. Neither side showed any inclination to back away.

Lord Stirling, followed by two staff officers, came galloping across the front of the line. He stopped in front of the Maryland line.

“My compliments to Colonel Smallwood and to you, sir,” he said to the officer in charge. “Your men are showing courage.”

“Thank you, sir,” the officer replied. “We are Marylanders. We shall hold firm.”

Lord Stirling looked back over his shoulder at the British.

“I do not understand their game,” he said. “It is General Grant and he has at least five thousand men. He outnumbered us greatly. He is the British general who once boasted that with five thousand men, he could conquer the whole of North America. Why does he hesitate now?”

A volley was fired from British cannons and four cannon balls came whistling overhead. Tad ducked, and then was embarrassed as Lord Stirling laughed.

“There’s no point in ducking once the cannons are fired, young man.”

“I believe,” said the Maryland officer, “That they are firing at you, sir.”

“Oh, I should not be surprised. There is no worry, though. They are firing too high and their cannon are sending the shots over our soldiers.”

Lord Stirling turned his attention back to the Maryland captain.

“I hear the pleasant sound of a Scottish accent in your speech, captain.”

“Yes, sir,” the captain replied quickly. “My parents were born in Scotland, but I was born in the Maryland colony.”

“Ah, Captain. Do not say the word colony any more. You were born in the state of Maryland, and now you fight in the army of the United States.”

As Lord Stirling spoke, there was another crash of explosions from the British cannon and the cannon balls came whistling in, but again were too high, but not by much.

Tad did not flinch. He held his drumsticks ready to execute any drum call that might be needed.

Lord Stirling wheeled his horse around and after quickly checking to see that his own cannons to Tad’s left were not quite ready to fire, he and his officers galloped toward the other end of the line.

“He neither seems to know or care that they are shooting at him,” the Maryland captain muttered.

Tad understood what the officer was saying. The general sat his horse as unconcerned about the British as if he were taking a leisurely ride in the hot sunlight.

The cannon fire continued and men fell here and there in the ranks. The number of downed soldiers was rising, and the Maryland captain decided to move his men into two ranks instead of three in order to maintain the length of his line.

“Now, I have no reserve and my line is thinner by a third. We shall face a long afternoon, I fear.”

The battle had lasted nearly two hours, and still the British did not move forward. The sun beat down on the battlefield with an artillery of heat.

Tad did not have a water bottle, and he sorely regretted that fact. He could feel the shirt under his uniform coat. It stuck to him like a wet blanket.

The cannon fire had produced so much smoke that it was hard to see the British line.

Tad could still see Ben and Roger and the Connecticut detachment standing out in advance of the line. Roger was firing his rifle now almost as fast as he could reload it. Tad could see glimpses of Ben pointing his sword at targets for Roger.

All eyes turned toward the left, toward the north. There was the noise of distant guns, both cannon and musket that for the moment drowned out the cannon on Lord Stirling's front.

“Sounds like General Sullivan's brigade to our north is being heavily engaged,” the Maryland captain said. “Why are the British holding back on our front?”

The noise to the north continued, and if anything, it got even louder. After about an hour and a half, when Lord Stirling had resumed his post in front of the Maryland regiment, a hatless rider came galloping through the interval and almost knocked over several cannon men.

The rider, pale-faced and with a bandage on his head, screamed at General Stirling.

“We are flanked, sir. The British have Sullivan’s brigade flanked and are beating him badly. You must fall back. We must make a new line, maybe as far back as the docks at Brooklyn Heights. Fall back, sir. Fall back!”

Lord Stirling guided his horse closer to the panicky messenger.

“Steady man, come to your senses,” the general growled. “Look about you. Do you see any panic here? General Sullivan will move to counter the flank attack, I am certain. Now, leave this field of battle before your panic infects these brave men. Go to the rear and calm down.”

The messenger was embarrassed. He hung his head for a moment and then saluted and wheeled his horse about and slowly rode through the interval.

Almost as if the messenger was a signal, the British artillery across the front opened fire and cannon balls screamed across the field and struck the American line.

That was followed by the sound of drums, and Tad knew the drums were beating the call to advance.

Tad quickly understood what was happening. He watched as part of a regiment of British light infantry advanced from the front of the British line and with quick step headed directly for Ben and his Connecticut detachment.

The Maryland captain saw it, also, and remarked, "They are going to clear out our skirmishers before making a general attack."

Tad wanted to yell for Ben to pull back, but he knew that might well bring a rebuke from the captain standing beside him.

The British light infantry advanced to within a hundred paces of Ben and his detachment. Roger fired and quickly began reloading. The Connecticut men fired a volley at the British when they closed to just under a hundred paces.

The British still held their line intact, though the Connecticut men had done much damage.

The British light infantry raised their muskets and fired a volley and then charged at the run, their bayonets leveled for the attack.

The Connecticut men fired another volley that staggered the British, but they did not stop.

Tad could see Ben urging his men to fall back, but it was too late. The British light infantry closed with the Connecticut men who met them bayonet to bayonet.

Lord Stirling urged his horse toward the Maryland captain and Tad.

"Come with me, drummer boy. We must rescue our skirmishers."

Tad quickly followed the general as they hurried across the interval and fronted the Pennsylvania line.

Lord Stirling shouted to the Pennsylvania commander.

"Quick now, we must advance to the support of the skirmishers," Lord Stirling shouted.

Then he turned to Tad, "Beat the advance, if you please, drummer boy."

Tad eagerly began beating the advance. His beat was fast and he wanted to run. The only hope that Ben and the Connecticut soldiers had was if the Pennsylvania line could move quickly to the fight.

Lord Stirling, riding just in front of the line, his sword drawn, glanced over at Tad and shouted.

“Steady, lad. We shall arrive in time.”

As they marched forward, Tad could easily see that the British light infantry had closed on Ben and the Connecticut men.

Ben was engaging two British soldiers, parrying their bayonet thrusts with his sword.

Roger faced three Redcoats. He grasped the barrel of his long rifle with both hands and swung it in an arc toward the soldiers. One dodged the blow, but two of the Redcoats went down. Roger’s rifle was badly broken as a result. He looked at the rifle and howled in rage, a sound that rose over the din of battle.

He threw the ruined rifle at the third British soldier and in an instant, plucked his tomahawk from his belt and leaped at him.

The Redcoat thrust with his bayonet, but Roger, just as he had once boasted, dodged the bayonet and grabbed the musket with one hand and then delivered a crushing blow to the head of the soldier who then collapsed.

At that point, Lord Stirling raised his sword and spurred his horse forward into the fray.

The Pennsylvania line broke into a run and as they closed with the British. The Redcoats turned and fled back to their own line.

Lord Stirling trotted along the Pennsylvania line urging the men to quickly return to their position.

The men moved back, but they were in good spirits and they walked backwards, still pointing their bayonets at the British so no one would be deceived into believing that they were retreating.

There seemed to be a momentary pause in the battle. Lord Stirling clapped a hand on Ben's shoulder.

"Well done, Captain. However, you must understand that when I put you out with skirmishers, I had no desire for you to fight the entire British army by yourselves."

"Yes, sir," Ben replied. "About my men, sir. They did fight well, indeed."

"Oh, yes," Lord Stirling said, "And I shall not forget them when I write my dispatch on this battle."

Their conversation was interrupted by a thunderous roar from the British cannon. Every cannon the British possessed opened fire on the American line.

As the cannon balls came smashing into the line, Lord Stirling laughed and said, "So, now General Grant has opened the ball and now we shall dance!"

Ben gathered his Connecticut men who now numbered only twenty-six instead of forty. They moved behind the interval between the Maryland line and the Pennsylvania line, there to wait in reserve.

Tad stood at the left end of the Maryland line where he had been placed by the captain. He watched as Ben marched his men back not more than twenty paces.

It was then that Tad saw one of the cannon in the interval which seemed much wider now, had been knocked from its carriage, and several men were down. Other men were running to help them.

Tad wondered how that could have happened without him knowing it because he was not even a stone's throw away. Then he thought it must have happened when he was advancing with the Pennsylvania line.

The Maryland captain strolled casually along the front of his line. He bid the soldiers to stand firm. He was at the left end of the line where Tad stood when British drums all along the front began beating the advance and thousands of Redcoats began stepping forward.

"They have cleared our skirmishers and now they are serious," the captain said.

He turned and hurried down the line.

"Hold your fire," he shouted to his soldiers. "Wait until they get within fifty paces."

Tad was scared. He thought his knees were shaking. The British came on in two lines. Officers were out in front leading the way with a measured pace.

Tad remembered his British drummer friend, Packie, and how he had always claimed that the colonials would do well to avoid meeting the British in just such a battle.

Onward they came, and it seemed to Tad as if it was taking forever for the British to close.

Finally, they were close. Tad could see the British soldiers in the front rank. He could see their faces, their eyes, and still they came on with bayonets leveled.

"Fire!" came the command, and instantly there was a roar of muskets and more clouds of smoke from the gun powder.

The British line appeared to shudder and Redcoats were down on the ground all along the front.

The men in the line near Tad quickly began reloading. It would take them nearly a half minute to reload.

The British closed their ranks and raised their muskets to their shoulders. The British return volley hit the American line, and Tad could hear cries of pain as Marylanders fell to the ground.

The British volley had done much harm, but it also gave the Marylanders the chance to reload and fire again. Both the first two lines of the advancing British were hit hard. They looked as if they were about to begin retreating, but the British had two more lines behind the first two, and these ranks quickly closed to reinforce the first two lines that had been stopped by the American fire. The massed British force attacked the Marylanders.

Now it was bayonet against bayonet and the British were in great numbers. The Maryland casualties had been many, and the weight of the British attack pressed the Marylanders back.

The Maryland captain was wounded and knocked to the ground. He was only a few feet out in front of where Tad was standing.

A British soldier rushed at the fallen captain, his musket and bayonet raised high for a fatal blow.

Tad jumped in front of the fallen captain and faced the British soldier.

Tad furiously beat the call to rally as the British soldier struck at him with his bayonet.

The bayonet slashed along the front of the drum, but did not break through, and Tad continued to call for a rally.

Nearby Maryland soldiers saw what was happening and beat back the attacking British soldiers so they could rescue their captain and the drummer boy.

The British soldier tried to dodge around Tad, but he quickly moved to keep in front of him. The soldier saw his own people falling back and realized that he would be left behind to face the Marylanders who were pushing hard.

The British soldier lowered his bayonet and said, "You're a brave laddie." Then he turned and joined the rest of the British soldiers who were in retreat.

The Marylanders cheered as the British retreated. They had held, and so had the other regiments in the brigade.

The captain was taken to the rear, and a young man who was not much older than Tad stepped forward.

"It looks like I am the ranking officer now," he said. "At this rate, I might even be a general by sundown."

The other men close by laughed. They were in good spirits even though their success had been costly.

The new leader, a lieutenant, looked at Tad. "You do look a bit peaked. Have a drink from my water bottle, but mind, you, just a swallow. This heat is as hard on us as the British."

Tad gratefully accepted the drink of water. He could tell the water bottle was not half full, and there was no way of knowing when more water would be at hand. He carefully swallowed the water and handed the bottle back.

"Thank you," Tad said. "I didn't know just how thirsty I was."

“Well, a drink of water is little enough reward for saving our captain,” the young officer said.

“Here they come again,” someone shouted, and sure enough, the British had reformed and were again advancing with drums sounding the advance and flags proudly waving.

Tad’s first thought was, no, not again. Why weren’t they beaten? He put the thought out of his mind as he watched the British advance.

Once again, the Marylanders waited until the British were fifty paces away before opening fire.

The two lines closed and again it was a fight of men and bayonets and rifles swung like clubs.

Tad saw Ben and his small detachment, much smaller now, dash forward through the interval and attack the advancing British.

Then came Lord Stirling and two of his officers riding their horses at full gallop, and with swords held pointed forward. They crashed into the British and with just that small addition, the British line stopped and then began recoiling back across the field.

Ben and his Connecticut detachment fell back toward their reserve position.

Tad could see that there were not more than twelve of them left. He saw Sergeant Harmon Smith who waved at him.

Ben paused for a second when he reached Tad.

“Are you all right?” Ben asked. “Why aren’t you in back of the line?”

“Doesn’t make any difference, now,” replied Tad. “One place is about like the other.”

“Take care of yourself,” Ben urged as he turned to join what was left of his first command.

“You, too,” Tad replied.

Again, the British reformed and attacked. And, once again, the Marylanders held, though they were pushed back nearly two hundred paces. The brigade had held against this attack, though forced to give up ground. There were cheers once again when the British retreated.

Lord Stirling rode along his brigade line shouting his praise for the valiant stand being made by his soldiers.

It was when he reached the Maryland regiment that a mounted courier rode up through the interval by Tad and the Marylanders.

“Thank God, I have found you, general,” the courier shouted. “Sullivan’s brigade has collapsed and another British division under Cornwallis has taken part of the Gowanus road. All is lost. You must retreat back on Brooklyn Heights before the way is closed and your brigade trapped!”

“What? Are you certain?” Lord Stirling replied.

“My orders come from headquarters,” the courier replied. “You must retreat from here and try to keep the Gowanus road open for the retreat of what’s left of both our brigades.”

No time was lost in the movement of soldiers back toward the road.

The Maryland and Delaware regiments were turned about and formed up for the march.

“We are in for it now,” the young lieutenant said as he led the way with Tad at his side beating a lively marching beat. “We are to be the rear guard for both brigades.”

As the two regiments filed away from what had been their line, they could hear the British drums beating the call to advance. The British they had faced would be following close behind, and would be on the rear of the column when it closed against the new division led by General Cornwallis.

There was chaos everywhere. There were men lying still upon the ground. There were wrecked cannon carriages. The smoke from cannons and thousands of muskets clouded the air.

Then they came upon a scene that would never leave Tad's mind. He saw Ben. The young captain was sitting down. He was leaning against the body of another soldier. As they came closer, Tad could see that the man on the ground was Sergeant Harmon Smith. Near them were three more soldiers of the Connecticut detachment. They lay still upon the ground.

"Ben!" Tad shouted as he broke away from the column. He hurried over to where the last of the Connecticut detachment and his friend Ben had fought their final battle. Around them were silent Hessians who had fought against the small band.

Tad knelt down in front of Ben. He could see that Ben's eyes were open and staring straight ahead. His sword was still clutched in his hand.

"Ben, Ben, talk to me, say something! Please, Ben..." As he urged his friend to speak, Tad slowly realized that Ben would never speak again.

Tears rolled down Tad's cheeks as he stared at his friend. Ben was the first friend Tad had made upon joining the army. Now, he was gone.

Tad suddenly felt light-headed. He could not hear the noise of battle around him. Tad did not know where he was or what was happening. His mind was filled with pale fog.

Then he heard voices. He heard the words, 'drummer boy' and he knew people were urging him to get to his feet and run. Then he felt hands grabbing him and pulling him to his feet. He was running, stumbling, and then running again. There were hands keeping him upright.

He knew when they took his drum strap over his shoulder and removed his uniform coat. Someone was binding his drum to his chest, and he heard someone say that the drum would help keep him afloat. Then he was in water and being pulled and pushed by men. The water felt cool, and he knew he was swallowing some of it, but it felt so good going down his parched throat. He closed his eyes.

Chapter 54

There Are No Bandages for a Wounded Mind

Tad knew he was awake. It was nearly dark, but he could see men moving about. At first, he could only make out what seemed like muffled sounds, talk that did not quite make sense, speaking that was garbled.

He turned his head slightly, and it was then that he realized his hair was wet. His clothes were wet. The wet clothes felt cool and that was a relief. His drum was beside him, and he was sitting up, his back braced against a large crate.

Someone stepped in front of him and knelt down and looked at him. He was an older man with spectacles that perched down on his nose.

Tad somehow felt that he should know this person, that he had seen him before. The man touched his forehead and held his hand on his wrist for a few moments. Then he looked into Tad's eyes. It was so unreal.

The garbled voices began to clear. Tad heard someone ask, "Well, doctor, how is he?"

"Don't know for certain," the doctor replied. "I can't see his eyes clear enough. It's too dark. Looks like he's deep into shock. Keep an eye on him. I'll try to get back later."

One of the men asked, "Is he going to be all right?"

The doctor looked down at Tad again and then turned to answer the man.

"I don't know. Sometimes they come out of it. Some take longer than others. Then, there's some who never come out of it. We just don't have bandages for wounds like this that are hidden in the mind."

Tad heard another man say, "No wonder he's in shock. He's seen more today than any man ought to see, let alone a boy."

Another man joined in, saying, "He surely did save our captain. I saw him jump in front of that British soldier who was going to bayonet the captain."

Another voice out of the growing dusk added, "That fancy blue drum saved the boy's life. Before we could get there, the Britisher stabbed at the boy, but hit the drum instead. See that long white streak? That's where the bayonet hit the drum."

"We'd have never got him across that river if it hadn't been for that drum. Tying him to the drum was a good idea. Kept his head above water," said another man.

One of the men said, "The drummer boy wasn't the only one saved by the drum. I was holding on for dear life on the other side."

"Are his eyes open?" someone asked.

"I think so," came a reply. "Don't seem like he sees anything, though."

A young soldier carrying a musket in one hand and a lantern in the other approached the group.

"I'm looking for a drummer boy," the newcomer said as he held the lantern up higher to cast a wider circle of dim, yellow, light. "His name is Tad Wheeler. Any of you boys see him?"

"And who be you?" came a voice from one of the men sitting on the ground.

"I'm a good friend", came the reply.

"Well, in that case, your friend is over here, but be careful. He's not doing so well."

Tad heard the voices. He could see the light from the lantern. He knew the voice of the person carrying the lantern, but he could not bring the name clearly into his mind.

The light in Tad's eyes grew brighter as the person approached him.

"What's wrong with him? I don't see any wounds."

One of the men replied, "He's been hurt bad, I think, but the hurt's locked up inside his head. He saw too much today."

The person with the lantern knelt down and stared at Tad.

"Tad? Tad? Can you speak to me? Your eyes are open. Can you see me?"

There was a crashing thunder inside Tad's head. He heard those words and saw the person a few feet away staring into his open eyes.

Tad suddenly screamed, "Ben?" Then the vision he saw disappeared, and he knew he was looking at Jed, the young Marblehead boy who had shared so much of the war with him.

Tad tried to speak, but he could not get even one word out. He cleared his throat and tried again.

"Jed?"

The men on the ground heard Tad speak and they quickly gathered around.

"I think he's coming out of it," one of them said.

"How bad was it?" Jed asked softly.

Tad stared back at his friend for a moment before replying.

"Ben's dead," Tad said. "It was his first command, and he died."

Tad paused as if to catch his breath even though he was not breathing hard.

"Where am I? What's happened?"

"You are back at Brooklyn Heights," Jed said. "I guess your friends here must have gotten you out of the trap. We lost a lot of men today."

"We are going to hold here on Brooklyn Heights?" Tad asked.

"Looks that way," replied Jed. "The Marblehead boys are coming ashore to help. Hard to tell about things, though. Everything seems to be mixed up."

"You've got a musket?" Tad asked.

“Sure do,” Jed answered proudly. “They need every man they got, and that means me, too, I’d warrant.”

Tad looked at the musket and he remembered Roger breaking his rifle over the heads of two British soldiers.

“Roger? Where’s Roger? Did he get out?” Tad asked anxiously.

“Oh, sure enough,” Jed replied. “He’s around here somewhere.”

“That’s good to hear,” Tad said. “Roger fought hard. So did Ben. That was awful. I think every man in his detachment got killed, though I don’t know that for certain.”

There was more light now besides that being cast by the lantern. There were bonfires burning as soldiers set about trying to establish some normal routine in the midst of chaos.

Another person approached. “You men of the Maryland regiment, it’s time for you to get back to the fortifications. You’ve rested long enough. Now what’s this meeting here all about?”

Jed stood up and almost made a good salute.

“Captain Hamlin. Tad here’s been shook up.”

One of the Maryland soldiers said, “He’s a good one, that drummer boy. He stood in line with us and never flinched. He saved our captain.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” Captain Hamlin said as he bent down and looked at Tad.

“How are you feeling, drummer boy?”

“I’ll be all right,” Tad replied. Seeing that the Captain had also survived the battle almost brought tears to his eyes.

“When’s the last time you had something to eat?” Captain Hamlin asked.

“I’m not sure,” Tad answered. “I think it was yesterday.”

“What you need is some food and rest.” Captain Hamlin said. He turned to Jed. “Go over to the cooking tents. Find something to eat.”

“What if they won’t give me any food?” Jed asked.

Captain Hamlin looked at Jed and smiled. “I’m sure you will find a way. Now, get about your business. I’ll keep watch over Tad here until you return.”

The Maryland men were up and preparing to move up to the line being held against the British. As usual, the Americans were resorting to the shovels and picks. They were digging dirt and making fortifications.

“Begging the captain’s pardon, sir, but we think we should take the drummer boy with us. He stood by us. He saved our captain. We figure we should take care of him.”

Captain Hamlin nodded. “I understand, but we owe Tad a debt, too. You say he saved your captain. Well, he saved our colonel back when we were fighting the British at Boston. Colonel’s a higher rank than captain, right? Besides, you will have no way to take care of the drummer boy up on line. We can take care of him back here much better. If it rains, we can keep him dry. He needs rest and food.”

There were quick murmurs of conversation between the Maryland soldiers. One of the soldiers answered the captain.

“We don’t quite understand the captain and colonel business, but you are right about what we can do. Mind you, we’ll be checking on you Marblehead people to see that you took good care of the drummer boy.”

“My word upon it,” replied Captain Hamlin. “Now, hurry along. You are needed on the line.”

The Maryland soldiers filed off toward the fortifications which were rapidly being dug.

Captain Hamlin looked around and saw a uniform coat that had been left behind. He brought the coat over to Tad’s side and rolled it into a pillow and put it on the ground by the crate.

“It’s not much of a pillow,” Captain Hamlin said, “But, it will work. Can you move?”

Tad tensed his muscles. He felt stiff, but he could move. He knew what the captain wanted, and he eased his body over and lay down with his head resting on the makeshift pillow. His eyes stared up, but he could see no stars. The light from the lantern which Jed had left sitting on the ground nearby, and the light from the bonfires made it impossible to see the stars.

“If I lay here, I’ll go to sleep,” Tad said.

“Good,” replied Captain Hamlin. “A few hours of sleep will do you good. When you wake up, I’m sure Jed will have found some food.”

Tad did not reply. He was asleep. Captain Hamlin sat down on the crate and kept watch.

CHAPTER 55

The Fox Proves Smarter Than the Hunters

Tad awoke suddenly and sat up. He did not know why he had awakened. He was not certain that he had been asleep, and for a few moments, he did not know where he was, and then he smelled food. He could smell bacon cooking.

“Look who’s awake,” Jed said. “Thought you were going to sleep for about a week.”

Tad could see that it was light and that there was a mist.

He saw Roger sitting by Jed. Both had plates in their hands and the plates were filled with biscuits and bacon. Tad realized that he was about as hungry as he could ever remember.

“Can you get up?” Roger asked.

Tad put his hand down to steady himself, and then got to his feet. He felt a little light-headed, and he wobbled a little when he started to walk. Both Jed and Roger quickly sat their plates down on the ground and jumped up to help him.

Tad shook them off. “I’m all right. I just feel a little weak. Is there any more of that bacon?”

Jed wasted no time in putting a plate of bacon and two biscuits in Tad’s hands. Then he helped Tad sit back down so he could eat.

Tad wolfed down the food, and his plate was empty. “Is there anymore?” He asked.

“Plenty,” Jed replied.

“I was able to get a big piece of bacon from the cooks and all the biscuits I could carry.”

Tad soon had a refill of his plate. This time, he ate slower.

He looked over at Roger and said, “I was worried about you. The last I saw of you was when you broke your rifle.”

“That was a terrible thing to happen,” Roger said. He pointed over to the crate where there were two muskets leaning against it. “Now I have that musket. Why, I’d probably be better off throwing my tomahawk than using that piece of junk.”

Tad laughed. His laughter sounded strange to him, but it felt good.

Jed heard the laugh and said, “Good to hear you laugh again. Of course, if anyone can make a person laugh, it’s got to be the barefoot woodsman here.”

“You better watch out,” Roger said to Jed. “I still haven’t forgot how you was trying to make me out to be to those British officers.”

Tad now felt much better. His stomach was full, and he had two good friends with him. He carefully kept other matters shut out of his mind. Although he did not show it, there was a deep pain hiding in his mind.

Captain Hamlin joined them. He saw that Tad was awake, and had eaten.

As he spoke, there was a column of soldiers passing by them.

After they passed, Tad asked, “What regiment is that? They look fresh.”

“That’s a Pennsylvania regiment that came over to reinforce us,” Captain Hamlin said. “I think there’s another one on the way.”

“We are going to hold this line?” Tad asked.

“Maybe,” Captain Hamlin answered. “But, I hope not. We should go back over to New York, and we should do it as soon as possible. The longer we wait, the better chance the British have of anchoring warships just off our docks here. Then, we shall be trapped. When our food gives out, we will have to surrender. If that happens, the Revolution could be lost.”

“Another retreat? Tad groaned. “When we came down here from Boston, I thought we had the regiments, the Continental Army, that could stand up to the British in open battle. Now, we are in worse shape than we were back before Boston at the start of this fighting.”

“Tain’t over yet,” Jed said. The Virginian will figure something out.”

Captain Hamlin smiled. “I would not be surprised. Captain Hamlin said as he looked at Roger. “You come with me, woodsman. We’ve got to go up and lend a hand at holding the line. Jed, you stay here with Tad. Keep him warm, dry, and fed. Make sure he gets plenty of sleep.”

Jed nodded. “And if you people let any Redcoats slip through, why, I’ll take care of them.”

“I just hope you remember which end of the musket to point at them,” Roger said as he readied himself for service.

The day passed slowly for the two boys. Tad was able to sleep. Jed made sure that Tad had plenty of water, and food. Soldiers who had come ashore during the day passed them on their way to the fortifications. An officer asked why Tad was asleep, and Jed explained as best he could what had happened. The officer shook his head and said for Jed to keep close watch on Tad.

Late in the day, they heard cannons firing, and wounded men were carried back by them by their friends. They were being taken back to the docks for a trip back across the East River to a hospital.

Jed watched Tad closely when the cannons fired. The drummer boy's face turned pale, and once, Jed thought Tad was shivering, but then Tad seemed all right.

There was rain that night. Jed found a piece of sailcloth and the two boys huddled under the canvas-like shelter.

Tad drifted off into a fitful sleep. Jed remained awake, trying very hard to keep Tad covered so he would not get too wet.

Jed was almost asleep when he heard Tad's voice ring out loud and clear.

"Here they come again!"

Jed could not see Tad's face. The darkness was unbroken by any lanterns or fires because of the rain.

"Tad?" The Marblehead boy asked softly. "Are you all right?"

There was a moment of silence that was shattered when Tad suddenly sat up.

"Ben? Ben? Speak to me Ben. Please speak to me, Ben. Ben?"

The last word was but a second gone from Tad's mouth when he screamed the word, "Ben!" and tried to rise to his feet.

Jed had never been so scared in all his life. He pulled Tad down to the ground. As he did so, there was a lightening streak across the sky and the rolling sound of thunder.

By the quick burst of illumination from the lightning, Jed could see that Tad was sweating. His face was screwed up as if in great pain. His

eyes were open wide, but Jed feared that the drummer boy was seeing nothing, or maybe even worse.

“Jed?” came Tad’s weak voice. “Are you here?”

“You awake now?” Jed asked.

“I had a dream,” Tad said. “It was like no dream I ever had before. What’s wrong with me?”

“Tain’t nothing wrong with you,” Jed said. “You’ve just been through a bad time, that’s all.”

Morning finally came. The rain stopped, and the day promised to be as warm as the day before. Jed tried to make a fire so he could heat up some bacon for their breakfast, but all he got was a pile of wet sticks that spluttered and smoked and then went out.

Tad sat on the ground. He watched as Jed worked at trying to get the fire started. When Jed came over and announced that all they had for breakfast was some soggy biscuits, Tad tried to laugh, and at first no sound came out of his mouth. When he finally succeeded, Jed looked at him and asked, “What’s so funny?”

Tad replied. His voice was stronger than his laugh.

“Remember back when we slipped into Boston and we had biscuits in our pockets and how they were soaked?”

Jed smiled. “They sure were a mess. I like to have never got all that mess out of my pocket.”

Jed’s words came tumbling out of his mouth. He felt a sense of relief. Tad appeared to be his old self. Jed knew that he would never forget the night just passed.

Jed saw them first. It was Captain Hamlin and Roger coming back from the fortifications. Jed hurried to meet them.

“How’s the drummer boy?” asked Captain Hamlin.

Jed replied in a low voice. “He had a terrible dream last night,” Jed answered. “I never saw anything like it.”

Captain Hamlin shook his head. “Boys are seeing things that men can barely handle. We are pulling out. We are retreating to New York tonight. We’ll get him on a boat back as soon as possible.”

Jed shook his head. “Can’t just stick him on a boat with strangers. He gets a spell like he had last night, and they might think he’s crazy.”

While they talked, Roger set to work making a fire. The woodsman soon had a fire going, and they eagerly watched as the bacon fried.

After a quick breakfast, Captain Hamlin explained the situation.

“We’ve come to our senses. We are crossing the river. By morning we shall be away from this island and back in New York. We won’t be trapped here.”

“That means the Marblehead men will get to work hard all night, as usual,” Jed said. “Where’d this army be without us?”

“True enough,” Captain Hamlin nodded. “You won’t be rowing though. You, I and the woodsman, and a few others will stay until the last boat. There will be other detachments like us along the line. We will keep up as many campfires as we can. We will be noisy about it. We want the British to think we are not retreating.”

“We’re going to fool them again,” Jed said.

“That is what we hope,” Captain Hamlin said.

“What about me?” Tad asked. “What am I to do?”

Captain Hamlin looked at Tad. After a brief pause, he said, "I had thought to put you on the first boat out so you could get some care back at the hospital, but now, I think I have a better plan. You will stay with us. You've been with this fighting almost since the beginning. You might just as well finish this out with us."

"I'm fine," Tad said. "I was just worn down a little. I can be of value here. I can play drum calls the British can hear. That will make them think we are moving about and maybe even getting ready to attack."

Captain Hamlin stroked his chin and stared at Tad. "That would be a big help. We'll fool the British for certain."

Later in the day, the doctor who examined Tad when he was in shock, came by. He saw that Tad was up and appeared to be well-rested. He looked at Tad carefully. After that, he and Captain Hamlin had a brief conversation. Their words were spoken in what was almost a whisper.

When the doctor said that Tad should be put on the first boat back to New York, Captain Hamlin shook his head.

"I think not. He had a bad night last night, but he seems to be getting stronger. I think keeping him here where we can keep an eye on him will be better than having him end up with strangers. I also think his sense of duty will serve him well in his recovery."

The doctor thought about the captain's words for a moment before replying.

"Can't say I agree with your opinion about what will help him recover, but I do have to agree that he will be better off with his friends he knows and trusts."

Before sundown, the evacuation of the trapped American army was underway. There was an early mist that gave promise of becoming a

friendly fog during the night. The fog would help hide the movement of the Americans from the British scouts and observers.

The crate where Tad had leaned against after escaping the British now became a headquarters table for Captain Hamlin as he kept an eye on the retreat for his sector.

Files of men came through the area on their way to the docks and passage across the East River.

Tad, Jed, and Roger along with several others in the captain's detachment gathered firewood for as many campfires as they could so that when darkness was upon them. The British would see the glow of many campfires and hopefully be assured that the American army was still in the trap.

When darkness covered the heights, the piles of sticks and twigs all up and down the line burst into flames.

It was hard work keeping so many fires going.

Late in the night, Tad and Jed took a brief break.

"You doing all right?" Jed asked.

"I think so," Tad said. "I haven't had time to think about it. I never knew retreating could take so much work."

That brought a laugh from Jed. "I think I'd have an easier time of it if I was with the boys rowing back and forth across that river."

Captain Hamlin was not his usual calm self. He was worried about the pace of the evacuation.

"It's going too slow. Dawn will be upon us and we shall still have too many men here."

He was soon put at ease. A long file of men passed him, and the officer leading them spoke as the file passed by.

“That’s it. There’s no one out there now except the British. Don’t wait too long. Dawn’s about to break.”

As the men disappeared into the fog, Captain Hamlin stared out to the front. There was still the fog which would turn into a mist when morning came, but there was a slight grayness in the east that was changing the fog from dark to light.

“The British will be up by now and getting ready for their attack,” he said. “They might even have patrols out close to our lines now.”

“Soon, I’d guess,” Roger said. “I was out there in front of our lines scouting around a little. I figure they are still about a half-mile away.”

“I’m surprised they didn’t just keep coming during the battle,” Jed said.

“They should have,” Captain Hamlin agreed. “They didn’t though. I think they were worn out. It was terribly hot. I heard that there were British soldiers who died of sunstroke. The heat killed them. They have those heavy red uniforms, and they marched carrying those heavy packs.”

“And, don’t forget, we gave them what for and then some.” Roger said.

Captain Hamlin nodded agreement and checked the fires.

“The fires are a little low. Maybe we need to add more wood.

He looked at Jed and said, “As you go down the line, tell the next detachment to do the same thing. Have them stand by. When they hear our drum, they are to pick up the beat. When our drum stops, everyone is to make for the docks as fast as they can.”

Jed and Roger quickly moved to carry out the captain's orders.

"Are you going to be able to move when it's time?" Captain Hamlin asked Tad.

"Yes, sir," Tad replied. "I feel better now. The food helped a lot." He looked over at a nearby water barrel and added, "I never knew how good a drink of water could taste. In some ways, the thing I remember about the battle was how hot it was and how awfully thirsty I was."

"Try not to think too much about the battle," Captain Hamlin cautioned.

Jed and Roger soon returned from their assignments. Captain Hamlin looked up at the sky. The gray was turning to the beginning of a full dawn.

"It's time," he said. "Drummer boy, wake up the army."

Tad picked up the drum and slipped the strap over his shoulder. He raised the sticks and then began beating a loud call for assembly. As he beat, they could hear the other two drums down the line pick up the beat.

Tad kept up the beat until Captain Hamlin waved his hand.

"That's enough. Now, move quickly back to the docks."

As they started to leave, they heard a strange-sounding horn coming from out in front.

"What kind of horn is that?" Roger asked.

They stopped and listened. The sound was repeated.

"That's a horn they use for fox hunting," Captain Hamlin said angrily. "They blow that horn when they think they've got the fox cornered and

they are about to catch it. They are taunting us. They think they have us cornered and are about to catch us.”

“They will get a surprise soon,” Jed said. He looked about him and saw the water barrel. He ran and tipped the barrel over so the water spilled out on the ground.

“We’ll give them nothing,” he growled as he returned to the group.

They quickly made their way to the docks where they were joined by the others who had done the same task of fooling the British.

“Where’s the boats?” someone asked.

Captain Hamlin turned to Jed. “Can you see them?” he asked.

Jed peered into the mist that shrouded the water.

“No, but I can hear them. I can hear the oars. Be patient. They may be running a little slow. They been rowing back and forth across this river all night.”

Jed was right. Four boats pulled up to the dock.

The boat master and Captain Hamlin talked while the last members of the American army on Brooklyn Heights boarded the boats and settled down for the trip back to New York.

Tad heard the boat master tell Captain Hamlin that the mist kept them hidden during the night.

“Didn’t make that much difference though,” he said. “The wind doesn’t favor the British warships to come up the East River.”

It was light by the time the crews pulled away from the docks and began their trip. Tad sat near the back of the boat. He could see Redcoats running out on the docks. Some of them raised their muskets

and fired at the boats, but the range was too great for the muskets, and their shots fell short.

Tad breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that there was no way for the British to keep them from reaching the New York harbor docks.

The sun was up and the mist gone by the time they reached the docks.

As Tad and his friends climbed out of the boats, the oarsmen, men from the Marblehead regiment who had spent the night rowing back and forth across the water to rescue the American soldiers, rested on their oars. They were exhausted, but their work was not yet done.

At Captain Hamlin's urgings, they pulled the boats up out of the water and onto the docks. Then they smashed in the bottoms of the boats. The British would never be able to make use of these craft.

When that task was finished, Captain Hamlin's small force made its way to Broadway, a street that Tad knew very well.

When they reached Broadway, Captain Hamlin told them to take a break and rest up for the march ahead. He was expecting more soldiers to join his rear guard, but they had not yet arrived.

Tad saw Jan and Mr. Van Zandt standing out in front of Mr. Van Zandt's store. Tad saw that Jan had a musket which he held awkwardly.

As Tad approached, Mr. Van Zandt said, "Well, I see you survived the battle."

Tad nodded and turned to Jan. "Where did you get the musket?"

"A soldier threw it away when he was passing the store. I picked it up."

“Well, I for one am glad that this is over,” Mr. Van Zandt said. “It will be a relief when the British come in and take over. This revolution nonsense has finally ended.”

“Oh, no,” Tad quickly replied. “It’s not over yet.”

“Bah!” cried Mr. Van Zandt. “Look at this rabble. You have no uniforms now. There is no organization. You are beaten. Your Declaration of Independence is nothing but empty words.”

Tad wanted to yell at the man, but this was Molly’s father. For her sake, he owed Mr. Van Zandt at least some respect, but it was hard to keep his mouth closed.

When Tad spoke, he turned to Jan. “I’ll take that musket. We probably have someone who can use it.”

Jan’s eyes were bright. He stood straight as a ramrod.

“No. I will keep it for my own,” Jan said firmly.

“It will go hard for you if the British find the musket,” Tad argued.

“If they find it, they will find it only when they face it,” Jan said.

“What are you talking about?” Mr. Van Zandt asked.

“I read that Declaration of Independence,” Jan said. “I believe in it. Now, I am an American. I must earn that right.”

“No!” cried Mr. Van Zandt. “If you truly believe this nonsense, then I will disown you.”

“You cannot disown me,” Jan replied. “Now, I am an American. I am a free man.”

Jan turned to Tad and continued, “I am going with you. I shall fight.”

“Don’t be a fool,” Mr. Van Zandt growled. “Can’t you see they are beaten?”

Jan shook his head. “Perhaps it is so, but all that means is that they need me now, and now is the time to prove my worth.”

“You are disowned from this time forth,” Mr. Van Zandt cried as he turned and entered his store.

“Are you sure?” Tad asked.

“Oh, yes, I am certain,” Jan answered firmly.

Captain Hamlin’s small rear guard was finally ready to march. He was at the front of the column. Behind him was Tad with his drum. Another soldier fell in on Tad’s left. He was a fifer and he played his fife as Tad set an easy marching beat on his drum.

Behind them came the first rank. Jed was on the right of the file. Jan was beside him, and Roger was on the end. Behind them came the rest of the rear-guard column.

Jed saw that Jan was having a hard time holding his musket and reached over to change Jan’s hold on the weapon.

It was a long and dreary march out of the city. When they came to the open country beyond, the road rose up, and they were on a knoll that allowed them to look back at the city.

Captain Hamlin formed the rear guard into a line that stretched across the road.

Suddenly, and for no reason, Tad began beating the rally call. The soldiers were surprised. There was no reason for the call. They were in formation and standing ready to face a British attack.

Then they realized that Tad was sending a drum beat message to the city and maybe even beyond. They understood and they cheered.

Tad stopped beating the drum and raised his hands to the sky with a drumstick in each hand.

He screamed defiantly.

“We shall never give up!”

End Book 2