

THE FRENCH DRUM, Book 1, Boston

By Robert Compton Miller

Chapter 1 A Redcoat for a Friend

Tad walked quickly through the streets of Boston on his way back to the printing shop where he worked as an apprentice to Mr. Stelle. He had delivered an order of advertising posters to a merchant and started back when he stopped to watch some British soldiers as they practiced marching. He soon realized that he had been gone for a long time and so he hurried now.

The warm, damp April afternoon soon made him consider taking off the ink-smudged brown waistcoat that he wore over his loose-fitting linen shirt. The short coat was warm, even though it was not really heavy. Below his waist, he wore breeches made of tough sailcloth. The breeches fit snugly around his legs, ending just below his knees. The tops of his long stockings were tucked under the breeches.

Tad hurried around a corner and bumped into a British soldier. He turned and started to scurry away, but the soldier caught him and held him fast. The British soldiers had occupied Boston for several years to protect their officials from the colonists who had violently opposed paying taxes.

“Ha! What kind of rabbit is this we have running around corners and trying to knock down the finest of the British army? Why, look here, I’ve captured Sam Adams, I do believe.”

Tad squirmed free. He defiantly turned to face his captor. The soldier was a short, heavysset man. Instead of carrying a musket, he had a brightly polished red drum that hung from a white strap around his neck and under one arm.

“I haven’t done anything,” Tad said, noticing as he spoke that he was nearly as tall as the soldier, even though he had only turned twelve last month.

“Listen to the rebel, would you? I’d figure you for a courier carrying messages for the Sons of Liberty. Why, I think it’s off to prison with you!”

“You can’t do that,” argued Tad.

“And why not, pray tell?”

“Because I have my rights,” answered Tad.

“You are a spunky one, I’ll give you that. But since I captured you, I think I’ll just make you carry my drum. What do you say to that?”

“I’d be happy to carry it for you,” Tad replied eagerly, “if you would let me play it.”

“What? Play my drum? Why, sir, I doubt that you could.”

“I can play a little,” Tad insisted. “I’ve been practicing.”

“Well now, that puts a different face on it,” the soldier said as he slipped the strap over his head and handed the drum to Tad.

“Let’s hear what you can do, but mind you, be soft or you are likely to have grenadiers and light infantry coming from every which direction, what with everyone being so jumpy about Sam Adams and the Sons of Liberty.”

Tad put the strap over his own head. Since he was nearly the same height as the soldier, it was close enough to the proper distance from his arms. The drum rode on his left leg. He took the two drumsticks and began a soft and slow marching beat.

“Not so bad. Not so bad at all,” the soldier admitted. “Where did you learn to play?”

“Mr. Stelle has a drum,” answered Tad. “It’s a blue French drum that he got when he served in the militia during the war against the French. It’s old, but it’s a good one, and I keep it polished.”

“This Mr. Stelle, did he serve at Quebec?” asked the soldier.

“I don’t think so, or at least he never talks much about it,” Tad replied.

“Did he teach you to play the drum?”

“No. I used to play around with it when I was younger, but I’ve watched the soldiers drill a lot this past year. Then at home, I try to make the same sounds on the French drum.”

The soldier nodded and asked, “How old are you, lad?”

“I just turned twelve last month,” answered Tad.

“For a fact! I was only twelve myself when I became a drummer in the army,” the soldier said. “What’s your name, young man?”

“Tad, Tad Wheeler. What’s your name?”

“Why, just call me Packie. That’s what I’m best known by in the regiment. Let’s shake hands on it like the two gentleman drummers that we be.”

Tad and Packie shook hands. “You’re the first native in Boston to shake the hand of Packie Smythe, you can depend on it.”

“There’s not very many soldiers who go around with a drum instead of a musket,” replied Tad quickly.

“Cleverly put, if I do say so,” laughed Packie. “You’ve got a rare sense of humor.”

"I didn't mean anything by it," said Tad, hoping that the cheerful soldier would not take offense at what he had said.

"It was taken as it was given," replied Packie. "But, I'd advise some caution in the sharpness of your answers, particularly in these times and here in Boston."

"Yes, sir," answered Tad. Mr. Stelle had hinted at the same thing more than once. He even suggested that Tad pay close attention to the writings of a printer from Philadelphia, a Mr. Franklin, who frequently urged moderation in all things and especially in speaking.

"There's too much trouble these days for people to be easy about strangers," Packie continued. "I remember back in 1759, though. It was different then. The colonists were proper glad to see the Redcoats then."

"Were you here, then?"

"Aye, lad. That was when I joined the army. I was but twelve years old, and I got shipped over here from England in time for the big doings up at Quebec. It seems like ever since we beat the French there, the colonies have had less patience with the king and the mother country. But what's that among good friends like you and me?"

The soldier-drummer was the first British soldier Tad had ever really met, at least, the first who seemed almost eager to talk. Usually the soldiers avoided the citizens of Boston, except to make necessary purchases or to inspect certain businesses for signs of rebel activity.

"What did your mother and father say when you joined the army?" asked Tad.

"Bless you, there was no mother or father to say aye or nay to the question. I was in an orphanage near London until they like to half-starved me to death. Then I got caught when I tried to run away. Lucky for me there was a squad of soldiers recruiting. They rescued me when I was on my way to jail for running away."

"I'm an orphan," said Tad slowly. "But I'm living with people who want me. I'd never run away, unless I had to for some reason."

"Things are different some here in the colonies," nodded Packie. "It's a lucky boy or girl who's born here, that's for certain. Here now, enough of all that. Give me the sticks and I'll tap out a different beat for you to try."

Packie took the drumsticks and began gently tapping out a beat that Tad had never heard before. Even though Packie's beat was softly played, Tad noticed that it made him feel like he ought to do something, and do it quickly.

"What's that beat?" asked Tad.

"That's what you play when the situation is bad, or when about all that's left are you and the flag-bearer and an officer, and the enemy bayonets are coming on like a winter storm. It's called the rally, and what it means is that all good soldiers are to rally around their flag."

"Have you ever done that?"

“There was a time or two, especially at Quebec when the battle went first one way and then the other. Why, without the drummers, battles would be fine messes, indeed. Here now. Have a go at it yourself, but be gentle or we’ll have an unhappy crowd of soldiers here.”

Tad and Packie were quickly becoming good friends. Packie showed Tad how to beat the various calls and told him why each was used in the army. He explained that during a battle, there was too much noise and smoke from the muskets and cannon for the officers to give commands by shouting and waving.

They were so intent on the lessons in drumming that they failed to see that they were being observed by a man who stood nearby.

The man approached and walked by them. As he passed, he murmured, “It seems clear that there are sons of Tories as well as Sons of Liberty.”

His tone of voice was one of contempt. He kept walking as Packie stared angrily at him. Tad was surprised. “What did he mean by that?” Tad asked.

“I suspect he was one of the Boston riffraff who call themselves the Sons of Liberty,” answered Packie. “He doesn’t like your being good friends with a Redcoat or Lobsterback as we’re called. I didn’t notice him sneaking about until he got upon us like yonder storm clouds that are a-coming.”

Neither of them had noticed that a storm was coming up on the city. Packie felt a drop of rain and said, “It looks like we’re both caught fair and square by a good spring shower.”

“Come on. Let’s run to my place. It’s not far from here,” said Tad, as he too felt the scattered raindrops.

“And what’ll your folks say when you come dragging in a stray, soaking wet Redcoat?”

“Come on. Mr. Stelle and his wife are good people. They’ll not mind at all. Come on. Let’s run. Besides, I want to show you the French drum.”

They both set out at a trot. At first Tad had trouble managing the drum, but his mind was not really on that problem. He wanted Packie to see the fine blue French drum, but what if there was a printing job for the Sons of Liberty hanging up so the ink could dry? And what if David were to come by? David was his best friend, and even though he was only fifteen, he was a member of the Sons of Liberty.

Tad’s sudden worry was washed away.

The rain began pelting down before they had gone far. “It’s a regular cloudburst,” Packie shouted.

Chapter 2 Friends and Enemies

A small bell rang when Tad and Packie hurried through the door of the printing shop. Though it was not quite dark in the shop, the shadows made it hard to see at first. Mrs. Stelle came through the door that separated the living quarters from the shop. She peered into the shadowy gloom.

"Tad, is that you?" she asked.

Mr. Stelle appeared behind her. He was carrying a candle. Mrs. Stelle saw the red uniform and cried out, "Tad? Are you all right?"

"Yes, ma'am, I..."

Mr. Stelle interrupted. "What is going on here?" he asked in a quiet but determined voice.

"I'm sorry about being late," Tad explained. "I met Mr. Packie on the way back from my errand. He's a drummer and he showed me how to play a new call on the drum. We got caught by the rain and ran for home. May I show Mr. Packie the French drum?"

Mr. Stelle thought for a moment and then looked at Mrs. Stelle. She nodded approval. Mr. Stelle said, "I can see no reason why not. But first you must wash up and eat supper."

Mr. Stelle then nodded politely to Packie and said to him, "And you, sir, are welcome to join us for supper. It is simple food, but there is enough."

Packie hesitated a moment, almost as if he were waiting for Mr. Stelle to say there was enough in spite of the hated British blockade of ships and supplies into Boston.

"Are you sure I wouldn't be a bother?" asked Packie.

"Not at all," Mrs. Stelle said as she smiled.

"Then that being settled, I'll join Master Tad here in washing up a bit, if you don't mind."

"Come this way," Mrs. Stelle said as she led them into the living quarters.

There were only two rooms and an enclosed back porch behind the printing shop. The wash basin and soap were kept on the porch during spring, summer and fall and in the one large room in the winter.

The large room was a combination kitchen and parlor. There was a fireplace and a large round table and chairs. There was also a large cupboard that held dishes and food. When there were no guests, Tad usually sat on the little ledge in front of the fireplace.

Just off of the big room was a tiny room where Mr. and Mrs. Stelle slept. Tad slept in the loft, which was reached by climbing a ladder that was against one of the walls in the kitchen. His bed was a pallet made of straw stuffed into a sturdy cloth cover.

The pallet lay by the fireplace chimney in the winter, but in the summer, he moved it over toward the eaves. He could look out and count stars through the small openings under the eaves, which he did sometimes until he fell asleep.

When Tad and Packie came back from washing, Mrs. Stelle motioned for them to sit down. Mr. Stelle had already taken his customary chair at one end of the table.

Packie sat down, but Tad turned and quickly scrambled up the ladder to the loft. He swung easily down the ladder despite the drum he had with him.

It was the blue French drum and Tad proudly held it out for Packie's inspection.

"Well now, that is a fine drum," said Packie. "How did you happen to get it?" he asked Mr. Stelle.

"I found it after the battle of Louisburg back in 1758," answered Mr. Stelle.

"You were with the army?"

"I served in the colonial militia," said Mr. Stelle. "But we can talk of those matters later. Tad, if you will say grace, we can begin supper."

During the meal, Mrs. Stelle told how Tad had come to live with them after his parents died in a smallpox epidemic.

"Tad was only two then," she said. "And hasn't he grown in the past ten years? He's almost a man now."

Tad blushed occasionally as Mrs. Stelle told of some of his antics when he was growing up. She told Packie how one day when he was only four years old; she had been working out in the garden and heard a drumming noise in the house. When she went in to investigate, there was Tad with the drum strap over his shoulder, trying to march around the room and to beat the drumsticks on the drum at the same time.

Everyone laughed when she said, "Actually, he wasn't moving the drum at all. He simply marched around it while the drum stayed in place on the floor. Finally, the strap had wound itself around him and he was caught."

After supper Tad moved to the fireplace ledge with the French drum between his legs. Packie got his drum from the corner and pulled his chair up in front of Tad. Packie played a call, and then Tad tried it. Sometimes it took him several tries, but he always got the beat right before going on to the next call.

Packie ran through all the calls and Tad noted each in his mind. Then Tad began to play one call after another. When he played the beat for the attack, his fingers went faster and stronger until the sounds of the drum filled the room.

"Whoa there," laughed Packie. "You'll be turning out all the troops in Boston at that rate."

Packie turned to Mr. Stelle and said, "He's a fine, natural born drummer, if ever I've heard one, sir."

“Drums are too often used for war,” Mr. Stelle noted politely. “I hope Tad’s swift fingers will be used for peaceful purposes. He’s a naturally fine printer, or he will be when he learns to be patient.”

“Not another rebel like Benjamin Franklin, I’d hope,” said Packie.

“He could do worse,” Mrs. Stelle said stiffly as she came in from the porch.

There was a silence in the room that was broken only by the softest kind of beating on the drum by Tad who was playing no particular beat.

Mr. Stelle’s face had become stern in appearance. His manner was no longer one of friendliness. Mrs. Stelle looked away. Both were obviously disturbed by Packie’s remark.

Packie knew that he had unfortunately crossed the boundary. He had allowed politics and the near state of war between the colony of Massachusetts and England to interfere with the evening. He looked as if he wished that there was some way he could take back what he had said about Franklin.

Tad sat and tried not to stare at the three adults. He understood the situation concerning the troubles and arguments between England and the Colonies well enough. He had learned to read early. He had read the pamphlets that Mr. Stelle frequently printed for the Massachusetts colony leaders. Even so, he could not understand why he and the Stelles could not be friends with Packie.

Packie broke the silence by playing a quick ruffle on his drum. He stuck his drumsticks into the loop on the drum strap and then stood up.

“It’s high time I got back to the barracks,” he announced. “The sergeant will be wondering about me.”

As he slung the strap over his shoulder, Mr. and Mrs. Stelle arose from their chairs. Mrs. Stelle got a candle and prepared to lead the way through the printing shop to the front door.

“You’ll come back again, won’t you?” asked Tad.

“Maybe one of these days. It’s getting harder and harder to get a free moment nowadays,” replied Packie. He turned to Mr. Stelle and said, “I hope you’ll forgive me for any rudeness. I spoke without doing enough thinking about what I was going to say.”

Mr. Stelle nodded and said, “I understand. I hope that these troubled days will end soon.”

As they walked through the printing shop, Packie told Mrs. Stelle, “Tad’s a fine boy. I don’t remember when I’ve seen an apprentice boy who looked so healthy. Most of them look skinny and underfed. But I bet Tad is as strong as an oak tree. Well, at least a small oak tree.”

Both Mr. and Mrs. Stelle laughed. “I make him get out into the sun a few hours each day,” said Mr. Stelle. “I only wish I could join him.”

There was a quick knocking at the door. “I wonder who that is at this hour?” asked Mr. Stelle. “It’s nearly time for bed.”

Mr. Stelle took the candle from Mrs. Stelle and unlatched the door. “Come in,” he said as he shielded the candle from the outside wind.

The door opened and a boy who was just a little taller than Tad slipped inside.

"It's a dark enough night out there," said the boy, "and I wish it were darker yet."

"It's David," said Tad happily, forgetting for the moment that Packie, dressed in his red soldier uniform, was also standing nearby. "What are you doing out at this hour?"

David stared at Packie. The candlelight was more than bright enough for him to see Packie's uniform.

"A Lobsterback? What's he doing here?" David asked harshly.

"He is a guest in our house," Mr. Stelle replied. "You will please mind your manners, Master David Seldon."

"Yes, sir," replied David meekly.

"I was just leaving," said Packie. "I thank you people for your kind hospitality this evening. The meal was a welcome enough change from what we get in the army. Tad, keep practicing on the drum. I shouldn't wonder but what you'll get some use of it before long."

"I pray not," said Mrs. Stelle softly.

"Will you come back?" asked Tad.

"Oh, in a few days. With all the marching about we're doing, it's hard to guess when the next free moment will come. Goodbye now and I thank you again for your hospitality."

After Packie had gone, David said, "I hope none of the Sons of Liberty or Sam Adams hears of this. Imagine, a British soldier, right here in the printing shop. What if he had seen the new pamphlets?"

"The safety of the pamphlets is my responsibility," replied Mr. Stelle. "And as for the Sons of Liberty or Sam Adams, neither they nor King George will ever dictate to me who is and who is not welcome in this house."

"I'm sorry, sir, if I have given offense. I was worried because there is talk that the Redcoats are going to march out of Boston and soon," said David.

"Where?" Tad asked as he began to softly beat the advance.

"Out into the countryside. The Redcoats are going to go after Sam Adams and John Hancock and the military supplies."

"That will mean war," said Mr. Stelle.

Tad began drumming more loudly.

Mrs. Stelle moved over to Tad and put her arm around his shoulders. "Not now, Tad. Let the drums of war be silent as long as possible."

Chapter 3 Why the Type Was Spilled

The next afternoon, Tad was hard at work in the shop setting type. His nimble fingers flew from the type case to the small narrow metal box until there were four rows of type. Then he carefully slid the rows of type into a rectangular metal form that securely held them and the lines previously set.

Each letter was a separate piece of metal, so to set a sentence involved considerable work. And to set a pamphlet of four small pages sometimes took hours.

It could have been done faster, for Tad was already as fast as most of the printers in Boston, but as Mr. Stelle had explained to Packie, it was important for Tad to get outdoors as much as possible.

Not many apprentices were as fortunate as Tad. Many of the masters did not treat the young boys apprenticed to them as part of the family. Sometimes the apprentices had to sleep in unheated sheds and eat scraps left over from the master's meal.

And sometimes when an apprentice did his job poorly or in some way displeased the master craftsman, then that unlucky boy got whipped, and more often than not, locked in a shed for a day without food.

Mr. Stelle and his wife were both gentle people and would not dream of such treatment. They had no children of their own, and so when they took Tad into their home, they made him a part of the family.

Mr. Stelle had always wanted a boy who might become a printer like himself, and so he began Tad's training very early. He made little blocks of wood with carved letters on them, only instead of Tad learning to build houses with them, he was taught to build words. In this way, he learned to read and at the same time he practiced setting type.

While Tad was working at the type-setting bench, Mr. Stelle worked at the press. It was a large piece of machinery and there were not very many in the colonies like it. Both Mr. and Mrs. Stelle had worked very hard to save enough money to be able to have the press sent over from England.

Each sheet of paper that was to be printed was fitted carefully on a piece of stretched canvas that then folded down over the type. Then, a heavy weight was lowered onto the canvas and Mr. Stelle pulled on a lever that added just the right amount of pressure. When he raised the weight and then lifted the piece of canvas that held the paper, there was the printing, exactly where it was supposed to be on the paper.

The paper was then removed and hung by a clip to a string so the ink could dry. Before another sheet could be printed, it was necessary to spread another thin layer of ink on the type. Mr. Stelle was a very capable pressman. He had a great deal of patience. Sometimes he could print as many as thirty sheets an hour.

Tad was learning how to use the press and could do a fairly good job, but he was still very slow at it. He lacked the patience to be able to do a good job every time. Mr. Stelle was not disappointed.

Their work was interrupted when the door opened and the bell jangled. It was David.

“How are the pamphlets coming?” asked David.

“Tad is setting the type now,” Mr. Stelle answered.

Tad put down his type container and walked over to the counter, which was near the door. He asked David, “Are you still mad about Packie being here last night?”

“I don’t think it was a good idea,” replied David. “I’m sorry if I created any problems. But he is a Redcoat, you know. And someday we are going to have to fight them for our liberty.”

Tad was silent for a moment. He wiped his hands on the printer’s apron that he wore to protect his clothes. “I couldn’t fight against Packie,” he said quietly.

Mr. Stelle watched the two boys. They had been the closest of friends for several years, and now that friendship was being tested.

“When the time comes, you’ll have to choose which side you are going to be on,” replied David. “There can only be those who will fight for liberty or those who will fight against it.”

“I’ve already made my choice,” said Tad. “I believe that what the British Parliament and the king have done is wrong. I believe it was wrong of them to put taxes on tea, and I believe it was wrong of the British to punish Boston by stopping ships from coming and leaving here.”

“Then when the time comes, when the British try to use troops to enforce their laws, you’ll have to fight them,” said David with a smile.

“But, Packie is my friend. He never took away any of my liberties,” insisted Tad.

“It will be his drum that the British troops march to when the time comes,” said David.

“Then if that happens,” said Tad reluctantly, “It will have to be his drum against my French drum.”

“You are a patriot,” laughed David, “but a confused one.”

Mr. Stelle broke into the conversation saying, “Or a thoughtful one.”

The sound of marching feet in the street outside the shop quickly broke off their discussion.

“Hist! It’s a Lobsterback patrol,” said David quickly. “Are there any pamphlets about?”

“They are well hidden,” Mr. Stelle replied.

But Tad appeared worried, and he started to say something when the door sprang open and a British officer and four men stalked into the shop.

“Who is the proprietor of this shop?” asked the officer. His manner was one of contempt as he stared insolently at Mr. Stelle and the two boys.

“I am the owner,” said Mr. Stelle as he stepped forward.

“We have reason to believe that you have been printing pamphlets for the rebels. We are here to search the place. And I don’t mind telling you, that if we find anything suspicious, it will go hard for you,” said the officer.

“You may search as you like,” said Mr. Stelle. “But I do ask that you caution your men to be careful. There is no reason to damage my equipment.”

“That is something you should have thought of before consorting with that terrible Sam Adams and John Hancock and the band of thieves who call themselves the Sons of Liberty,” replied the officer, who then motioned his men to begin the search.

The soldiers began looking. Mrs. Stelle came to the door that led to the living quarters. “What is going on here?” she asked.

“Those are your living quarters back there?” asked the officer.

“Yes,” replied Mr. Stelle

“Then kindly ask the woman, who is your wife, I presume, to stand aside. We must search those rooms also.”

Mrs. Stelle motioned for his wife to join him. When she did so, the soldiers began their search of the kitchen.

Tad was not worried about the soldiers finding the pamphlets. He knew they were well hidden because he had slept on them last night. They were in layers beneath the straw in his pallet. What he was worried about was the form that he had been setting in type when David had arrived.

It was the opening page of a new pamphlet and if the British officer were to find it and read it, then Mr. Stelle might be arrested and deported to England to stand trial, which was all but the same as being convicted and sentenced to a long term in prison.

He heard one of the soldiers tell another to climb up the ladder and look in the loft. In a few seconds, he heard the soldier cry out, “There’s nothing up here but an old straw pallet and a drum.”

The officer began wandering about the shop and looked at this and that. He regarded with disdain a smudge of ink he picked up by brushing against a part of the press. “I suppose I should bill you for that smudge,” he said angrily.

He walked by the bench where Tad had been working and took a long look. Tad held his breath, hoping the officer would not be able to read the type, which appeared backward so that when the paper was put on it, the type would print correctly on the paper.

The officer paused at the bench for a few seconds and then returned to the counter. He was soon joined there by the soldiers who reported that they had found nothing suspicious.

“What about that type over there on the bench? What does it say?” the officer asked Mr. Stelle.

“It is nothing,” said Mr. Stelle. “We are working on a new almanac, and that is one page of it.”

“Oh, really? I think I should like to read your almanac. Bring that page of type here,” the officer ordered.

Mr. Stelle looked at Tad. “Do as the officer says, but be sure to be very careful.”

Tad moved to the bench. He noted the emphasis that Mr. Stelle had put on the words ‘be very careful.’ He gingerly picked up the form of type and started across the room. He was halfway across the room when he slipped and the type tray tipped. The type went clattering to the floor where it lay in a mixed-up jumble of several hundred pieces of tiny metal.

“What’s this?” cried the officer in amazement. “What happened?”

“This clumsy apprentice has pied the type,” groaned Mr. Stelle.

“What do you mean, ‘pied the type’?” shouted the officer angrily.

“Each word is made up of many small pieces of metal,” explained Mr. Stelle. “When they are dumped on the floor by mistake, we call that pied type. It cannot be read and all the work must be done over.”

“Oh, so it cannot be read. That is very interesting. Now I’ll not know whether that was a rebel pamphlet or a page for an almanac, will I?” said the officer sharply. “But wait! Where is the writing?”

“The writing?” asked Mr. Stelle.

“Come, come. Don’t dally with me. I know that whoever set that type must have had a copy of writing to follow,” said the officer.

He turned to his soldiers and ordered them to examine each scrap of paper in the shop. The soldiers looked at every piece of paper they could find, but they could turn up nothing that looked like a copy of written words, or at least nothing that looked to be important. Finally, the officer decided to give up the search.

“We are leaving now, but you can be sure that this place will be closely watched from now on,” said the officer. “And as for that clumsy apprentice, I’d say a good caning is in order. All apprentices should be whipped at least once a week. Then perhaps they’re not so apt to stand before their betters with a sullen look on their faces!”

He said the last while looking at David. Tad thought it was strange that the officer could not tell the difference between hatred and sullenness. When the officer and the soldiers were safely out of sight, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

“I was afraid we were in for it when he wanted to look at that type,” David said. “That was a happy accident when you tripped and spilled the type, Tad.”

Mr. Stelle laughed. “It was no accident at all. Tad caught my hint well enough and spilled the type deliberately. He hasn’t spilled the type or pied it for more than a year now.”

David looked at Tad with a new appreciation. “You really did it deliberately?” he asked.

Tad nodded yes, saying at the same time, “Wasn’t it funny when they were looking for the copy paper?”

“Where is it?” asked a puzzled David. “I never thought of that until the officer did. Did you hide it?”

“No,” replied Tad, “I burned it yesterday.”

“But how could you know what to set if you didn’t have the paper?” asked David.

“Tad memorizes what’s on the paper and then destroys it. He sets the type for the pamphlets from memory,” said Mr. Stelle, who was obviously proud of Tad’s ability.

Tad knelt down and began picking up the pieces of type on the floor and putting them back on the tray again. “It may have been a good idea, but it’s going to take many hours to sort out each letter in this mess,” he said glumly.

“Yes,” smiled Mr. Stelle, “and I should get back to work on the press. We can’t allow such interruptions to stop our work.”

“Wait!” cried David. “There is something I must ask first.”

“What is it?” Mr. Stelle asked.

“I need Tad’s help tonight on a mission for the Sons of Liberty,” David said softly.

Chapter 4 David’s Mission

“What do you mean a mission?” asked Mrs. Stelle.

“There’s good reason to believe that the British might march out tonight in an effort to get the supplies and Mr. Adams and Mr. Hancock,” replied David. “The people in Lexington and Concord must be warned.”

“That’s where the supplies are,” said Mr. Stelle, nodding his head in agreement.

“Right. And we haven’t been collecting those supplies for two years just to hand them over to the British as the result of a raid,” David said.

“But what can Tad do?” asked Mrs. Stelle. “He’s too young to fight against the British.”

“Packie was a drummer in the British army when he was my age,” said Tad quickly.

“We need to know which way the British are going and what they are up to,” David explained. “We have been watching them closely for the past week. Tonight, we will watch even closer. If Tad

comes with me, any British soldiers who see us will just think we are two apprentices out on a lark. We may be able to go places that older persons in the Sons of Liberty cannot.”

“What if you’re caught?” asked Mrs. Stelle.

“There’s no danger to it,” David insisted. “At the worst, all they would do is to lock us up for the night, thinking that we might be two runaway apprentices.”

“What if Packie comes by this evening and you aren’t here, Tad?” asked Mr. Stelle.

“Packie Lobsterback will not be by this evening,” said David in an I-know-something-you-don’t-know manner.

“Why? What has happened to him?” Tad asked.

“He’s probably been cooped up with the light infantry and the grenadiers. They’ve been relieved of all duty, and even now are in their barracks. They’re getting ready to march,” said David.

“Then there must be something to the rumors,” Mr. Stelle said. “It really does sound like they are going to march.”

“That’s why it’s important that Tad go with me tonight. There will be no trouble,” said David.

“I remember back in 1770 when the British shot people in the streets,” said Mrs. Stelle grimly. “Don’t tell me there is no danger.”

“There won’t be another Boston Massacre tonight,” argued David. “We don’t want to face the British troops here, though I would like to be at Lexington and Concord. There’s sure to be fighting there.

“I had hoped it would not come to this,” said Mr. Stelle sadly. “I had hoped that somehow the Continental Congress and the king’s ministers could reach some kind of a fair agreement.”

“The only kind of agreement the king’s ministers will agree to is to put chains around our necks,” said David defiantly.

Mr. Stelle turned to Tad and asked, “Do you want to do this kind of work tonight? It may be dangerous.”

Tad was elated. He had feared that Mr. and Mrs. Stelle would be against his going out into the night with David.

“Oh, yes,” answered Tad, his young face lighting up at the expectation of the mission. “I want to go more than anything else in the world.”

Mr. Stelle shook his head slowly back and forth. “Tad is almost a man now,” he said softly. “He is twelve years old and must begin to face life as a man. He is no longer our little boy who drags around the blue French drum.”

There were tears in Mrs. Stelle’s eyes. She did not argue with her husband on the point, but it was clear to Tad that she had not yet given in either, but it was enough to have Mr. Stelle on his side.

“What time will we start?” Tad asked.

“As soon as the sun goes down,” replied David. “I’ll come by for you. Then we’ll stop by my place for a moment. I have something to show you.”

“What is it?” Tad asked. David was always teasing his curiosity.

“You’ll see,” replied David. “I must go now. There are many people I must visit before tonight.”

Tad waved goodbye as David left the shop. Mr. Stelle said, “It would be a good idea if you finished picking up the type and then go to your loft to rest. You’ll want to be fresh for the night’s work.”

When Tad knelt down to pick up the rest of the type, Mrs. Stelle leaned over and touched his curly, brown hair. She started crying and fled from the room.

Tad was saddened by Mrs. Stelle’s crying. Mr. Stelle came over and began helping him pick up the pieces of type. “She’ll get over it in time,” he said. “She can’t bear to think of her little Tad being in danger.”

“There won’t be any danger, sir,” said Tad. “All we will do is walk around and watch.”

“Yes, I know,” replied Mr. Stelle. “Sometimes David can be a little rash. He doesn’t always consider the consequences of his actions. Part of being a grown person is learning to make judgments. Do not let David lead you into trouble.”

“I understand. I promise that we will be careful,” Tad said.

“Good. Now you had best go get some rest. It has been a tiring afternoon and tonight will be more so.”

Tad left the shop and climbed the ladder to his little space in the loft. He flopped down on the pallet and stared at the sloping rafters and roof. He could not sleep. He recalled that he really hadn’t been frightened when the British officer almost discovered the pamphlet that he had been setting in type. He wondered if he would be scared during the night.

He tried to fall asleep, but he could not. Finally, he got up and began polishing the French drum with a rag that he kept handy for that purpose. Sometimes when he had something on his mind and could not sleep, he would sit in the dark and slowly polish the drum until his heavy eyelids told him that he was sleepy.

He mulled over all that David had told him about the problems with King George the Third and the British. He had also listened to many men talk in the printing shop. Some of what they had to say was not very clear to him, but there was much that he understood.

He believed that the British were wrong to treat the Colonies so harshly. He thought it was right for the Colonies to organize the Continental Congress and to take steps to protect themselves.

He was at the same time, in agreement with Mr. Stelle, who always took the position that there was right and wrong on both sides, and that every effort should be made to solve the problems without bloodshed. Now that he had met Packie, he had friends on both sides.

Tad felt a hand on his shoulder and jumped from surprise. He looked around. It was Mr. Stelle. "It's time to get up and eat," he said.

Tad had gone to sleep with his head and shoulders draped over on the drum. "Have I been asleep very long?" he asked.

"No, maybe an hour," replied Mr. Stelle. "Come on now."

Tad got up and followed Mr. Stelle down the ladder. Mrs. Stelle had supper on the table.

She looked at Tad. "Are you really sure that you want to do this?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied as he sat down at the table.

"There will be no good come of this. Something awful will happen," she said as she placed Mr. Stelle's plate on the table.

Tad ate quickly, but he was barely finished when there was a knocking at the door of the shop. He got up and ran to the door. It was David.

"I got here a few minutes early," said David. "Are you ready to go?"

"Yes," replied Tad eagerly.

Mr. and Mrs. Stelle came to the door. Mrs. Stelle carried a coat. "Put this on," she ordered. "April nights can be chilly, and I don't want you to catch cold."

Tad was not happy about having to wear the coat. David didn't have one on, and the coat might just get in the way. Mr. Stelle nodded at Tad, and so he silently accepted it.

"You be careful," Mrs. Stelle warned him as she slipped the coat around his shoulders. "It just seems odd to me that all these men who go around talking about liberty and all that other high-sounding business have to send out children to do their job for them."

She hugged Tad warmly, and for the first time, Tad felt a little embarrassed. Mr. Stelle gravely shook his hand and said, "Remember what I said about judgment."

"There won't be any trouble," said David lightly. "All the Sons of Liberty will be out tonight. The British will find it hard to steal a march on us tonight."

Tad and David slipped out the front door of the shop just as the sun was settling below the horizon. The April day was turning into evening and there was a coolness to it that made Tad feel a little better about having the coat.

"Come on," said David. "Let's hurry over to my place. I want to show you my surprise."

No amount of pleading by Tad could get David to say what he had. When they finally arrived at the little shed in which David lived, he told Tad to close his eyes. Tad stumbled into the tiny, damp room.

"Okay, open your eyes," said David.

When Tad opened his eyes, it took him a second to adjust to the lack of light. "What is it?" Tad asked. "I don't see anything."

David fumbled around on a small table until he got a candle stub lit. "Now look," he said.

Tad saw it immediately. Lying on a little cot was a musket. It looked grim and deadly in the flickering candlelight.

"Where did you get it?" asked Tad.

"Oh, there are ways and means," said David with a toss of his long, blond hair.

"Don't be a tease," said Tad. He was a little irritated at the mysterious airs that David was putting on.

"There were a number of muskets smuggled into Boston," said David. "And I was lucky enough to get one of them."

"Is it loaded?" Tad asked.

"Of course, it is. I've got powder and balls for at least two more loads," replied David.

"Do you know how to load it and shoot it?" asked Tad.

"We practiced some," David said casually. "So I guess I could shoot it about as well as anyone."

"I don't think Mr. Stelle would ever let me have a musket. I mean, to keep for myself," said Tad.

"Old Mr. Foster doesn't care," laughed David. "I don't have a comfortable place to live like you do, but there's other apprentices who have it worse than I do. And besides, I am free to come and go on business for the Sons of Liberty. That's what's important."

"Are you going to take the musket with us tonight?" Tad asked. He was beginning to worry about the prospect of them wandering about Boston with a loaded musket.

"Of course not, silly. Even the British would get suspicious of two people dashing about in the night waving a musket around. No, it stays here and well-hidden." David wrapped the musket in an old blanket and then pulled up a board from the floor. There was a box beneath the floor and David carefully put the musket in the box and replaced the board.

He blew out the candle, and they hurried out into the alley. "Where shall we go first?" Tad asked.

"I'd guess that we should go over to the barracks and see what we can find there," replied David.

Chapter 5 The British Are Watched

Although there were few people out now that night had fallen, there were many shadows that seemed to ghost about. Tad watched them, thinking that they might be British soldiers. He and David drifted through the streets, but they saw nothing unusual.

When they got close to the barracks, they became more cautious. Their caution was rewarded when they saw two sentries pacing back and forth at their posts. The barracks were lighted with candles, but there were no sounds of singing or talking coming out of the windows and doors.

The two boys found an alleyway and hid behind a bin. They waited for what seemed to Tad to be a very long time. He found himself beginning to squirm, and for that he drew a rebuke from David. "Lay still," David whispered, "or you'll give us away."

"I wonder what time it is?" asked Tad in a low voice. "It seems like we've been here a long time."

"It's barely nine o'clock, I'd judge," replied David.

Just as Tad was beginning to think that the evening was going to be a long dull wait, a party of horsemen rode up to the barracks. They dismounted and entered the barracks.

"They're up to something," whispered David excitedly.

Several men came out of the barracks. They had torches in their hands. Then other men began coming out. Tad saw several drummers carrying their drums, but they were not playing any calls. The drums were silent.

"They're trying not to attract attention," Tad said softly. "Otherwise the drummers would have come out first and beat a call to arms."

David nodded in agreement. "I would never have thought of that," he admitted.

The soldiers formed up in ranks, row after row of men. Tad tried hard to pick Packie out from the other drummers, but the torchlight was too uncertain. Low voiced commands were heard, and the whole group turned and began marching in a long column away from the barracks.

"Keep down. They are going to march right by our hiding place!" David said with a quiver in his voice.

Tad watched as the soldiers marched closer and closer. He could see their faces by the light of the torches. They were strong-looking men. They were considered by many people to be the best soldiers in the British army and maybe in the world.

The drummers came marching by. The second one from the end was Packie. As they passed, Tad almost thought that Packie had looked into the alleyway and had seen him, but that was impossible, he assured himself.

When the column had passed, David asked, "How many did you count?"

Tad was embarrassed to say that he had not thought to count the number of soldiers. Then he remembered from his days of watching the soldiers drill on the common park. There were usually thirty-two soldiers in a company, though sometimes less.

"There were five companies of them," he whispered in reply. "So there must have been about one hundred sixty soldiers plus officers."

"I made it out to be one hundred forty-eight soldiers," said David.

"That's not enough to make an expedition though," said Tad. "If they are truly going to march out into the countryside, they would at least have the grenadiers with them."

"Maybe they are going to meet the grenadiers somewhere?" David asked.

"Probably," answered Tad, "unless it is just a patrol going out for the night."

"Then we should follow them and see where they are going," decided David.

"Are you sure?" Tad questioned. "Maybe we should just go to the Green Dragon and tell someone what we saw." Tad remembered Mr. Stelle's warning about David's rashness.

"What would we tell them? That we saw some British soldiers marching around? That wouldn't be any help at all. We've got to follow them. Are you coming?"

Tad thought for a second. David was right. They really had nothing to report that would be of any real help at all. And yet, he could not shake the feeling that maybe they shouldn't follow the soldiers.

"Yes," said Tad quickly as he got to his feet. "Let's go."

They followed the marching column, which was taking back streets to avoid attracting attention. Tad and David hurried through the dark alleys nearby.

"They seem to be headed for the dock," said David as they lay on the damp earth in an alley.

"That means they are not going out over the Boston Neck road. They must be going by boat," Tad mused. "Maybe we should go report now."

"We can't," argued David. "What if they turned around after we left and marched the other way? What if they are just going in this direction to fool people like us?"

David got up and began moving. Tad slowly and reluctantly got up and followed him.

David set a fast pace and Tad had all he could do to keep up with him. The excitement of discovering the British soldiers on the move and the fear of being caught were both dulled because of the effort needed to keep up with David.

"Where are we going?" Tad panted. He realized that it had been several minutes since they had seen or heard the soldiers.

David stopped for a rest. He too was feeling the results of the running. "I figure they must be heading for the dock. If so, maybe we can get there ahead of them. If the grenadiers are there and they all start loading on boats, then we can run back and report."

They rested for a few moments and then began hurrying through the night. Soon they reached the warehouses that screened the dock from the street. They stopped running. David motioned to a narrow gap between two of the warehouses. They got down on their hands and knees and crawled through the gap.

When they came to the other side, the dock was lighted by torches and there in ranks stood row after row of silent grenadiers in their huge bearskin helmets.

"There must be five hundred of them at least," said David as he stared in awe.

"No doubt about it. They are going to cross the river and land at Charlestown or somewhere on the coast," said Tad.

Presently they could hear the approach of more columns of soldiers. Then came the sound of many oars dipping in unison in the water. The grenadiers began loading in the boats. As they loaded, columns of light infantry marched from side streets to take their places on the dock.

A half-hour passed and then an hour. The loading of soldiers continued. As each boat was filled with soldiers, it moved off into the dark.

Tad and David remained in the narrow, cramped gap between the two warehouses. "Can you see which way the boats are going?" David asked.

"No," replied Tad.

"We've got to work our way around so we can get a better view of the direction they are going," said David.

"How can we do that?" Tad whispered. "The dock is well-lighted. They are bound to see us if we try to get any closer."

David eased out of the gap just enough so that he could peer down along the side of the building. There were several large boxes and barrels scattered near the wall.

When he pulled his head back in he said, "We can crawl along the side of the wall. Just a few feet away from here, we'll be able to get behind some boxes. We can crawl behind the boxes to the end of the dock. Once we get there, we can climb down into the water and wade under the dock. Then we can see where the boats are going."

"Won't they be able to see us from the boats when we are under the dock?" Tad asked doubtfully.

"No. We can hide behind the posts that hold up the dock. We'll be safer there than we are here."

Tad stilled his doubts about David's plan by reminding himself that David had been right thus far. He followed David's lead, which took him out onto the dock in full view of the British soldiers. The

soldiers had their backs to them and were too busy with the loading details to notice two shadows worming their way alongside the warehouse.

Tad was almost behind the first large crate when he heard one of the soldiers yell, "There's something moving around over there by that building."

"Quickly now," whispered David fiercely. "They've discovered us. Follow me."

The two boys crawled as fast as they could toward the end of the dock. Tad knew that they had to get to the end of the dock before the soldiers found them.

The soldiers, holding torches up high, approached the first crate where they had seen the movement. They began searching while the other soldiers continued to climb down into the boats. Tad could see David's feet ahead of him. Then the feet disappeared. He crawled forward and found the edge of the dock.

"Hurry," came an anxious whisper from below. "It's not deep at all. Be careful not to make a splash."

Tad rolled over the edge of the dock. He hung on to the planking with his hands. His legs thrashed about wildly until he found a pole. He locked his legs around the pole and slid down into the water. It was cold and set his teeth to chattering.

David was beside him. He grabbed Tad's arm and began pulling. The bottom was soft, but Tad did not sink. He followed David. They worked their way back under the dock.

Overhead, they could hear footsteps going back and forth. As they went farther back under the dock, the water got shallower, and Tad stopped worrying about drowning.

"What's this?" David asked in a low voice.

It was a small rowboat tied to one of the supporting posts. Near it were stairs that led up to a trapdoor in the dock. David pulled himself up on the stairs and then reached back to help Tad up. The two boys sat on the stairs in their wet clothes and shivered.

Between the supporting poles they could see dim forms climbing down into the boats. They could barely make out the boats as empty ones came in and full ones left. Just when Tad thought there would never be an end to the loading, he realized that it had become silent. There were no more boats, and he could not hear soldiers walking around above.

"Do you think its safe now?" asked Tad.

"I don't know," replied David. "Maybe we'd better wait a little longer."

They waited for almost a half hour before David cautiously stood up on the steps. "I'm going to see if the trapdoor will open so I can peek out."

Just as David was getting ready to push the trapdoor up, they heard footsteps overhead. They heard one of the soldiers say, "There's no one about. Let's go on."

David waited a few more minutes and then pushed on the trap door. It creaked alarmingly and Tad winced at the thought of the sound reaching the ears of the soldiers.

Up through the trapdoor climbed David. Tad followed him. Both boys sat in the dark on the now deserted dock. "What do we do now?" Tad asked.

"We've got to get back to the Green Dragon Tavern with this information. We've got to make sure that the people there know what's going on," replied David. "Come on. We haven't much time."

The two boys got to their feet and hurried along the dock. Tad's wet clothing clung to him and held every stray breeze. He wondered if his teeth were chattering because he was cold or afraid or both. They came to a corner of a building after walking through an alley. "Wait!" David cautioned. "Did you hear something?"

"No," Tad whispered.

"I think there's someone around the corner. Let's go back and find another way."

Tad followed David as they retracted their steps. Suddenly, there were shouts as several soldiers came around the corner.

"There they are! Get them!"

"It's a trap," David yelled. "Run, Tad, run."

Tad ran as fast as he could. Where is David he thought frantically when he saw that his friend had disappeared from his side? Then he heard footsteps behind him.

"Stop! Stop in the name of the king!" roared the voice behind him.

Tad felt strong hands grab him. "That's all the running you'll be doing tonight, Master Rebel!"

The soldier held on tightly and Tad's effort to squirm free was unsuccessful. Other soldiers came running up. One of them had a lantern. He held it up so they could see what they had caught.

"Look at this," one of the soldiers laughed. "We've caught ourselves a minnow. What's your name, boy?"

Tad hesitated before answering.

"Speak up, boy. What's your name?" another soldier demanded angrily.

"Tad."

"Ha, we don't have a minnow here. We have a tadpole. Come along, Tadpole. You can join some fish in a nice tank we have for you," said the soldier.

One of the soldiers looped a piece of rope around Tad's wrists and pulled him along.

They marched toward a building in which Tad could see many lights gleaming through the windows. He wondered what had happened to David. Had the British taken him also? He wanted to ask but he knew that if he did, the British might go back and try to find David if they didn't already have him.

Chapter 6 Tad Refuses to Talk

They entered the building, and Tad was locked in a room, but he was not kept there very long. Soon a soldier came and got him, and they marched down a long hall.

“You better tell everything you know, lad,” said the soldier in a kindly voice. “Captain Ackerly is what you’d call a bitter man, especially toward rebels, if you know what I mean.”

The soldier stopped in front of a closed door and knocked. A hard voice inside said, “Come in.”

The soldier escorted Tad inside and then left. He carefully closed the door behind him.

Tad quickly glanced around the room. There were two guards nearby who moved to stand on either side of him. Facing him was a desk, and behind the desk sat the captain. His eyes looked fierce, and his thin face had a cruel look about it. On the table-like desk in front of the captain was a lantern, several sheets of paper, an ink pot, writing quills, and a large pistol.

“What is your name, boy?” asked the captain sternly.

“Tad.”

“Your last name. Who do you belong to?”

“Tad Wheeler. I’m an orphan,” he answered, hoping to be able to keep from telling the captain about the Stelles.

“All rebels are orphans,” the captain jeered. “Who was the other person with you tonight and what was your mission?”

Tad remembered David’s saying that perhaps they could pass as just two apprentices who had sneaked off for a lark.

“We were just out for some fun,” Tad said. “We didn’t have any mission except to keep our masters from knowing.”

“Don’t lie to me, boy. You were sneaking around the docks. You were there to count soldiers and to see which way they went, weren’t you?”

Tad drew himself up to full attention. “I cannot answer that question,” he replied, fighting to keep his voice from quavering.

“You can’t answer or won’t answer? Which is it? Be quick about it, or you’ll regret it, I promise you,” threatened the captain.

“I cannot answer your question,” Tad said as the tears started to form in his eyes despite his efforts to keep from crying.

“By the eternal! I know a way to loosen your tongue!” shouted the captain. “Guards! Take off his coat and hold him.”

The guards followed orders and held Tad by the arms. The captain reached into a drawer in the desk and pulled out a long, leather strap.

"Either you start talking, or there'll be some pretty enough rebel dancing," he said as he got up and circled around behind Tad.

"I cannot answer your question," repeated Tad as he hunched his shoulders and braced himself to take the blow he knew was coming.

The strap whistled down hard across his shoulders. Tad bit his lower lip to keep from crying out.

"Begging your pardon, sir," one of the soldiers muttered. "But he's just a lad..."

"You keep your silence, soldier, or you'll get far worse for not obeying orders," snapped the captain. "And as for you, my fine young rebel, are you ready now to talk?"

Even though Tad was badly frightened, he vowed to himself never to talk. He knew that if he did talk, the Stelles could lose their printing license and maybe Mr. Stelle would go to prison. His friend David would be sure to go to prison. Worse than that, the British might use his testimony to convict some of the patriots in the Sons of Liberty, and they would be hanged.

Tad slowly shook his head no, and gathered his strength for what he knew would follow. The leather strap whistled again and the painful force of the whip drove Tad to his knees despite the efforts of the two guards to hold him up.

There was a knock at the door. "Come in," said the captain, who was distracted by the knock for a moment from his efforts to make Tad talk.

The door opened and several officers entered. The two guards came to attention.

"General Gates, sir! This is an unexpected honor," said the captain as he saluted the general who was in command of all the British soldiers in Boston.

"What, pray tell, is going on in here?" asked the general.

"We have a tough little rebel spy, sir," answered the captain. "But I'll warrant that he'll speak his piece by the time I'm done with him."

Tad pulled himself to his feet and turned to face the general. He tried to stand at attention, but the effort caused the newly made welts on his back to begin stinging. Even so, Tad was firm in his resolve not to let the general see him cry.

"Is that blood on his back?" asked the general as he circled Tad and peered intently.

"Just a touch, sir," answered the captain as he tried to nudge the leather strap under the papers on the desk.

"Did you whip this boy?" asked the general with no little bit of astonishment in his voice.

"Just a touch, sir. Just a touch to remind him of his duty to the king. That's all, sir," replied the captain.

“And did he talk?” the general continued.

“Not yet, but he will. These rebels are all alike. Give them a taste of the whip and they dance smart enough,” said the captain with a sideways glance at Tad that promised more of the same when the general and his officers had gone.

“Does it ever occur to people like you that this sort of business makes what you call rebels less than satisfied with their duties to the king?” asked the general wearily. “It’s no wonder Sam Adams can build such a following of people when we have officers who are doing his job for him.”

“But, sir?” interrupted the captain.

“Silence!” roared the general. He turned to one of his aides and ordered, “I want this boy returned to his cell. Then in the morning, release him. And see to it that those welts on his back are treated and that he’s given something to eat.”

“Begging the general’s pardon, sir,” the captain began anxiously, “but he knows about our troop movements. If he’s released he may get word to the rebels.”

“By tomorrow, captain, there will be no need for further secrecy. And I should like to inform you that the gentlemen in the British army are not in the habit of making war against children, even determined ones such as you more than likely have here. If any further business of this nature comes to my attention, you’ll have reason to regret it. Do you understand?”

The captain came to attention and saluted as he acknowledged the order. The general approached Tad again and put his hand on Tad’s shoulder and gently turned him around so he could again see where the strap had bit into Tad’s back and brought two narrow bands of blood through his shirt.

The general, slowly shaking his head from side to side, turned and headed toward the door. Then he stopped and said to one of his aides, “Stay with the lad until he is taken care of, and see to it that it is done properly.”

The aide and the two guards ushered Tad out of the room after the general had gone. They took him to the room where he had been held briefly before being taken in for questioning. The aide said, “Keep the lad here for a while. It won’t be long before dawn, and get him something to eat.”

The two guards snapped to attention and saluted. “You’ll be all right now, lad,” said the aide. “You are a plucky little fellow. Good evening.”

When the aide had gone, one of the guards said, “Here now, let’s get that shirt off and do some attending to those stripes. The captain laid on some good hits with that strap.”

Tad winced as the shirt stuck momentarily to the welts and then was gently pulled free by the guards.

“That wants some grease on it, I’d say,” said the guard who had spoken first. He turned to the other guard and said, “Go fetch some grease from the cook. A handful ought to do the trick well enough.”

The guards finished spreading the grease over the welts and found Tad a crust of bread and some water. They left the room saying that they would return soon to release him.

They left a candle burning. It wasn't much of a candle, and was already beginning to flicker as candles do when they are nearly burned out.

Tad worried about David. He wondered if David had escaped and then had gone to the Stelles to tell them about his being captured.

He hoped David had kept silent. Otherwise the Stelles would begin looking for him, and the captain would quickly have two more names of people to be questioned.

The grease on his back seemed to take away some of the stinging sensation. While he waited for the guards to free him, he thought about the two stripes that must now be on his back. He knew that whipping was common enough in Boston. It was considered part of the training of apprentices. He had seen the British punish their own soldiers with brutal whippings.

Mr. Stelle had never whipped him, Tad thought gratefully. He vowed to himself that no man would ever take a strap to him again.

He picked up the crust of bread and began munching on it while he waited. Once or twice he thought he heard scurrying around the room. It is the smell of the bread, Tad thought. It's bringing out the rats. At that moment, he glanced over at the candle and saw with alarm that it was nearly burned out. Where are the guards, he wondered?

He felt alone and frightened as a terrible possibility came into his mind. If David had been captured and was being held somewhere in the barracks, the Stelles would have no way of knowing what had happened. What if the guards did not return at all?

The wax from the candle had run down over the wooden candleholder and onto the small table. It was clear enough that the candle would go out, and Tad would be left in the room with no light unless the guards returned quickly.

He began searching about the room for a club or a stick to use as a weapon if any rats might come close. There was nothing handy. He tried to pull the chair apart so he could use a leg as a means of defense, but he was unable to wrench it apart.

As the candle finally sputtered itself out, Tad desperately looked around the room for any possible means of escape, a possibility that he had not considered until now. There were no windows in the room, and the walls looked to be too strong.

The candle went out and the room was dark. Tad folded his legs up on the chair and sat cross-legged. His imagination told him that the scurrying noises were both louder and more frequent.

The door to the room sprang open with a loud noise, and the light from a lantern flooded into the room. Tad was startled by the noise and the light. He could not see at first who had come into the room. He was relieved. It must be the guards coming to release him. He could go home now. As never before, he wanted to be wrapped up in his blankets and snug against the chimney in the Stelle's loft.

"Can I leave now?" Tad asked hopefully.

The person standing behind the upheld lantern laughed bitterly, and then strode into the room. Tad jumped to his feet. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead that had nothing to do with the fact that the room was cool and that he was without his shirt.

“Captain Ackerly!” blurted Tad in despair.

“Very observant, young man. Very observant, indeed. I never told you my name and yet you know it. A sign of a well-trained spy, I must admit. The rebels are improving,” said the captain as he set the lantern down on the table.

“Have you come to free me?” Tad asked.

“Not exactly,” laughed Captain Ackerly.

“But the general said I was to be released,” argued Tad.

“Oh, you will be, my word upon it,” said the captain as his voice turned soft and yet more menacing than when he was shouting.

“But first of all, there are a few matters to be taken care of, and never let it be said that I was one not to attend to matters.”

Captain Ackerly reached behind his back and produced a leather strap. He allowed the strap to uncoil. “Now you’ll pay for getting me into trouble,” he sneered.

Tad moved so as to put the table between himself and the captain. The captain followed him, and they slowly circled the table. “Don’t be stepping away from what you deserve,” said Captain Ackerly bitterly.

They circled the table again. The captain’s anger became too much for him to control. He whipped the strap through the air, trying to reach Tad with it, but he missed. Tad started to make a dash for the door, which had been left open by the captain in his eagerness to gloat over the boy. The captain quickly blocked off the opening by moving between Tad and the door.

Captain Ackerly reached down in a pocket with his free hand and pulled out a pistol.

“Now sir, hold fast or I swear I’ll shoot you,” ordered the captain.

Tad stared at the gun. He believed the captain would shoot him and yet, if he did stand still, Tad feared that the beating would be so severe he might not survive anyway.

“You’ll not beat me!” Tad shouted. “I’ve never been beaten except for what you tried earlier. I’d rather die first.”

The captain cocked the pistol and aimed at Tad.

“If you shoot me, the general will find out,” said Tad.

“Oh, no. I’ll simply report that you tried to escape. Besides, do you really think generals have nothing better to do than looking out for the interests of rebel brats?” asked Captain Ackerly.

Tad made a desperate lunge for the lantern on the table. The pistol barked with a deafening roar. Tad was conscious of the ball passing with a rush just inches from his head. He grabbed the lantern and threw it at the captain with all the strength he could muster.

The lantern hit the captain and knocked him down. Tad ran from the room with the vision of the lantern bursting into flames imprinted on his mind.

He ran down the hall. The two guards turned a corner and Tad almost ran into them. He darted between them and for a second they hesitated. Then the guards saw smoke coming out of the room where Tad had been held prisoner, and they dashed that way.

Tad found a window partly open and squeezed through it. He dropped to the ground and ran. The cold April air felt good on his bare shoulders and back. There were no sentries outside. Tad ran as hard as he could to get away from the building.

Chapter 7 An Escape Is Planned

There were few people about in the streets and no British patrols. Tad ran as quickly as he could to the printing shop. There was a candle burning in the window.

As Tad hurried breathlessly up to the door, it burst open and both Mr. and Mrs. Stelle popped out into the street. He collapsed wearily in their arms. He was exhausted.

The Stelles helped him into the shop and then on back to the kitchen. When Mrs. Stelle saw his back, she cried out, "Look at his back! Tad, oh, Tad, what have they done to you?"

Tad struggled to sit down on a chair. His head flopped tiredly down on his arms. Then he raised his head and asked, "Is David safe?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Stelle. "He came to see us during the night. When he told us that you had been captured, we had thought to try to find you. but one of the leaders of the Sons of Liberty advised us to wait until morning because the British would probably release you then."

Mr. Stelle was trying to explain to Tad how David had escaped being captured, but Tad no longer heard him. He was nearly asleep.

"What happened to his back?" Mrs. Stelle asked.

"Never mind about that. Let us get some warm water and wash those wounds and then cover them with a clean cloth so he can lie down and sleep," said Mr. Stelle.

While Mrs. Stelle went to get water, Mr. Stelle examined the two welts more closely. He could see that someone had tried to cover them with grease. As he thought about the way the welts had to have been caused, his eyes narrowed and a look of great anger passed across his face.

They put Tad on their own bed. Mrs. Stelle sat by the bed most of the morning and on into the afternoon. It was not until evening that Tad began to stir. When his eyes opened, he at first did not recognize where he was. He sat up quickly and then grimaced as his back sent a sharp reminder of the leather strap.

Mrs. Stelle had stepped out of the room for a few moments to prepare supper. Tad could hear voices coming from the other room. He slowly eased himself up from the bed and walked over to the door.

David and Mr. Stelle were sitting at the table. "How are you feeling?" Mr. Stelle asked.

"I'm all right," replied Tad as he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and sat down at the table.

"There's been a great battle at Lexington and Concord," David said eagerly. "And the British got beaten badly."

Tad looked at Mr. Stelle for confirmation. "It's true," nodded Mr. Stelle. "The British are bringing a great many wounded men over now from Charlestown."

"What happened?" Tad asked, suddenly feeling regret that he had slept through a battle.

"We don't know for sure yet," answered Mr. Stelle. "But it seems that the Massachusetts militia met the British and drove them back into Boston. Some people are claiming that the militia companies have the city under siege."

"Has there been any word about people being hurt?" Tad asked.

"You mean did the British drummer get hurt, don't you?" David said bitterly.

"Yes, I hope he is all right," Tad said as he started eating hungrily from the dish of food set in front of him by Mrs. Stelle.

"How can you feel that way when the British hurt you the way they did?" David insisted.

"It was not Packie who hurt me," answered Tad. "Not all the British are bad. Even General Gates tried to help me."

"You saw General Gates last night?" David asked.

Between bites of food, Tad told David and the Stelles what happened to him after he had been captured.

Mr. Stelle pursed his lips and looked thoughtful. "This is more serious than I thought. This Captain Ackerly sounds like a dangerous man to me, and we don't know how badly he was hurt. It might be a good idea if you were to stay out of sight for a few days, or at least until we can find out more information.

“And you never told the captain who I was even though he whipped you,” chimed in David admiringly. “That was very brave.”

Tad blushed. “I was never so scared in all my life,” he replied. “But what about Packie? I don’t need to hide from him, do I?”

“He’s a Redcoat, just like all the rest. You can’t trust him,” said David.

“I don’t know if David is right or not, but we had best not take any chances,” counseled Mr. Stelle.

Mrs. Stelle broke into the conversation. “There’s been enough talk here for one night. Tad, go wash up as best you can, and then you should go back to bed. Staying out of sight for several days will give you a chance to catch up on your rest.”

After Tad washed and had carefully climbed the ladder to the loft, he lay down on his stomach on the pallet. Sleep was slow in coming. He found the rag that he used to polish the blue French drum.

As he polished the drum, he considered that if Captain Ackerly should ever discover that he lived with the Stelles, then Mr. and Mrs. Stelle would probably be put in prison, or at least deprived of their license to print. The king’s authorities allowed no one to own or use a printing press without a license.

Mr. Stelle had been greatly swayed to the cause of liberty as a result of the licensing. The printer often explained how it was wrong for the king’s representatives in the colonies to threaten printers with revoking of their licenses for printing the truth.

That must not be allowed to happen to the Stelles, Tad thought as he polished the drum. He would have to go away at least for a while. If there was an army forming to blockade the city, then he must get through the British post at the narrow land neck that connected Boston with the mainland or else find some means of crossing the Charles River.

Of course! That was the answer. He remembered the small boat he and David found under the dock. He could cross the river in it and then hike the rest of the way. He would take his drum along. The gathering American army would need drummers.

When Tad awoke the next day, his back felt stiff and sore. He dressed and climbed down the ladder, and started to go out into the shop. He could hear Mr. Stelle operating the press and he was eager to get back to work.

Mrs. Stelle came in from the porch. “Oh, you’re up. Good. I’ve saved back some porridge for you. Sit down and eat.”

“Yes, ma’am,” replied Tad. “Then I’ll go out and help Mr. Stelle with the press.”

“Oh, no,” replied Mrs. Stelle quickly. “It might not be safe for you to be seen. There have been British patrols through the street and by the shop all morning.”

Tad ate his porridge and cleaned the dish and spoon. Then he swept the back porch. While he worked, he thought about the plan he had put together last night.

It would mean leaving the Stelles, and Tad felt sad when he thought about it, but there seemed to be no choice. At least, he considered, it would not be for long. Surely the British king would see that the Americans were serious and somehow put matters aright. Maybe in a few weeks, he could come back.

Tad returned to the table and sat down and began reading a book that Mr. Stelle had placed there as a gentle hint for him to take advantage of the enforced idleness by improving his mind. Tad didn't even get to look at the title of the book. He heard the shop doorbell ring.

He got up and peeked around the corner. It was David. He heard David say, "Where's Tad? There's much news!"

Mr. Stelle brought David into the kitchen. "You are up and around," said David with considerable satisfaction. "They can't keep a good Yankee down, can they?"

"What's happening?" asked Tad eagerly.

"The Redcoats took a horrible drubbing from our boys," said David proudly. "They got chased all the way back from Concord, losing men right and left, and now there are supposed to be thousands of Massachusetts militia just outside Boston. The British are penned in here."

"And then so are we," said Mr. Stelle thoughtfully.

"It won't last long. The militia will soon drive the British from the city," David bragged.

"There's only the narrow neck to be defended," replied Mr. Stelle. "And there are more than enough troops and cannon to hold it until British reinforcements come by sea. I'm afraid I cannot see the end of this."

The bell over the shop door rang again. "Someone's here!" said David.

"Quickly, Tad, up into the loft with you," ordered Mr. Stelle softly. "And you, David, come along with me. If it's a search party, you can pass as my apprentice."

Tad clambered up the ladder as quickly as he could. Mr. Stelle and David returned to the shop. Mrs. Stelle took up station in the kitchen doorway. She had a broom in her hand and she looked determined enough to take on the entire British army if necessary.

Tad lay on his stomach, straining his ears to hear what was happening below. He heard a shout from the printing shop and an answering roar of anger.

It was Packie! David and Packie must be arguing, Tad thought. He climbed down the ladder. He did not want his two friends to fight each other, even if one was a rebel and the other a Redcoat.

"So, he's not here, is he?" Packie said angrily when Tad came through the door. Packie wore a big bandage on his hand and there was a scratch on his face. "Why did the likes of you want to lie to poor old Packie?" he asked Mr. Stelle.

"There's been trouble that you know nothing about," replied Mr. Stelle. "I tried to protect Tad."

“So there’s been trouble, has there? Well, I’d say that’s the truth of the matter and then some. I thought all the trouble was on the other side of the water from Boston.”

Mr. Stelle looked at Tad. “He may as well hear the whole story and from you, Tad.”

“No!” cried David. “He can’t be trusted.”

“Oh, listen to that kind of talk about being trusted, would you? He’s like those who shot us down while skulking around behind stone walls instead of coming out into the open and fighting like men,” roared Packie.

Mrs. Stelle quieted the storm by a warning and a slightly raised broom. “There’ll be no fighting in my house,” she said.

Packie turned to Tad. “Well now, good friend. Out with it. What happened?”

“Wait!” said Mr. Stelle. “Let us go into the kitchen where we can talk easier, and there are fewer people to see.”

When all had seated themselves at the table, with Tad and David on the ledge in front of the fireplace, Tad told his story.

“So that’s the way of it,” muttered Packie when Tad finished. “That explains why there’s orders out to question all the apprentices in Boston. I thought it was just to keep them from trying to make an uprising here in Boston so the militia could rush into the city while we were busy putting down the uprising. Captain Ackerly is a man who it’s not wise to have come up against.”

“You say they are checking the apprentices?” Mr. Stelle asked.

“Aye, they are going from shop to shop,” replied Packie.

“Then we’ve got to find a hiding place for Tad and quickly before the soldiers get here,” responded Mr. Stelle.

“It won’t do any good,” countered Packie. “The city of Boston is not that big and there’s many more troops coming. Captain Ackerly will not rest until he’s found Tad or has torn Boston to pieces in the try. No, Tad’s got to get away to the mainland if he’s to be safe.”

“Then I trust that you are not going to turn him in?” Mr. Stelle asked.

“He’s my friend, and I won’t be turning in a good friend,” answered Packie with much conviction. “Besides, it wouldn’t be fair. I don’t think that lad should be blamed for having been led astray by others.”

Packie stared balefully at David when he mentioned being led astray by others. David started to answer, but Tad stopped him by placing a hand on his arm.

“Now as to the means of escape,” continued Packie, “that is a tidy problem. The road from Boston to the mainland is well guarded, as you can see if you try to pass that way. No, the lad has got to go by sea. We’ve got to find a boat, smuggle him to the boat, and row him across the river.”

"I know where there is a boat," Tad said. "Remember, David? When we were hiding under the dock?"

"Of course," replied David. "I had forgotten it. You can't row yourself across the river, and I have done it so many times. We'll go together and once we are on the other side, we'll join the American army."

"I don't mind helping Tad to escape, even if he's going to join the rebels, but I don't think I can help this Son of Liberty escape," said Packie angrily.

"What are you all talking about?" cried Mrs. Stelle, who could hold back her anger no longer. "Tad is only twelve years old. What kind of world is this when children have to run for their lives? I won't permit it, not for a second."

"These be unsettled times, ma'am," nodded Packie. "But there's no second choice that we want for the lad. If Captain Ackerly gets hold of him, there's not much future for him and that's the truth of the matter."

"Couldn't we maybe explain to the authorities that Tad was guilty of being nothing more than a disobedient apprentice?" Mr. Stelle asked.

"That might have worked," said Packie as he shook his head. "But not after yesterday. There's too many fine English lads still lying out alongside the road to Lexington and Concord for any sweet reason to be applied now."

"Then we've gone beyond reason," said Mr. Stelle sorrowfully.

"Aye, though some claim the matter will be settled without war, I think that's what it's come to now," replied Packie.

"Good enough and about time!" said David happily.

Packie stared back at David. "Don't be cheering for war until you've seen its miseries."

Tad broke into the give and take between Packie and David. "Then we should leave tonight. As soon as it's dark, we can slip down to the dock, climb down through the trapdoor and row over to the mainland."

Packie raised his hand slightly and smiled at Tad. "It's a good plan except for two small matters. First of all, the soldiers are still stirring around like hornets. Let a day pass and things will calm down a bit. Secondly, how do you know the boat is still there? That has to be checked."

"Will you do this for us?" Mrs. Stelle questioned.

"Aye, and tomorrow night I'll come back and take Tad to the boat. That way, if we're stopped, I can claim he's my prisoner."

"And I'll be there to make sure that Tad gets to the boat," added David.

"What if you get caught?" Mr. Stelle asked Packie.

"Why, then it's a rope around my neck and a short swing of it," laughed the soldier.

Mr. Stelle looked at the red clad soldier. "What a pity that good friends must end up at war against each other."

"Until tomorrow night then," said Packie as he bowed his head slightly to Mr. Stelle.

Chapter 8 The Escape Attempt

All through the next day Tad hid in the loft. David returned to the Stelles' early in the morning with a light bundle of his belongings and the carefully wrapped musket. Mrs. Stelle took one look at the long object and demanded to know what it was. When she found out, the musket was taken out to a small woodshed and hidden.

The streets were full of British patrols. Numerous people came by to discuss the swift-paced events that had overtaken their lives.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, a British patrol of four soldiers and an officer entered the shop and demanded to see all of Mr. Stelle's apprentices. When Mr. Stelle said that David was the only apprentice he had, the officer looked at David carefully. He said that David did not fit the description of the apprentice they were looking for.

When Tad crept down from the loft so that Mrs. Stelle could change the dressings on his back, Mr. Stelle told him of the visit.

"If the officer thinks David is our apprentice, then maybe they won't come back again, and Tad won't have to leave us," said Mrs. Stelle.

Mr. Stelle shook his head. "Unfortunately, not everyone in Boston is in favor of our cause. There might even be neighbors who would say that David is not really our apprentice, but that another boy is, and then the search would be more thorough, indeed."

The day seemed to Tad as if it would never come to an end. He fretted over whether Packie could get away from his duties as a soldier in order to help them escape. He wondered if the boat had been moved from under the dock. The more he fretted, the longer he sat cross-legged on the floor of the loft and polished the blue French drum.

Finally, when it was well past ten o'clock at night, Mr. Stelle heard a noise at the door of the shop. It was Packie. Tad quickly scrambled down from the loft. He brought his drum with him.

"The boat's still there, and the coast seems to be clear enough," grinned Packie. "And it's a perfect night for what has to be done. There's not been a darker night this year, and there's a mist arising on the river."

David went to the woodshed and got his musket. When he returned to the Stelles' kitchen, he unwrapped the weapon. Packie saw it and immediately protested.

"I'll not be having a Son of Liberty at me back with a musket," he said. "This night's work will be chancy enough without that!"

"And I'll not go one step with this Redcoat without the musket," argued David.

Mr. Stelle raised his arms to silence them. "David will need the musket if he's to join the army. I think that Tad has shown that he has good sense, and I expect David to listen to him even if he is older than Tad."

Packie grumped about for a few seconds, but the issue seemed to be settled. "Well, let's get started. We have a ways to go, and it won't do to be caught by the dawn."

Mr. Stelle went into the bedroom and returned with a leather bag. "You'll find most of what you need in this kit," said Mr. Stelle. "It's old, but I've kept it up and it will serve you well."

The leather pouch was held shut by a small strap and buckle. The worn leather was soft to the touch. There was a long, leather strap attached to each end. Tad slipped the strap over his head so that the pouch hung at his right side.

"There's a folding cup, a wooden bowl, and a spoon in it, along with a pair of stockings and a pair of coveralls," continued Mr. Stelle.

"And I put in a bar of soap and a comb. Mind that you use both every day," added Mrs. Stelle.

Along with the leather pouch, there was a rolled-up woolen blanket with a twine rope strap.

Tad put this strap over the same shoulder as the kitbag strap. Then he put the drum strap over his other shoulder. The straps crossed in front, a combination of leather and twine that brought a smile to Packie's face.

"It's not the same as the British army, that's for certain, but I guess it will have to do."

Mrs. Stelle put Tad's hat on his head and then stepped back. Mr. Stelle put his arm around her shoulder. They looked at Tad. Mrs. Stelle had tears in her eyes.

"It's best that we be hurrying now," said Packie, who had already started for the front door of the printing shop.

"Can you manage the load?" Mr. Stelle asked Tad.

"Yes, sir. I think I can. I'd best be going now. Thank you both for everything," said Tad as he felt a big lump beginning to come up in his throat and tears beginning to form in his eyes.

He sprang forward and both Mr. and Mrs. Stelle clasped him as tightly as they could. When they pulled apart, Mr. Stelle slipped an object into Tad's hand and whispered to him to put it in his kitbag.

David, feeling awkward at witnessing the parting, started to join Packie at the door of the shop when Mrs. Stelle called out, "Wait, David."

She handed him a cloth sack. "There's food in there for the two of you, in case there's no one to feed you tomorrow."

"Thank you, ma'am," replied David.

Mrs. Stelle reached forward and hugged David, saying as she did so, "I know there's no mother to worry about you. When this is over you are welcome to come back here and live with us and Tad."

David sniffled a bit and then broke away gently to head for the door, where the rest were waiting. "Thank you, ma'am. Thank you."

"It's all clear," said Packie. "Let's be about our business."

"Mr. Packie?" Mrs. Stelle whispered.

"Yes, ma'am?"

"May God bless you for helping our Tad and David."

"Nothing to it, ma'am. Tad's the only friend old Packie's got this side of London. It wouldn't be proper to allow him to be clapped up in some prison." Packie glanced at David and then added, "Though there's some what might profit from it! Come now, let's be on our way."

They melted into the dark shadows of houses across the street. When they reached the end of the block, Tad stopped for a second and looked back at the darkened windows of the printing shop.

"Here now," said Packie gruffly. "There's no time for looking back. You'll be taking on a man's job now. Come on."

Tad turned and hurried along beside Packie. He was glad for the cool night air upon his face, which was burning from embarrassment because of the soldier's rebuke.

As if sensing Tad's embarrassment, Packie whispered, "You're a lucky lad to have such a fine home to be leaving."

They hurried along through alleyways and side streets. They heard British patrols, but none were close enough to challenge them. Soon they were close to the dock where the boat was hidden.

A shout rang out!

"Halt! Who goes there?"

None of the three could see the challenger. Packie whispered to David, "Quick now, give me the musket."

"No," replied David softly as he clutched the musket tightly in his hands.

"Don't be foolish. I'm not going to bash you with it," said Packie. "But maybe we can fool the patrol into thinking that I've got you two as prisoners. It may be your only chance to escape."

David hesitated for a second. Tad touched his arm and said, "Give it to him."

David sighed and handed the musket to Packie. "It's hard to stomach, letting a Redcoat march me about," gritted David.

The hidden voice sounded again. "Who's there? Identify yourselves and be quick about it."

"Identify yourself, and be just as quick about it or I'll whistle up the light infantry to find your hiding place," Packie shouted back.

"Are you on the king's business?" questioned the voice.

"That I am. And unless you show yourself this instant, I'll have to include you in my bag of fish," said Packie as he cocked the musket. The sound traveled quickly to the ear of the hidden party.

A figure stepped out of the shadows. Tad's eyes, accustomed to the night by now and trained to look for detail because of his work in the printing shop, caught a quick glimpse of a pistol in the stranger's hand.

"He's armed," warned Tad.

"I see the pistol," replied Packie.

The stranger put away the pistol and came forward. He was dressed in civilian clothes.

"I saw your cap and recognized you as a soldier," said the stranger. "Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Mr. Gerald Hollister, a citizen of Boston and a loyal subject of the king. What have you got here?"

"If you saw my cap in this night, then you're blessed with two good eyes. What I've got here are two young Sons of Liberty who are no friends of the king, I can assure you," said Packie as he nudged David with the muzzle of the gun.

"I'll get you for that," growled David.

"See what I mean, sir?" Packie asked. "They are not at all friendly. Now if you would be so good as to tell me what are you doing here and why are you carrying a pistol?"

"Doing my duty," answered Mr. Hollister. "The city is overrun with spies for the rebels. I thought I could be of some service to the king by doing some prowling about. The rebels shy away from uniforms so I thought I might have a better chance at catching them since even though we don't agree in thought, we do dress somewhat alike."

"I see," said Packie as he casually shifted the barrel of the musket until it was almost pointed at Mr. Hollister. "And as you can see, I've already caught me two. I'll just continue on my way and wish you good hunting, sir."

"There are two of them, and there may be more about. I'll accompany you to your headquarters," said Mr. Hollister.

"It's not necessary, sir," replied Packie. "And besides, how do I know if you're not really one of them, after all? Maybe I'd best be taking three prisoners instead of two?"

"I can assure you, soldier, that I am not a rebel. I work on orders from Captain Ackerly. If I turn in a report on you for not cooperating, you'll see very quickly that you made a mistake," said Mr. Hollister.

When he mentioned the name, Ackerly, Tad gave a start. Hollister was not just an ordinary Tory.

"If you're what you say you are, then you may accompany us as you like," replied Packie. "I'm only trying to do my duty, and that's hard enough after Lexington and Concord, I don't mind telling you."

Hollister seemed to hesitate for a moment. Then he laughed. "I can well understand your confusion, soldier. Let us hurry along. The first light we come to, I'll be wanting to look over your captives a bit. There's a possibility that one of these two young lads here is of special interest to the captain."

Tad looked at David. It was dark enough that neither boy could see the other's face clearly, but Tad knew David could sense his fear that Hollister would try to take him back to the captain.

"Do you have a description of the boy you are looking for?" Packie asked casually.

"Yes, I'll be able to know him well enough," replied Hollister. "He's carrying some stripes across his back."

Packie laughed. "There's more than one apprentice boy here in Boston who carries the mark of his master's displeasure across his back. Why that's so common as to be no identity at all."

"Possibly so. But come now, enough of this dawdling. I want to get a good look at these boys, and I want to see what's in the packages they are carrying," answered Hollister.

At that moment, David lunged forward and grabbed the musket away from Packie, who was caught off guard.

"You, over there by that Tory spy," David ordered Packie. "Now Mr. Hollister, put your pistol down on the pavement. Don't try anything or I'll shoot you."

Hollister carefully laid the pistol on the pavement. He turned to Packie and said, "Now look at what you've done."

"It's your fault," argued Packie. "I'd have turned them in by now if you hadn't come along."

"Silence," ordered David. "Now, down on your bellies. Be quick about it. There's nothing I'd rather do than shoot a Redcoat or a Tory."

Both Packie and Hollister did as David ordered. Then David touched Tad's arm and pointed toward the pistol. Tad picked it up and stuck it in his kitbag. Then both boys began backing away. There was a small alley a few feet away. When they reached the alley, David whispered, "Now, run!"

As they ran, they could hear Hollister shouting in an attempt to attract a British patrol. The two boys were not far from the dock where the boat lay hidden. Tad ran as fast as he could, but the drum, the blanket roll and the kitbag proved awkward. When they got near the dock area, David whispered, "You stay here. I'll go see if there are any sentries on the dock."

Tad crouched down in a doorway. He was grateful for a chance to catch his breath. David quickly disappeared.

Tad heard a noise and crouched even lower. He saw a shadow gliding toward him. He regretted that he had not taken Hollister's pistol out of the kitbag so it would be ready for use.

"Tad?" came the whispered call. "Come on."

Tad hurried out of the doorway to join David. "There's just one sentry," explained David. "We'll go down through the trapdoor and then cast off."

The two boys walked between rows of crates stacked near the dock. Soon they came to the trapdoor. David put down his musket and tugged with both hands on the iron ring. The door came up. Tad climbed down through the door. David followed, letting the door softly come down behind him.

They loaded their gear and David took a package of grease from his pocket. He spread the grease on the oarlocks so there would be no squeaking to give them away.

Just as Tad was leaning forward to cut the rope with David's knife, there was a noise of running boots on the deck above.

"Have you seen anything of two boys wandering about here?" came a sharp voice from almost overhead.

"Hollister!" Tad whispered.

Neither Tad nor David heard the guard's reply, but they did hear Hollister order, "Bring torches. I want this dock searched thoroughly."

"Quick, cut the rope," whispered David.

Tad sawed at the rope with the knife. In his eagerness to get away, he leaned out too far and almost fell out of the boat when the knife finally parted the rope.

Once free of the rope, the boat started to drift. Tad and David kept pushing against the poles holding up the dock, both to keep the boat from making noise by bumping them and as a means of getting the boat out from under the dock.

"Over here, sir," they heard a shout. "There's a trapdoor that leads down to under the dock."

"Keep down," warned David as the boat drifted out into the open water. David eased the oars into the water and gently rowed. Tad turned and looked back. He could see the torches and the dark shadows of men scurrying about on the dock.

Tad's hands nervously gripped the edges of the boat. He didn't relax until David had quietly rowed the little boat far out into the gray mist.

"Can you see anything?" Tad asked in a whisper, for he knew well that sound carries far over the water.

"No," replied David. "It's just like we were inside a feather mattress."

Tad turned so he could look out in front. No matter how much he strained his eyes, he could see nothing. He jumped when they both heard a strange creaking noise.

“What’s that?” they both whispered at the same time. David rested his oars and leaned forward with his head cocked slightly to one side. Tad anxiously scanned the gray mist.

“There it is again,” Tad whispered.

“Yes, I heard it. Where do you figure it is?” David asked.

“Somewhere up ahead, I think. It’s hard to tell.”

“Keep a sharp lookout. I’m going to begin rowing again,” David said.

His oars made a little splash as he dipped them into the water. The little boat began moving through the mist again.

“One good thing about the mist,” whispered David. “The British won’t find us out here.”

The creaking noise continued. Now it sounded much nearer. David slowed his rowing.

“I can see something!” Tad whispered. “Over there.”

“Where? I can’t see where you are pointing,” David said.

“Look back over my left shoulder,” directed Tad.

“I still can’t see anything, but I think we better get away from here.”

The boat shot ahead. David pulled again and again, putting all his strength into the effort. Tad glanced over his shoulder.

“Stop!” he all but screamed, but instead he choked out the word in a half-gargled whisper.

There was a loud bump. “What did we hit?” David asked quickly.

“It’s a ship. A big ship,” Tad moaned.

“We must have bumped into one of the British warships,” David said. “Hang on. We’ve got to get away.”

Just as David leaned into the oars, a voice rang out from up on the deck. “You, down there in that boat. Stand fast, or I’ll fire upon you.”

Both David and Tad heard the sharp sound of a musket being cocked, and then another shout, “Ho, officer of the deck. Boarders on the starboard bow. Turn out the guard.”

David rowed hard and fast alongside the ship. When he came to the bow, he cut sharply and rowed at an angle away from the ship. There was a flash of light dimly seen through the mist and a sharp bang.

“They’re firing at us!” Tad exclaimed.

“Keep down,” replied David. “We’ll be out of musket range in a minute.”

They heard shouts coming from the British ship. The growing numbers of lanterns looked like dimly lit fireflies bobbing about.

“Lower away a longboat,” came the voice of someone in command. “We’ll have us a bit of hare and hounds game this night.”

Tad could hear the creaking and groaning sounds of the pulleys as a boat was lowered from the ship. They both heard oars being powerfully dipped and then stroked through the water. The British longboat was somewhere near them.

Tad saw a soft glow, a light of some sort on his right. He started to call it to David’s attention when suddenly the glow got brighter and he could see someone standing.

David saw it too and whispered, “Duck!”

Both Tad and David slid down in the boat. Tad peered over the edge and watched as the British longboat ghosted silently by.

An officer, shrouded in a dark cloak, stood in the bow and behind him stood a sailor holding up a large lantern. The other sailors in the longboat were seated. Their oars were up out of the water. The longboat drifted silently by. The backs of the sailors faded into the mist and soon the soft glow of the lantern disappeared.

“They’re gone,” whispered Tad as he raised himself up.

David sat up and looked all about. “It was a close call,” he marveled. “If they had been any closer, we could have touched them with an oar.”

David waited a few moments and then began dipping the oars into the water. The going was slow because of the need to row carefully.

Tad lost track of time. Without even knowing it, he was drifting in and out of sleep. Then he started. His head, which had drooped downward, snapped up and he was instantly awake. “What did you say?” Tad asked.

“Shh,” came David’s reply, followed quickly with, “There’s something up ahead.”

Tad spotted what looked like a dark shadow. He turned and whispered to David, “I can’t tell what it is. Try to get closer.”

The boat suddenly lurched to a stop.

“David! What’s wrong?” Tad asked. “We’ve stopped.”

“We’re aground,” David replied happily. “We made it. We really made it.”

Tad lifted his leg over the side of the boat. His foot touched bottom. He hopped out of the boat and began tugging it up on shore. David joined him and they tipped the boat over so that it was propped up on a large rock.

They crawled under the boat to rest until dawn. Neither the cool, damp air nor the pebbles under them kept the exhausted boys from falling asleep.

Chapter 9 In the American Camp

Tad's eyes opened. At first, he was confused. For a few seconds, he did not know where he was, but his mind quickly dispelled the confusion. The sun was barely up. He could see across the river to Boston. He could also see a British warship held at anchor in the channel of the river. British sentinels paced back and forth on the deck of the ship.

"David, wake up. It's daylight." Tad had to shake David several times before he opened his eyes.

They crawled out from under the propped-up boat. "We'd better get out of here," David yawned as he stared at the ship. "They could easily land a party to catch us."

Quickly, they gathered up their gear and walked away from the boat. "Is it very far?" Tad asked.

"It's not far," replied David. "And there is a good road. We won't have to march over those two hills."

Tad looked in the direction David had pointed. There were two hills, one not far from the water's edge, and another, larger hill farther back toward the mainland.

"It still looks like an awfully long walk," said Tad doubtfully.

"I'll carry your drum for you," offered David.

"No. I'll carry it," replied Tad. "If we are going to go, let's start or I'll go to sleep standing up."

"Just like a horse," laughed David as he led the way. "Just look at the top of this first hill here. I'll bet you could see the Stelles' printing shop from up there."

Tad did not answer as he hiked along behind David. He was reminded now of how worried the Stelles must be. He wondered if Packie had gotten into trouble with Hollister. No, he thought. Packie was too smart to allow himself to get caught by the Tory or Captain Ackerly.

Half asleep and half into his thoughts, which were almost like dreams, Tad did not notice that he and David had traveled the length of the peninsula and were now approaching a narrow neck of land that linked the peninsula to the mainland.

They were in the middle of the narrow land bridge when they were challenged.

"Halt there! I say halt or in the name of the Continental Congress, I will surely lower your height by a head."

"Don't shoot. We've come from Boston to join the army," shouted David.

"Advance, real slow, and don't make any false moves," came the order from behind a partially caved-in stone barricade. Tad could see several musket barrels atop the wall and aimed in their direction.

The boys slowly stepped forward. As they did so, one of the soldiers behind the makeshift barricade laughed, "Why, they are only boys."

The soldiers, nine in all, came out from behind the barricade. They were dressed in work clothes. There was no attempt at a uniform appearance. Several of the soldiers carried clubs instead of muskets. One of them approached and said, "I'll just relieve you of that musket, young man."

David stepped back. "This is my musket and you'll not take it."

"Now don't be selfish, boy. You're too young to be toting a musket. You'll be obliged to turn it over to me, I think," replied the soldier.

Tad moved to David's side. "We're here to join the army," said Tad. "You leave David's musket alone. He can shoot as well as you, I'd venture."

The soldiers laughed, but they made no move to take David's musket or the other equipment that they were eyeing enviously.

"I guess we'd best take them back to headquarters. They might be British spies, you know," said one of the soldiers with a wink of his eye.

Having made the suggestion, the soldier was immediately voted to escort the two boys back to the headquarters. Tad was amazed at this. There was no order given. Instead, the soldiers voted on it, and the outcome was anticipated with much good humor.

"Come on, lads. We'll just march a way. Maybe we can find something to eat, though I must say, we've been here a day and a night now, and the food isn't too plentiful."

Tad and David followed the soldier. Tad realized that the soldier was barefoot and that his only weapons were a small knife stuck in his belt and the club, which also served as a walking stick.

As they walked, Tad struck up a conversation with the soldier. He told how he came to join the army. "I was plowing a field when the town militia came marching by," said the soldier.

"Their captain hailed me from the road, saying we're going off to fight the British and we need every man. So, I laid down the plow and told my wife to take care of the horse. Then I jumped the fence and went off to war."

"How did you fight?" Tad asked. "You don't have a musket."

"Well, I didn't do much fighting," admitted the soldier, "But I did an appreciable amount of yelling, marching, and running, all the way to Boston town. I hope all this ends in the next day or so. I've got to get back and get a crop in the ground, or we'll be hungry come this winter."

Tad could not help but compare the soldiers he had seen thus far on the American side with the British regulars he had seen drilling in Boston. The British soldiers were supposed to be the finest in the world.

And yet, thought Tad to himself, the Americans had forced the British to retreat from Lexington. Maybe there are better organized soldiers somewhere up ahead at Cambridge, he thought as he yawned sleepily.

The soldier noticed that Tad was nearly asleep and that David was beginning to lag behind. "Why don't you strike up a beat on that pretty drum of yours, lad?" asked the soldier.

Tad pulled out the drumsticks from the loop on the strap and began playing a marching beat. Both David and the soldier straightened their backs and squared their shoulders. David carried his musket sloped against his shoulder. In this way they marched, Tad leading, followed by David, and then the soldier, who, upon seeing David shoulder his musket, did likewise with the club.

The heat from the sun and the rubbing of the drum strap and the other straps soon caused the welts on Tad's back to begin hurting. He tried to shift the straps to stop the pain, but each attempt only irritated the welts even more. He glanced around at the sun and then realized that he was hot and thirsty. Being in the army was not all a matter of fancy parades, he thought.

A man on horseback came galloping toward them. He reined up when he reached them and cried out cheerfully, "Where's this splendid little army going?"

"General Putnam!" said the soldier with some surprise. Tad stared at the man on the horse. He doesn't look much like a general, thought Tad. He looks like a farmer.

"Where are you headed?" asked the general.

"I've got two recruits for the army from Boston town," answered the soldier.

The general urged his horse forward and then walked the animal in a circle around both Tad and David.

"Can you play that drum?" asked the general.

"Yes, sir," said Tad as he gathered his drumsticks into his left hand and raised his right hand in salute.

"What's this?" roared the general. "I do believe we've got a regular soldier here and not militia. You probably know more about the army than some of our officers. How old are you?"

"Twelve," replied Tad.

"A bit young! You'll have to wait a few years before you can become an officer. At any rate, we can use a drummer. I'd mark that drum as being an old French model unless I be mistaken. How'd you come by it?"

"It was given to me by Mr. Stelle. He served in the last war in the militia," answered Tad.

The general nodded and again walked his horse around Tad and David. "What's the matter with your back, son?" asked the general.

"The British did that, sir!" said David.

Tad was embarrassed by the attention being paid to his back. He wished that David would keep silent on the subject. He stared pointedly at David, but David ignored him.

"They captured him while we were trying to learn their plans the night before Lexington. They tried to make him talk, but he wouldn't do it," David said.

The soldier gently turned Tad around. "Look at that," he whistled. "What did the Redcoats hit you with?"

"They only hit me twice," said Tad. "And it was General Gates himself who stopped it."

General Putnam got down off of his horse. His heavysset face was red from anger.

Though angry, he said gently, "Here, lad, let me have a look." The general lifted the drum strap over Tad's head. He then took off the kitbag and the blanket roll.

The shirt stuck to Tad's back. He bit his lower lip in an effort to keep from crying out when the general pulled the shirt loose and took off the piece of cloth Mrs. Stelle had put on to cover the welts.

"Here boy, let's get you out of this shirt," said the general. Once free of the shirt, Tad felt better.

General Putnam handed the shirt to David and then returned to his horse and got a bottle out of his saddlebag. "Take a drink of this," ordered the general as he uncorked the flask-like bottle.

Tad took the bottle and sniffed it.

"It's water," laughed the general. "Though I suspect some strong cider might do more for you."

Tad took a long drink and would have taken more, but he remembered that David had not had anything to drink. He took the bottle from his lips and handed it to David, who eagerly raised the bottle and took a drink.

He passed it over to the soldier and when the soldier had taken a drink, the bottle was returned to the general. He shook it and said, "Well, there's enough left, I reckon." He poured the rest of the water over Tad's back.

"Now, young man! You let your friends here carry the drum and your other articles. You're going to ride into Cambridge behind me. Tie the sleeves of your shirt around your neck so you don't get sunburned."

"I'll meet you in Cambridge with your drum and kit," promised David. "I'll see to it that nothing happens to the drum."

The general mounted and then pulled Tad up behind him. "Hang on," ordered the general. "We're on our way to Cambridge."

It didn't take long for the general and Tad to reach Cambridge, but the trip was bouncy enough to convince Tad that he did not want to be a cavalryman. General Putnam took him to see a doctor, and then to meet General Artemas Ward, who commanded all the American soldiers.

General Ward had many questions to ask about the British in Boston, and while Tad was answering them as best he could, David arrived. After that, they were assigned; David as an infantryman to a Massachusetts regiment commanded by Colonel Prescott, and Tad as a drummer attached to General Ward's staff.

Both boys wanted to serve together in the same unit, but they cheerfully accepted their orders. Tad gave David half of the food Mrs. Stelle had packed for them. They shook hands. "Maybe I can get assigned to your regiment later," said Tad hopefully.

"I'll be listening for your drum," laughed David.

Tad did not have far to go to reach his new home. He stopped in front of a little tent just behind the headquarters. In front of the tent sat a young man with red curly hair and a sunburned face. He was frying bacon in a kettle and having a hard time of it.

He looked up at Tad and grinned. "Who ever heard of frying bacon in a kettle?"

"Are you Benjamin Morrison?" Tad asked.

"Yes, I am. Most people call me Ben though. Who are you?"

"I'm Tad Wheeler. I've just joined the army, and I was assigned to your tent."

Ben laughed and waved his hand at the little tent. "Welcome to your new home. I think it must be the smallest tent in the army, and you look like you're carrying enough gear for a regiment. We'll have to figure out how to build an addition to the tent, or you'll have to sleep with that drum on your stomach. Can you really play that drum?"

"Some," Tad said modestly. "I know how to beat six or seven calls on it. If I hadn't had to leave Boston when I did, I'd have learned more."

Ben was surprised to hear that Tad had come from Boston. "How did you get through the British lines?"

"David, he's my friend, and I came over in a rowboat last night. We nearly got captured by a warship, but we got away and landed near Charlestown," explained Tad.

"That sounds like a first-rate adventure. All I've done so far is trot around delivering messages and sit here burning bacon." He quickly grabbed the kettle from the fire as the bacon began sending up a column of smoke.

"It's not much of a breakfast, but since we're going to be tent-mates, you might as well start sharing the burnt bacon," he continued.

"I've got some food," said Tad as he slipped the drum and the rest of his baggage to the ground. "Mrs. Stelle packed it for me and David."

He reached in the bag and pulled out the cloth sack and handed it to Ben, and while Ben was opening the sack, Tad tried to push the pistol down under his coveralls.

"There's cheese and biscuits," said Ben happily. "We'll have a real feast. We haven't had any biscuits for two days now."

Tad wasn't listening to him. A shiny piece of metal in the kitbag had caught his eye. He pulled it out of the bag and looked at it. It was a gold coin. Tad remembered Mr. Stelle pushing something in his hand when they said goodbye.

“What’s that you’ve got?” Ben asked.

Tad hesitated a second and then handed it over to Ben, who quickly bit down hard on the coin. He spat out the bitter taste from his mouth and announced, “It’s real. I haven’t seen many gold coins before. It must be worth ten or twenty pounds or even more. How did you happen to come by it?”

Tad explained about the Stelles and how Mr. Stelle had given him the coin. “Put it away, quick!” urged Ben. “There’s men in this camp who would cheerfully bash your head for such a prize. We’ve got more than one here who is more interested in their pocketbook than patriotism.”

“What’s this about patriotism and pocketbooks?” came a gruff voice behind them. Both Tad and Ben were surprised.

“Sergeant Cutler! I didn’t hear you coming,” said Ben in a bitter tone of voice. “Maybe someday we’ll put a bell around your neck, like a cat, so the birds will know when you’re around.”

“And are you the one who wants to do the belling?” asked the sergeant.

“I think I could,” replied Ben “I’m certain that I’m disposed to do it. The only problem is that maybe your neck is better suited for a rope than a bell.”

“Ho, listen to the rascal talk. There’s a law against slander, you know. Now, who’s your young friend here?”

“This is Tad Wheeler. He’s just joined the army, and I was warning him against the likes of you.”

“Oh yes, this would be our young hero from Boston. I’ve heard all about you, I have,” said Cutler.

“What’s this? What have you heard?” asked Ben with a great deal of interest.

“Our new recruit is the talk of the headquarters. He bears a commission from the British army,” said Cutler.

Ben turned to Tad. “What’s he talking about?”

“It’s nothing,” said Tad, who was at that moment wishing he could have gagged David when they were being questioned by General Ward and the others.

“Our hero is properly modest,” said Cutler. “And with a story like he’s told, modesty is not out of place. Haw! What a lie!”

“That’s not true,” Tad said quietly but firmly.

“What are you two talking about?” demanded Ben as he threw his hands up in a gesture of frustration.

“He’s told all the officers that he got captured on the night before the big battle at Lexington and that the British whipped him when he refused to answer questions. Isn’t that a pretty story? More likely he’s a British spy.”

“Is that true, Tad? Did they really beat you?” asked Ben.

Tad hunched down and murmured, "Yes, except that it was only two whacks and then General Gates came into the room and made them stop."

"Haw," sneered the sergeant. "I used to get that much and more from my father before breakfast every morning."

"And probably deserved twice as much," added Ben. He turned to Tad and said, "You never answered their questions. That was brave."

"Aw, he made up the whole story just to get in good with the officers. He probably stole that drum and fancy kitbag, the truth be known," said Cutler.

"That's not true," replied Tad angrily. "Mr. Stelle gave me the drum and the kitbag."

"And who is Mr. Stelle?" asked the sergeant.

"I lived with Mr. and Mrs. Stelle. He's a printer in Boston, and I was his apprentice," replied Tad.

"Humph. Another story. Why would a man of substance give you the kit and drum just so's you could run off and join the army? No, the truth is you probably stole everything you could carry and then ran off," laughed Cutler.

Tad leaped to his feet. He could feel the anger flaming red on his face. The sergeant was much older and bigger than Tad, but Tad would not allow him to talk that way.

"Take it back!" demanded Tad.

"What's this? The tadpole has become a fighting cock, upon my soul. Very well, little man. It's time you had a good thrashing," said the sergeant as he pitched his hat aside and prepared to fight.

"Wait just a minute," warned Ben as he smoothly uncoiled from the ground. "This doesn't look like a fair fight to me. I think I'll just even it up a bit."

"You stay out of this," snarled the sergeant. "You got no call to interfere. It's my duty to discipline those who get out of line."

"Maybe," replied Ben, "But only after you've tried to do some of your disciplining on me first."

"I'll put you on report," said the sergeant. "Then you'll get what's coming to you soon enough."

"Maybe, but I'm not afraid of your threats. Besides, if I came up for a hearing, there's a few things I intend to talk about so the officers can hear," replied Ben softly.

"People who aren't careful about what they say sometimes regret it," warned the sergeant.

"Then leave the boy alone and you'll have no trouble from me," said Ben. "Besides, there's plenty of others who will catch on to your tricks before long."

"Well, if it's tricks you want, you'll likely get enough of them from our fancy hero here. Once this is over, you can bet on it, there's a warrant out for a thief and runaway apprentice that will come to light," said the sergeant as he turned to walk away.

He stopped and added, "Particularly when it's plain enough that there have been valuables stolen."

When the sergeant had gone, Tad asked, "Do you think he saw the gold coin?"

"I'm sure of it," nodded Ben. "You'll have to be careful now, for I truly believe he would steal it if he got the chance. You'll have to guard it carefully."

"Thank you for standing up for me," said Tad. "I hope there aren't very many more like him around here."

Ben laughed. "There's some strange birds roosting here, but most of the men are good enough. They'll give a good account of themselves if they get the chance."

They both jumped to their feet when a young man about Ben's age came rushing up. He was dressed in a military uniform, one of the few that Tad had seen since he came over from Boston.

"Orderly, General Ward has a message for you to carry. Come now," he ordered.

"Yes, sir," replied Ben as he stood at attention.

The young officer turned and hurried back to the headquarters.

"I've got to go now. Rummage around in our leaky tent until you can find a place to lie down. Get some sleep. There'll be plenty to do later on," called Ben as he trotted off to headquarters.

Tad waved and then began putting his gear away. The ground under the tent was covered with hay and leaves. He shoved the drum to the other end of the tent and then crawled in. It was too warm for the blanket, so he left it rolled up and used it for a pillow.

There was a soft fresh breeze coming through the tent. Tad looked up at the holes in the tent and was thankful for the fair weather. He wondered how David was doing as an infantryman in the Massachusetts regiment, and he thought about the Stelles and Packie, but not for long. He drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 10 Hard Lessons Learned

Tad felt someone shaking his shoulder. He opened his eyes, but did not stir.

"Come on, sleepyhead. Wake up. It's time for supper," said Ben. "I found some potatoes and an onion. They're about to boil away."

Tad stretched and then sat up. "What time of day is it?" he asked.

“Time for supper, and maybe a little past,” answered Ben as he leaned over the kettle to inspect the cooking food.

It was dusk and the failing light made it difficult to see in the little tent, even though both ends were open and there were holes in the canvas. Tad fished around for his kitbag. He couldn’t find it.

“Ben?” he called from the tent. “Have you seen my kitbag?”

“No. Not since you put it in the tent when you went to sleep this morning. Why? Can’t you find it?”

“It’s gone,” said Tad unhappily.

Ben coaxed a stick into flame and carefully shielding it with his hand, he brought it over to the front of the tent. Tad used the flickering light to make another search.

“It’s no use,” he said. “It’s gone. My drum’s still here and my blanket roll, but the kitbag is gone!”

“And so is the gold coin, I’d wager,” said Ben.

For a second Tad had forgotten about the gold coin. He was hungry, and his main concern had been his bowl, spoon, and the folding cup. “Yes, the gold coin and a pistol, too,” he said sadly.

“A pistol?” Ben said with a surprised look on his face. “You didn’t mention that you had a pistol.”

Tad nodded. “I got it the night David and I escaped. When a man named Hollister stopped us, he had a pistol.”

Tad crawled out of the tent and walked over to the fire. “I’ve just got to find that kitbag,” he said. “I’ve just got to find it.”

Ben joined him. “It won’t be easy to do that. There must be twenty thousand men scattered all around here. And besides, if you do find the gold piece or the pistol, it’ll just be your word against whoever has it.”

“Yes, that’s true,” replied Tad. “But at least I can claim the kit and the bowl, if nothing else. They really don’t belong to me, you see. They belong to Mr. Stelle, and I’ll have to return them when this is all over.”

“I’ll tell you what we’ll do. You can share my spoon and plate. We’ll eat our supper and then maybe look for your belongings, though I doubt that we’ll have much luck.”

They shared the potatoes and onion and made quick work of them. Tad looked longingly at the kettle, wishing that there had been a piece of meat in it, or that he had saved back a biscuit from earlier in the day.

Ben saw him glancing at the kettle. “There’s no point in wishing so hard. Food is about as scarce as anything can be around here. There’s supposed to be a lot coming in tomorrow, but that’s what they said about today.”

After their meager meal, Tad and Ben sat by the fire and talked. Ben told how he had come into the battle of Concord late in the day. "If the British hadn't shown up with reinforcements and cannon, we'd be in Boston right now."

"And I wouldn't have lost the gold coin or the kitbag," Tad said bitterly.

"You'd best be forgetting that business," said Ben. "There's no point in crying over spilt milk. And there's not much real point thinking that you'll ever find them again. That only happens in fairy tales."

"If only I had wrapped the strap around my arm before going to sleep," said Tad as he shook his head in dismay.

Ben nodded. "You learned a hard lesson today."

They talked on into the night with Ben making Tad tell all the details of how he and David escaped. Finally, Ben yawned. "Daybreak comes too soon for my liking. We'd better get some sleep."

Later when Tad was curled up on his side of the tent and wrapped in the blanket to keep off the damp night air, he told himself that maybe tomorrow would be better. Deep down inside his mind, he was very unhappy. He blamed himself as much as he did the thief who took the kitbag. He had wanted to be a good soldier like Mr. Stelle must have been, or like Packie was now or even David, but in one day he had lost the kitbag and had almost gotten into a fight with a sergeant.

The next day Tad kept a close eye out for anyone who carried a kitbag, but he saw none that even began to resemble the kitbag given to him by Mr. Stelle.

There was some good luck. During the day, he was given a tin pan and a spoon by General Ward's cook, and he got permission to keep his drum in a closet in the headquarters building. That will make a little more room in the tent, thought Tad.

His duties during the day were light because the camp was not yet organized enough to have very many parades, and he was not assigned to one of the regiments guarding the road into Boston or along the coast.

In the days that followed, Tad was used as a messenger more than as a drummer. Once he took a message to Colonel Prescott. He saw David drilling with a company of men and waved to him, but of course, David could not wave back.

He did not get to see David very often. Unlike many of the regiments encamped around Boston, Colonel Prescott's regiment was always hard at work, either practicing formations or building shelters.

Tad noticed that many of the regiments were living in crudely constructed lean-tos made of boards and tree branches. Garbage was frequently dumped outside the rough shelters, and when Tad had to go to some camps with a message, he was tempted to hold his nose.

Nor were all the regiments as well-drilled and practiced in marching and the use of their muskets as Colonel Prescott's regiment, or the Rhode Island regiment, which was commanded by a man named Greene. Tad was surprised to hear that Greene had been a Quaker before becoming a

regimental commander. While there were few Quakers in Boston, and those were not welcome, Tad had learned enough about them to know that they did not believe in fighting.

Life at the headquarters, while easier than what David was experiencing with the Massachusetts regiment, was still much harder than anything Tad had ever known while growing up in the Stelle home. He missed his straw filled pallet in the loft and the warm quilt that had kept him snug in the loft of the Stelle home.

Now Tad and Ben shared a ragged patch of tenting cloth that leaked water whenever it rained. It was not so bad now because the nights were warm enough and the days were getting hotter as June ended and July began.

Once when Ben and Tad shared a watery stew for supper, and Tad's stomach was a long way from being filled, he remarked that the present arrangement would not be very comfortable when winter came. Ben laughed at him. "We'll have the Redcoats out of Boston before the leaves fall, mark my word on it."

Tad counted the days since he had joined the army, and not one battle had been fought in all that time. The quiet period, broken only by an occasional foray between small patrols, was beginning to be a problem for the Americans. Many of the soldiers had gone home, claiming that they would return if there was to be fighting.

Tad could see that many of the regiments were smaller than they had been, and that many of the soldiers still in camp were sick. No one knew why. Some older men pointed out that such sickness was always common whenever soldiers camped in the same place very long.

One particular morning toward the middle of June, Tad was returning from one of the camps. The smell of the garbage and refuse was so strong that he could hardly wait to get away from the camp. As he returned to headquarters, he saw that there was a great amount of activity. Officers were hurrying toward the building and others were coming out and hurrying back to their commands.

Tad saw Ben. "What's happening?" Tad asked.

"The army's going out to occupy Bunker Hill," replied Ben. "The British will never be able to push us off of there, and we can see right down their throats from the hill."

Tad remembered the peninsula where he and David had landed. "You mean the whole army?" "If we all go, there won't be any room for the British."

"No, just a few picked regiments are going. It's for sure that Colonel Prescott's Massachusetts regiment is going. Isn't your friend, David, in that regiment?" asked Ben.

"Yes," replied Tad. "When are they going to march?"

"The word now is that they'll leave out early tonight and spend the night out on the hill getting ready for the British. It'll be hard work, too, because they've got to dig a fort during the night and be ready to fight the British come daylight. Maybe we'll have the British out of Boston by nightfall," said Ben.

Tad did not have much time to think about the battle that might come soon, maybe even the next day. He delivered messages and returned answers, hurrying from one place to another throughout the day. The heat and dust and weariness began slowing his feeling of excitement over the prospect of a battle.

He wanted to see David, but by the time he was free of his duties, David's regiment was on the road. Maybe I'll get to see him tomorrow, thought Tad. If there is a battle, maybe we'll end up meeting in Boston.

Neither Tad nor Ben waited very long after eating their scanty rations of food before going to bed. They had both put in a hard day's work. Tad wondered sleepily how many miles he had walked that day.

"Tad! Tad! Wake up."

Tad rolled over and blinked his eyes open. It was still dark, but he recognized Ben's voice.

"Get up, sleepyhead. There's work to be done."

Tad shed his blanket. "Should I pack?" he asked.

"No, all you'll need for this day's work is your drum. Here, I got some biscuits for us to eat."

Ben handed one to Tad. He took the biscuit and tapped it against his drum. He made a face at its hardness and put it in his pocket.

On their way to the headquarters Ben explained, "It appears that when Colonel Prescott took his men out on the Charlestown peninsula, old General Putnam went along and talked Prescott into going clear out to Breed's Hill. That's where they are now, digging a fort right under the noses of the British."

"David is there, then," said Tad. "That's almost where we came ashore when we escaped from Boston. Maybe David can see the Stelles' printing shop from there."

Ben laughed. "From what we've heard at headquarters, you can count the fleas on a dog's back from there. A couple of our cannon up on that hill, and the British will have to come out and fight, otherwise we'll blow them out of Boston."

They entered the busy headquarters. "We'll wait here in the hall," said Ben. "We'll get our orders soon enough,"

Tad tightened his belt and noted that he was on the last hole. If he got any thinner, he'd have to punch another hole in the belt.

An officer walked by and then turned back. He was unlike most of the other militia officers. His bearing was upright, and there was a look of determination in his eyes.

"What's this, a drummer boy?" asked the officer.

"Yes, sir," replied Tad as he got to his feet.

"What regiment are you with?" he asked.

“None, sir. I came over from Boston after the big fight at Lexington. I’ve been serving here at the headquarters ever since.”

“Do you know how to beat that drum?”

“Yes, sir. I had a good friend in the British army who’s a drummer. He taught me how to play the calls.”

The officer laughed. “More than one of us here got our training from the Redcoats. How would you like to serve in my regiment? At least for today? We’ve only got two drummers, and I don’t believe either of them could drum ants to a picnic.”

“Yes, sir. I’d like that,” Tad replied eagerly. “Who do I have to see for permission?”

“Don’t worry about it. Just wait here. I’ll take care of it. I’m going to have a word with General Ward. Don’t run off, now,” said the officer.

“Oh, no, sir. I won’t. I promise,” Tad replied.

The officer smiled and then walked through the door to the waiting room. Tad heard a clear voice say, “Colonel Stark presents his compliments to the general. I’m here as ordered.”

So that’s Colonel Stark, thought Tad. He had heard much about Colonel Stark and his New Hampshire regiment. Though lacking the fine uniforms and equipment that the Rhode Islanders had, the regiment and the colonel were highly thought of throughout the American camp.

We are really lucky, thought Tad. David was assigned to Colonel Prescott’s Massachusetts regiment, and he, Tad, was going to serve under Colonel Stark’s command.

Ben returned from having delivered a message. Already he looked hot and dusty.

“What’s happening?” Tad asked.

“Nothing yet,” Ben said as he blew out the light in the lantern on the table. “It’s just cracking the first gray of dawn now. I can’t figure out why the British haven’t spotted our troops yet.”

“I’m marching today,” said Tad proudly.

“What?”

“Yes, Colonel Stark came by to see General Ward, and I...”

“I know that,” interrupted Ben. “I carried the message to Colonel Stark. But what does that have to do with you?”

“Colonel Stark saw me sitting here and asked me to join his regiment as a drummer,” said Tad.

“You don’t say!” Ben said. He was obviously impressed by the news, but also a little unhappy at the same time. “I wish I could be so lucky. All I ever get to do is run around on one fool errand after another. Sometimes I can’t even find the person I’m looking for.”

Colonel Stark came striding out of the general’s room. “Well, that’s all taken care of. Are you ready, young man?”

"Yes, sir," replied Tad as he slipped the drum strap over his head.

"Beg your pardon, sir," Ben said, "but could you use another man?"

"I can use all I can find," answered the colonel.

"Then I volunteer, too," said Ben.

"You're one of the orderlies here, aren't you?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, sir," replied Ben.

"Well, I'm afraid General Ward would never approve of losing an orderly just a few minutes before a big battle is to start."

Ben's face sagged with disappointment.

There was a low, rumbling noise outside. "Is that thunder?" asked Tad.

"That's thunder all right," said the colonel sternly. "But it's thunder made here on earth and not in the heavens."

The colonel rushed to the door followed by Tad and Ben. Outside, the thunder continued. Quickly, the area around the headquarters was filled with people listening and talking excitedly.

"The battle is joined," said Colonel Stark. He turned to Tad. "Be ready in five minutes. I want to see General Ward again. I think the New Hampshire regiment will be needed out on Breed's Hill and not on the Boston road."

"Yes, sir," replied Tad.

A rider came galloping up to the headquarters. Men ran to ask him what was happening.

"We're well dug in on Breed's Hill, but the British warships are firing a terrible amount of cannonballs. Colonel Prescott says he needs help!" shouted the courier as he dashed into the headquarters.

"I'd better go in and stand ready," said Ben. "You be careful this day. Colonel Stark is not the sort of man to be kept away from the midst of the fighting. You'll see action this day. I envy you. Take care of yourself, Tad."

They shook hands. "Don't worry," answered Tad. "I'll be careful. I just hope I don't get too scared and forget how to beat my drum. I would hate to disappoint Colonel Stark."

Ben laughed. "If you disappoint him, you'll have more to fear than the British cannon."

As Ben hurried on his way to report, Tad heard drums and fifes playing a merry tune. A regiment came marching down the street, and as its ranks passed the headquarters, one of the marchers shouted, "We're off to Bunker Hill, boys!"

The statement bothered Tad. David and the rest of the men under Colonel Prescott's command were on Breed's Hill. There seemed to be some mix-up in the orders, Tad thought.

The men in the regiment looked eager and willing, but Tad saw that the officers appeared to be upset and unsure. Few of the soldiers marching by had bayonets, and some even carried spears instead of muskets.

Tad's stomach growled hungrily, and he pulled the hard biscuit from his pocket and began gnawing on a corner as he watched the soldiers march past. He would have to tell Mr. Stelle about the biscuits. Mr. Stelle would laugh.

He thought that maybe after today's battle, the British might be forced out of Boston, and he could return to see Mr. and Mrs. Stelle. A sudden wave of homesickness threatened him, and he angrily forced it away. This is not the time to be melancholy, he thought.

Colonel Stark came out of the headquarters. He looked angry. Tad slipped the drum strap over his head.

"Come on," said the colonel. "We've got to do a considerable amount of marching today. First of all, we've got to march away from the battle before we can march to the battle. What a great mistake!"

Tad nodded and followed the colonel, which wasn't so easy because he walked rapidly and took big strides. They walked at the edge of the street, which by now was filled with marching men. It all seemed very confusing to Tad. Some men were marching in one direction, and other men in the opposite direction.

"Look at this," growled the colonel as they hurried along toward the New Hampshire regiment's campground. "No one seems to know what they are doing. I don't envy Colonel Prescott and his boys. They may get left out there to be snapped up by the British."

For a second, Tad thought of David out there on Breed's Hill. No, he said to himself. They won't just be left on their own, not with men like Colonel Stark in the army. The continuing roar of cannon chased the thought from his mind.

Chapter 11 The Price of Liberty

Tad and Colonel Stark arrived at the well-kept campground of the New Hampshire regiment. "Begin beating the call to arms," ordered Colonel Stark.

This was not just for practice, Tad realized as he began the cadence. The men in the regiment hurried to form their companies.

After checking with his officers, Colonel Stark got in front of the regiment and gave orders that brought it into a long column of men, four in a row across.

Once the men were lined up, Colonel Stark gave the order to march. "Give us an easy marching beat," the colonel said to Tad.

The captain of the first company marched with Colonel Stark. Tad, who was just behind, overheard Colonel Stark tell the officer, "We are marching away from where we will likely end up. There's no need to push the men hard in the wrong direction."

The regiment soon reached a farmstead with a clump of trees along the road. Colonel Stark ordered a halt so the soldiers could rest.

When the captain of the first company asked why they were taking such a long break, Colonel Stark answered, "Because, Captain Dearborn, I'm expecting orders any time now for us to reverse our direction and march back to the Charlestown peninsula. Where we are now, we can easily move to reinforce the Boston road and we are not too many hours march from Breed's Hill."

"But why weren't we sent directly to reinforce Colonel Prescott?" Captain Dearborn asked.

"Because General Ward is afraid that the British might act like they are going to attack Prescott, and then attack out of Boston over the road," replied Colonel Stark.

The discussion was interrupted by a messenger who galloped up on horseback. "Colonel Stark?" he yelled. "Is this the New Hampshire regiment?"

The messenger flung himself off of his horse when he saw the officers. "Colonel Stark, sir?"

"At your service," said the colonel.

"General Ward's respects to you, sir," said the messenger quickly in an effort to get past the formal greeting that was considered to be good and proper military form. "The general wants you to march to the aid of Colonel Prescott's Massachusetts regiment, sir,"

Colonel Stark nodded and asked, "What is the situation now with Colonel Prescott?"

"The Redcoats have landed in force on Charlestown peninsula. They are expected to attack at any moment," replied the messenger.

"You may reply to General Ward that the New Hampshire regiment will do its duty," said Colonel Stark.

The messenger mounted and rode off. Colonel Stark nodded at Tad, and he began a rapid, staccato beat on his drum. The soldiers came hurrying out from under the shade trees and formed up. The march back to Breed's Hill was under way.

The regiment marched back the way it had come. The sun was now coming up into the sky. The road was becoming hot and dusty. Tad could see that the New Hampshire regiment wasn't the only one heading for the battle. There were other regiments behind them and ahead of them.

Soon they came to a part of the road that Tad remembered well. He knew that they were not far from the narrow bridge of land that connected the Charlestown peninsula with the mainland.

The British cannon roared with a sharpness that made Tad jump. His fingers began to fly over the French drum. "Steady there, lad," came the calm voice of Colonel Stark. "Keep an easy pace. We'll get there in plenty of time."

The regiment turned a curve in the road and then marched up a small rise. When they topped the rise, Tad could see the narrow strip of land that connected the peninsula. Out in the bay, there was a big barge flying the British flag.

As the regiment marched down the rise, the barge was suddenly covered with smoke. Seconds later, there was a sharp roar as cannonballs struck the narrow strip of land over which the regiment would have to cross.

Colonel Stark pulled a small telescope from his pocket and looked at the barge. "She's mounting a battery of twelve cannon. Very respectable, indeed," he said coolly.

There were several hundred men just on the mainland side of the strip of land. It was a regiment that had evidently lost its nerve because of the cannon on the barge. Some of the officers were trying to urge the soldiers forward, but there was little response.

Captain Dearborn came forward and asked Colonel Stark, "Sir, maybe we should have the regiment run across the strip? That way the British cannon won't get as many shots at us."

"No," replied Colonel Stark quietly. "I believe we should continue at our own steady pace. There is no reason to weary the soldiers. Always remember, a fresh soldier arriving at the scene of battle is better than ten weary ones."

As the New Hampshire regiment made its approach, Colonel Stark dropped back to march beside Tad. "When we come up to that bunch of skulkers who are refusing to cross, I want a lively tune from your drum. I want the whole regiment to be able to hear it. You and I will lead the way out onto the neck. When we get mostly to the other side, you and I will stand aside and watch as the regiment comes across. Keep the drumming up, no matter what happens. If you falter, the soldiers might not try the crossing. They will be able to see me, but it's you they will hear."

The regiment continued forward. Just as the soldiers approached the narrow strip of land, the British cannon fired, and the roaring noise was awesome. Tad instinctively shrank back.

"Steady, lad," murmured the colonel.

The New Hampshire men marched between the sullen, disorganized regiment that was milling about. There were a few taunts from the New Hampshire soldiers that stung some of the men in the other regiment, and they joined Colonel Stark's regiment.

As they marched out onto the narrow strip of land, which was not much wider than a road, Tad felt completely alone, and he knew a fear that was even greater than when he had to face Captain Ackerly or when the British longboat had come through the mist while he and David were crossing the river.

The fear and the excitement of the moment caused him to increase the speed of his drumming without really being aware of it. He heard Colonel Stark laugh. It seemed to come from somewhere far off even though the colonel was marching at his side.

“You’ll get used to it,” said the colonel. “The first time is always the hardest. It seems like every cannon in the world is shooting at you. Now try to hold an even beat.”

They were across the neck of land before the cannon could fire again. Colonel Stark and Tad took up a position where the rest of the regiment could easily see them. The soldiers maintained a steady pace even when the cannon on the barge fired again. The volley was high and the cannonballs sailed harmlessly over the heads of the soldiers.

Once across and safe from the fire of the cannons on the barge, Colonel Stark ordered a brief halt while he and Tad hurried to the head of the column. Then they resumed their march.

Bunker Hill was just ahead, and the column began climbing up the hill. Tad could see hundreds of soldiers already on the hill, but it looked as if there was little or no organization.

When they reached the top of Bunker Hill, Tad could look down and out over the entire battlefield. Down below was the smaller Breed’s Hill. He could see the small dirt fort that had been dug during the night.

In the fort were a great many men. They were silent. Farther down the slope of Breed’s Hill and near the shore were the British. Directly facing Breed’s Hill were the grenadiers, row after row of them perfectly lined up and awaiting the command to advance.

In the waters around the peninsula were several British warships whose cannon were firing with great regularity. The men in the dirt fort, which was called a redoubt by some, appeared to be safe from the cannon.

Colonel Stark passed the word back that he wanted the officers to come forward. When they arrived, he pointed down at the beach on one side of Breed’s Hill.

“See that beach down there? You’ll note that the British have formed up a column of light infantry to march along that beach in order to get behind our people in the fort while the grenadiers attack the fort from the front. We must not let that happen. We will occupy the area on and near the beach and hold it. Let’s go!”

When they got down to the beach, Tad saw that it was very narrow, maybe no wider than the space taken up by ten men standing side by side. There was a drop-off of about six or seven feet where the slope of Breed’s Hill came down to the beach. The men in the redoubt on top of the hill would not have been able to stop the light infantry from marching around behind them.

Colonel Stark issued orders quickly. Several companies of men, about one hundred eighty soldiers in all, clambered up the bluff and took up position on the slope of the hill. The others began carrying rocks and driftwood to build a wall on the beach. The wall was not very high. Tad could see that it barely came up to his belt. It was long enough so that ten or twelve men could squeeze together behind it and then kneel down with their muskets resting on the wall.

“Here they come,” shouted Colonel Stark. “Remember, no one fires until I give the order.”

The British light infantry came on. They were in rows of eight men, four rows to a company. Then there was a space of a few yards and another company and then another company.

Tad tried to count how many companies there were of the light infantry, but he lost track. He knew that somewhere in their ranks was Packie, beating the advance as he had in so many other battles.

"There are so many of them," Tad murmured.

"There doesn't seem to be any shortage of them," laughed Colonel Stark. "But they are advancing on a narrow front. We can hold them as long as our ammunition lasts."

Now, Tad could see the faces of the light infantry. They were less than a hundred paces away and still coming on. The men in the front ranks showed no hesitation.

"Steady now, men. Let them get closer," cautioned Colonel Stark.

When the British soldiers were less than thirty paces away, Colonel Stark loudly ordered, "Present your pieces."

The Americans behind the wall slid their musket barrels out on the top of the wall. Tad saw that all of the soldiers in the group behind the wall were aiming carefully.

At less than twenty-five paces, Colonel Stark shouted, "Fire!" and the blasts of the muskets caused Tad to flinch. The first rank of eight British soldiers went down as did one soldier in the second rank.

The advancing British soldiers stumbled over their fallen comrades and the advance was stopped. Before they could regroup, the New Hampshire soldiers at the wall had stepped to the rear and were reloading their muskets. The second rank of Americans hurried to the wall and fired another volley. More of the light infantry went down.

As yet, the British had not fired. Tad watched as the British officers waved their swords and tried to urge their men forward. Even with the urging of their officers and sergeants, the British soldiers were beginning to back off from the deadly muskets of the Americans. At first the retreat was slow, step by step, and then, the light infantry broke and ran.

The Americans leaped in the air and cheered. They had met the best the British had and stopped them cold.

"We've won, sir. We've won!" shouted Tad happily.

But Colonel Stark looked surprisingly grim. "It's not over yet. This was just the beginning and for us maybe the end."

"But why, sir? They are running away," Tad said.

"Only to reform and come again. But this time, the story may be different. We're lucky if we have enough gunpowder left for each man to fire three more times," said the colonel.

Out of powder! It had never occurred to Tad that a desperate battle such as this would be started without a plentiful supply of gunpowder. If the British ever got in among the Americans with bayonets, it would be a disaster.

The light infantry did not advance again. They formed up and presented a line of defense. "It looks like we are going to get a breather," said Colonel Stark.

"Look yonder at them!" yelled a soldier. Tad glanced over toward the front slope of Breed's Hill. The grenadiers were advancing. They were marching in long ranks and heading resolutely toward the fort on top of the hill.

"Quick now, lad! Follow me!" ordered Colonel Stark as he clambered up the bluff and turned to give a hand to Tad.

The colonel waved to his reserve company and they rushed to join him. Once up on the bluff, they joined the rest of the New Hampshire regiment that had guarded the slope.

"We'll hold here, in case the Redcoats try to sweep around the fort," Colonel Stark said.

Officers in the fort could be heard urging their men to hold their fire. Tad wondered if David was scared, but then dismissed the notion from his mind. He had never seen David scared of anything.

The grenadiers were almost up to the walls of the dirt fort when suddenly a great cloud of smoke was seen and the roar of muskets was heard. Grenadiers tumbled to the ground. Just as Colonel Stark had done at the rock wall on the beach, so now the Americans did under Colonel Prescott in the fort. They had waited until the British were almost upon them before firing.

The Americans kept up the galling fire, and the grenadiers retreated. Their attack was stopped. From the fort came a great cheer. The cheering stopped when it was evident that the grenadiers were reforming for another attempt.

On came the grenadiers again. One British officer was well out in front of the first line of grenadiers. Colonel Stark squinted his eyes and then announced, "That's General Howe himself. He's a brave man."

As the grenadiers advanced again, Tad thought of how he had two friends, one who may already be dead, and one who was maybe about to be killed. His eyes began to cloud over, and even though the soldiers around him were excited, Tad began praying that both Packie and David would come through the battle unharmed.

Again, the grenadiers were staggered by musket fire from the fort, and once again the soldiers in the great bearskin hats faltered and retreated. This time they retreated almost back to the water's edge despite efforts by their remaining officers to stop them.

Surely it will end now, thought Tad as he gazed at the battlefield where so many British soldiers lay dead or wounded. It cannot go on, he told himself, but the British formed up yet again. As they approached, Tad could see that many of the soldiers had been wounded and bandaged and then returned to the ranks for another terrible assault on the fort.

“This will be the charge that decides the battle,” murmured Colonel Stark. “Brave as the British are, they’ll not be able to reform if they are repulsed again.”

As before, the American muskets were silent as the British grenadiers came up the hill in columns. Tad could hear the British officers giving their commands to keep the columns straight and in good order.

Again, at close range, the American muskets spoke their deadly piece, but this time the firing diminished quickly. The remaining grenadiers in the first rank and in the following ranks leveled their bayonets and closed in on the little fort.

“What’s happening?” Tad cried with alarm.

The grenadiers were able not only to attack from the front, but also to run around the walls of the fort and then attack at the narrow opening in the back.

The British bayonets were doing their grim work. Some of the Americans were able to fight their way through the British, or to somehow climb the dirt walls and then tumble down the hill in an effort to escape.

Colonel Stark waved to his men to follow, and he hurried to directly behind the fort but down the slope just out of musket range. Tad followed, his drum bumping clumsily on his leg as he ran.

“Quick now, lad! Give us a strong and fast beat,” ordered Colonel Stark. He then shouted to his men, “Form a line on the drummer and myself.”

Several American soldiers who had been in the fort ran past the line formed up by the New Hampshire soldiers. One of them yelled, “We were betrayed. No one came to help us!”

More and more Americans were escaping from the fort. Some of them ran as fast as they could and did not stop at Colonel Stark’s line, but others did stop and took their place in the line ready for yet another round with the British.

One group of nearly a dozen men ran up to Colonel Stark and Tad. Some of them were wounded. Their leader, a young man with a bayonet wound in his arm, shouted excitedly, “In the name of liberty, sir! Share your gunpowder with us. If we would have had gunpowder, they would not have pushed us off in a hundred years.”

“We barely have enough to fire three more times ourselves, but if you will join our line here, we’ll give you what we can,” answered the colonel.

“Fair enough, sir, providing we can have the honor of holding the center,” answered the young leader as one of his men hastily bandaged his bayonet wound for him.

“That is a fair bargain,” nodded Colonel Stark.

“Quick now,” the young leader ordered. “Get what powder you can and then form around the drummer and his fine blue drum.”

The young man took up a position by Tad and Colonel Stark. “We fought well enough, sir. Exceedingly well. But we ran out of powder, and the Redcoats swarmed us with their bayonets. I fear

most of our soldiers will be trapped, but at least we proved that we can hold out against the best they've got."

There were more Americans fleeing down the back slope of Breed's Hill now. Several groups of British soldiers emerged from the fort and gave chase.

When the young leader took a position beside him, Tad asked, "Do you know a soldier named David Seldon? He was in Colonel Prescott's regiment."

"No, I can't say I've had the honor," answered the young leader. "Is he a friend or relative of yours?"

"He's my best friend. We came over from Boston together to join the army," replied Tad as he slowly began to realize that David might well be one of those Americans who would not be able to escape from the fort.

His thoughts were interrupted when Colonel Stark shouted, "Stand ready, they're forming up."

More and more British soldiers were standing on the back slope of the hill just behind the fort. Officers were pushing them into lines, ready to resume the attack.

There was a stirring of the men in the New Hampshire line, now increased somewhat by the arrival of the soldiers from the fort. All up and down the thin line men checked their muskets and made ready to receive the British charge.

"We'll not last long, but at least we'll make them pay for the back slope of the hill just as they paid dearly for the front slope," said the young leader.

"Then we've lost the battle!" cried Tad.

"Not exactly," interrupted Colonel Stark, "but we're not going to win it, and there is the reason why."

Colonel Stark had turned around and was staring back at Bunker Hill. Tad glanced over his shoulder. He saw what the colonel meant. Back on Bunker Hill, there were hundreds of soldiers milling about leaderless, or with leaders who had no orders or had not the nerve or experience to take action on their own.

"If they would advance to our support, we could still win this battle," said the colonel firmly.

Several groups of men did begin to move down from Bunker Hill and form lines. Colonel Stark ordered his men to slowly retreat toward those fragments of lines. The British followed up, but were always careful to maintain a distance between themselves and the New Hampshire men and those who had joined them.

The retreat continued back over Bunker Hill and then down to the narrow neck of land which again had to be crossed. For Tad, the retreat was hard work. There was marching and then the turning and facing the British, and then marching, and again turning to face the oncoming British. All the while his drum beat the various calls used to give the men their orders.

The heat of the July day, the smelly smoke of the gunpowder that hung over the battlefield during the fighting, the marching and the countermarching, and the playing of the drum all had their effect on Tad. He felt as though he had been marching forever. He could barely go another step.

The drum strap felt as if it was tugging him down, and he knew a thirst that was so bad he could barely swallow, but the tears that came down his cheeks were not because of all that, or because the Americans had not held the hill.

The tears were there because of all the soldiers who had fled the hill after the British stormed it, none of them was David. Tad feared that somewhere up on the hill, David lay dead.

Chapter 12 A Friend Is Missing

It was almost dark when Tad and the New Hampshire regiment slouched wearily through Cambridge. When they neared the army headquarters, Tad called to Colonel Stark, "If it's all right with you, sir, I'll drop out here. My camp is just behind General Ward's quarters over there."

Colonel Stark looked around and replied, "Very well." Then to Captain Dearborn he said, "Take the regiment into our camp. See to it that everyone gets food and water. I'm going into headquarters to see what's going on."

Both Tad and Colonel Stark stepped out of the column and watched as the soldiers marched silently by. Some of the men had bandages covering wounds, and all, like Tad, were dusty and tired. When the last of them trailed by, Colonel Stark put his hand on Tad's shoulder.

"You've done a fine day's work with your drum, young man. If you ever want to serve with a regiment, I'll be glad to have you at my side. Now you had best get something to eat and then get some sleep."

Tad saluted and took his leave of the New Hampshire colonel. He stumbled wearily toward the leaky tent and the little cooking fire that he could see winking merrily.

Ben jumped up. "Tad? Is that you? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," Tad said slowly as he carefully stowed his drum in the tent. "Just tired. I don't think I've ever been so tired in my life."

"Was it as bad as I've heard?" Ben asked hesitantly.

"It was awful," Tad replied as he sank to the ground and stared at the fire. "I was scared. But I think I did all right. Is there anything to eat? All I've had today was a biscuit."

Ben hurried to the kettle that warmed itself in the ashes near the flames. "I've been keeping this stew warm for you. Don't even ask what's in it. And, here's a jug of fresh water. When you eat the stew, don't be surprised if you get the urge to whinny like a horse."

Tad ignored Ben's joke. He continued to stare at the fire until Ben put the water jug and the kettle down next to him.

Tad drank long from the jug. The cool water revived him enough so that he was ready to eat what was in the kettle.

"As soon as I eat," he said between hastily gulped mouthfuls of food, "I've got to go look for David. He was in the worst part of the battle."

Ben coaxed the story out of Tad, point by point, and he expressed amazement when Tad bitterly claimed that the battle could have been won if the supporting soldiers back on Bunker Hill had come forward to help.

"We might have been in Boston tonight," said Tad angrily, "Except that someone didn't do what they were supposed to do. And now, David is missing. I almost wish I was back in Boston. At the rate things are going now, the British will win this war."

"No," said Ben. His voice was strong. He was not going to back away from his belief. "Maybe we made bad mistakes today. I'll grant you that. But a lot of Americans fought well. You didn't run away. David didn't run away. Maybe we have a lot to learn about fighting battles, but we'll learn and when we do, the British will be beaten."

"You can't win wars by losing battles," Tad replied bitterly. "Besides, how are we going to live while we are supposed to be learning? We don't get enough to eat. And our clothes are falling apart. Sometimes it seems like half the army is sick or has deserted."

"David was a good friend of yours, wasn't he?" Ben asked softly.

"He risked his life trying to get me out of Boston," replied Tad. "And now I don't know where he is or even if he's alive. Being a patriot sure didn't get him much, did it?"

"You aren't giving up, are you?" asked Ben.

"Of course not," Tad answered. He was not sure that he meant it. His voice sounded strange when he said it. Ben had touched upon the growing ache in Tad's heart. He did not want to talk about it further. He picked up the kettle and peered into it to make sure there wasn't a scrap of food left.

"I'll wash up the kettle and then go look for David," he said.

"I'll do it," Ben said. "You can do the cooking and washing tomorrow. It's getting late. If you're going to find anyone at all, you'd better get there before everyone's asleep."

Tad put down the kettle. "Thank you, Ben. I'll do them tomorrow and the day after."

He left the light of the little fire and began walking. His route took him through several camps. There was an unusual quietness to the scene. There was no singing or joking. Soldiers sat quietly by their fires or slept under their tents and makeshift shelters.

When he reached the Massachusetts camp, he noticed that there were not very many men present. Colonel Prescott's regiment had taken many casualties. At the first fire, there were three men sitting on the ground. None of them spoke when he walked up and squatted by the fire.

"Do any of you know a boy named David Seldon?" asked Tad.

The soldiers stared at him. One of them shook his head slowly, no. Tad got up and went to the next fire. An old man sat before this fire. He seemed to stare straight ahead at the darkness beyond the dancing flames.

"Have you seen a boy named David Seldon?" asked Tad. The old man did not answer. Tad asked him again. Still the old man did not answer.

Tad started to walk away when the old man muttered, "Wait."

"Have you seen David Seldon?" Tad asked, his words coming faster as his hopes began to rise.

"Aye. I knew the boy. He was near me when the Redcoats came over the wall," said the old man slowly.

"Is he all right?" asked Tad anxiously.

The old man shook his head, no. He remained silent for a few moments and then spoke again. "He fought well, he did, and was still fighting when I saw him go down, borne down by the weight of Redcoats."

"Is...is he dead?" Tad asked softly.

"Beyond what I've told you, I can tell you no more," said the old man, "except likely so. Likely so."

Tad stumbled away. Tears were coming down his cheeks, and his mind was filled with a mixture of sudden memories from all the days of his friendship with David.

Now more than ever, he wanted to go home. He wanted to be safe and secure in the tidy printing shop with Mr. and Mrs. Stelle always nearby to explain things to him.

It's all a terrible mistake, he told himself angrily. There was no liberty worth fighting for, particularly when good people like David had to die.

Ben was already asleep when Tad crawled in under the canvas and lay down on his blanket. For a few seconds he had control of himself, but when Ben woke up and asked about David, Tad began crying.

"He's alive, I know he's alive," whispered Tad through his tears. "Someday I'll find him."

Ben kept silent, waiting for the tiredness that had to follow such a day to bring sleep. Tad gradually stopped crying and his breathing deepened as he drifted off to a troubled sleep.

The next morning Ben got up early and was unusually lucky. General Ward's cook gave him a good-sized chunk of beef and six biscuits. He started a fire and skewered the meat on a strong green branch.

There was a sizzling noise as some of the fat dripped from the meat into the fire. Ben glanced over at the tent and saw Tad watching him.

“Come look at this. It’s something we haven’t seen for a while; meat and biscuits and plenty of both at the same time,” Ben announced cheerfully.

Tad did not budge from the tent. Ben appeared not to notice. Soon the rich, strong aroma of the meat reached Tad. He crawled out of the tent and sat down by the fire and waited for the meat to cook.

They didn’t wait for the meat to cook completely. Ben cut the meat in half. They wolfed down the food hungrily.

“My stomach and I are friends again,” smiled Ben as he patted his stomach.

Tad remained silent. He looked at the fire, which was beginning to burn itself out.

“Still thinking about David?” Ben asked gently.

Tad nodded. “Maybe he wasn’t killed,” Tad said slowly. “Maybe he is a prisoner.”

“What you need to do is take it easy for a day or two and rest up,” Ben said. “It will make a big difference in how you feel.”

“Difference?” asked Tad. “How? David will still be missing. We’ll probably be hungry again. The British will still be in Boston.”

“Are you going to quit?” asked Ben.

“I just want to go home,” Tad replied.

Ben was silent for a moment. Then he spoke. “If you go, will you leave your blue French drum here?”

“Why? You can’t play it,” said Tad.

Ben shrugged his shoulders. “Maybe we can find someone who can. Maybe we can find someone like David who believes in our cause. David would want someone worthy to carry a drum like yours.”

Tad got up and stalked angrily away, leaving Ben to worry over whether he had made things worse.

Tad walked and walked. He passed through the regimental camps, stopping sometimes to ask if anyone had seen David. The answer was always no. The hours passed without Tad’s realizing it. About mid-afternoon, Tad heard someone shout his name. It was Ben.

“I’ve been looking all over this camp for you,” he panted. “You sure cover a lot of ground.”

Tad smiled. “I’m glad you found me. I wanted to say I’m sorry about this morning. I had no call to be angry.”

Ben waved aside the apology. "That's past. Listen. I checked at headquarters and the word is that the British took some prisoners. Now don't get your hopes up too high."

"Do they know who the prisoners are?" asked Tad instantly.

"No, not yet," replied Ben

"David's alive," said Tad. "I just know he's alive and in Boston."

"Maybe," cautioned Ben. "But what about you? Are you going to quit?"

Tad shook his head. "No, I'm not going to quit. I guess I got downhearted about everything. While I was walking today, I got to thinking about how many hills there are around here. If the British have to buy them all at the same price they paid for Breed's Hill, there won't be many British soldiers left."

"As long as we all stick together," agreed Ben, "we'll win. Now we'd best get back to headquarters. There's much work to be done."

The next few days went by slowly. Tad seemed to have recovered from the battle, and the possibility that David might be dead. He was still moody. Ben was worried about him and kept a close watch on him.

Duties were light. The army seemed to be resting and wondering just what would happen next. There were rumors that the British had lost so many men that they were getting ready to pull out of Boston.

Tad laughed when Ben told him about the rumor. "They'll never leave unless we force them out. I don't see how we can do it," he said, shaking his head slowly as he remembered how few cannon the Americans had. Also, there was still a serious shortage of gunpowder.

Tad checked at the headquarters every day to find out if there was any information concerning prisoners taken by the British on Breed's Hill. The answer was always the same. There was no information.

The end of the week brought big news that set the whole army buzzing.

"Have you heard the news?" Ben asked Tad early one morning when Tad was on his way to headquarters.

"There's word on the prisoners?" Tad asked hopefully.

"No, I'm sorry," replied Ben. "We're getting a new general who is going to take over the whole army. He'll be here in about a week."

"Oh? Who is the general? I heard talk that General Putnam was going to take over," said Tad.

"No. This general is from Virginia. A General George Washington. He has been appointed by the Continental Congress. He's had experience," said Ben.

"A Virginian? Why in the world did they appoint a Virginian?" asked Tad. "He won't know anything about us or the countryside. Virginia is a long way away from here."

“A lot of the officers here feel the same way,” admitted Ben. “Some of them are claiming that the only reason Washington was appointed was that the Massachusetts people wanted to make sure that the Southern colonies would stick in the fight against the British.”

“That doesn’t sound like any reason to go picking a general,” argued Tad. “How are we going to know whether he’s any good or not?”

“I guess it’s just a chance we will have to take. Anyway, he has had experience. That ought to count for something,” Ben said.

“He will need all the experience in the world if he’s going to make men from the different colonies work together,” Tad said. “I don’t even know what a Virginian looks like.”

Ben laughed. “We’ll find out soon enough.”

Chapter 13 The Tall Virginian

Most of the army was drawn up along the route that General Washington was going to take through Cambridge. There were regiments from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. According to what Tad had heard, there were men present from the other colonies also.

Tad held a position near the guard of honor, a small group of men picked from the various regiments. All the members of the guard were dressed in uniforms and their muskets shone brightly in the sun.

Tad and his French drum were to be the start of the whole affair. Upon command, he would beat various calls that would be picked up by the other drummers in the regiments along the way. It was an honor to be chosen for the post, and Tad was grateful. For a moment, he wished that his two best friends could be here to see him now.

He put that thought out of his mind. It was too painful. There was still no word as to David’s fate. There was no way to know if Packie had survived the battle or if he had been hurt.

Tad glanced over at the officers waiting to greet General Washington. They were talking in low tones. He wondered if they were still arguing about giving the command of the army to a Virginian. The older officers had kept their silence in public, but as Ben had related to Tad, there was considerable gossiping even among them.

The booming sound of signal cannon sent everyone rushing about to their places. The new general from Virginia was here!

Ben was standing near the officers, ready to run with a message, or to steady any of the horses that got excited and tried to bolt. Tad saw General Ward lean down and whisper to Ben, who then gave Tad the signal to begin beating the drum. Tad began a long rolling beat that was quickly picked up by the drummers in the regiments along the road.

From where he was standing, Tad could see a group of men on horseback coming down the road. They were led by a tall man on a large horse. As he rode past the various regiments, he doffed his hat in salute to them. His hair was either white, or he had on a wig. Tad couldn't tell which.

The new general was dressed in a light blue uniform and carried a sword at his side. As the general got closer, Tad could see his face. There was a look of determination in his eyes, and in the way he carried his head. To Tad, this Virginian looked more like a general than all the generals he had seen in the American army, or even General Gates of the British army.

General Washington rode up to the officers in front of the headquarters. Tad marveled at the ease with which the Virginian rode his horse, and could not help but comparing him with General Putnam, whose riding style provided many a good-natured joke around the campfires.

The other officers dismounted and clustered around General Washington. Tad was signaled to stop playing the drum. Like candles being blown out one after another, the drums down the line ceased beating.

General Washington dismounted. "He's heading toward me!" thought Tad. The general was an enormously tall man, and when he stopped in front of Tad, he towered over him. Tad stood at attention and stared straight ahead just as he had seen British soldiers do time and again.

"You have as fine a military bearing as any man I've seen today. How did you happen to come by that French drum? I haven't seen one like that since 1754," said General Washington.

Tad stammered out a reply. "It was given to me, sir, by a man who served in that war."

"You are young," said the general. "Do you know how to play the drum well?"

"He's the best in the army," said General Putnam, who was standing nearby. "He's seen more actual battle service than many of the officers here in the headquarters."

"I'll need every good man," said General Washington as he looked down at Tad. "I hope you will stay with us." The general nodded at Tad and then turned away and walked quickly to the headquarters building for a meeting.

It was truly a day to remember, Tad told Ben later on when they were sitting in front of their fire cooking the extra rations that had been distributed in honor of the general's arrival.

"Didn't I tell you things would get better?" said Ben joyfully. "Now we've got us a real general."

"I didn't know there were human beings who are that tall," laughed Tad. "When he was talking to me I thought my neck was going to break from trying to look up at him."

"Now the British will catch it," said Ben as he stirred the thick stew in the kettle.

"I think so too," said Tad, but he qualified his optimism by adding, "If the other officers will cooperate with him. I saw some pretty sour faces among them today."

"Oh, they'll get over it. They are just unhappy because it wasn't a person from Massachusetts who is going to lead the army. I really don't care myself where he comes from as long as he knows what he's doing," Ben said.

“Everybody talks a lot about all the colonies going in together in this war, but when it comes right down to it, they balk when it actually happens,” Tad laughed.

“Oh, oh. Look what’s slinking around our area,” cautioned Ben.

It was Sergeant Cutler. As he strode into the light of the fire, he sneered, “Well, look at this. Our heroes are taking their rest and eating up all the food.”

“What do you want?” asked Tad. “There’s not much to steal here, and if Ben and I eat fast enough, there won’t even be any food to steal.”

“Slander!” shouted Cutler. “Nothing but slander. I know you think I stole your fancy kitbag, but you can’t prove it, can you?”

“If we could have proven it, you would have known it. You would have been drummed out of camp,” said Ben.

“Well, you’ll not get the chance now, that’s for certain,” said Cutler. “This fancy general from the south is taking care of that.”

“What do you mean?” asked Ben.

“I’m to be transferred out of headquarters to a regiment just like a dog. There’s no gratitude for what I’ve done,” said Cutler.

“If you try any of your tricks with the soldiers in the regiments, you’ll find yourself in more trouble than you ever thought existed,” said Tad. “And you’ll find them a hard bunch of people to fool.”

“And if I had thought General Washington’s arrival would have meant that we get rid of you, I would have carried both him and his horse on my shoulders and run all the way just to get him here quicker,” said Ben as he winked at Tad.

“I may be leaving here,” said Cutler, “But that doesn’t mean I’m going to serve in any of the regiments.”

“You would be the one to desert all right,” said Ben in disgust.

“Well, at least I would be in better company than I am now,” Cutler said. “Now we got a general who has never really won a battle in his life, but oh, the airs he can put on. Like he was some kind of aristocrat and better than us.”

“He wouldn’t have to be much to be better than you,” said Tad.

“And you. Just look at what’s serving with this high and mighty general: a runaway apprentice with stripes on his back, and more to come, I’d warrant, if his master catches him,” said Cutler as he wagged a finger at Tad.

The two welts on Tad’s back had long since healed and now there were only two faint lines to remind him of that night when Captain Ackerly had beaten him. It all seemed so long ago to Tad, but now with a rush, he thought of the Stelles and wondered how soon it would be before he would see them again.

Ben was counting, "One, two, three..."

"What's that you're doing?" asked Cutler. "Practicing your sums, are you?"

"Four, five, no, I'm counting to ten and if you aren't gone by then, I'm going to pitch into you just like I've been wanting to do ever since I first saw you," said Ben.

"I'll leave when I get good and ready," said Cutler as he took a determined stance and folded his arms.

"Six, seven, eight, nine..."

When Ben reached nine, he jumped to his feet. Cutler ran for his life. Ben laughed and then said softly, "Ten."

As Cutler ran away, they heard him shout, "I'll get you two for this, both of you and that aristocrat too."

"Do you think he means it?" asked Tad.

"Who cares?" answered Ben. "Threats from a coward like Sergeant Cutler are not worth much."

Tad was not so sure, but then decided that Ben was probably right. Cutler was sure to desert the army.

"It's really strange," said Ben, breaking into Tad's thoughts. "Here Cutler is, getting ready to desert because he's being transferred to a regiment, and I've been trying to get transferred and can't."

"I know what you mean," said Tad. "I keep hoping that someone will need a drummer. I thought for a while that I would get assigned to Colonel Stark's regiment, but nothing came of it."

"That's because General Ward wanted you here for the welcoming ceremonies," explained Ben.

They sat up late, talking about the events of the day. Tad got his drum and began polishing it with a rag. Tomorrow would be a new day, and new beginning in what promised to be a new army.

Chapter 14 Drums across the Lines

Tad got up at dawn the next morning. He sniffed around the campfire and the kettle like a hungry brown bear. There was nothing to eat and no sign of Ben. He decided to go over to see General Ward's cook. Maybe he could find a scrap of breakfast there.

Just then Ben came running. "Tad! I was just coming to the tent to wake you up. That General Washington must have worked all night. I think there must be fifty messages for me to deliver, and you're to get one of them."

“What’s this, a message?” asked Tad with a laugh.

“True. You’re to be detached from headquarters for a few days. You are to report to a regiment guarding the Boston road. It’s a good one. It’s called the Marblehead regiment since the men are all from that town. You are really lucky,” groaned Ben. “Every time I try to get assigned to a regiment, all I ever get told is no, no, and no.”

“When?” asked Tad eagerly.

“Now. Today,” replied Ben. “There’s a supply wagon due to go out to the Marblehead line in an hour or so. Be at headquarters with your drum and blanket roll.”

“At last,” laughed Tad. “I’ll be away from your snoring and the leaky tent.”

“You’ll take care of yourself?” asked Ben.

“Of course. Don’t worry. I think we are going to make it. You take care of yourself, too.”

They parted with a wave of hands as if they were going their different ways for a few hours instead of days and maybe forever. It had been like that with David, Tad thought. I waved to him one day, and he was gone.

Tad shook his head and hurried to pack his few possessions.

He felt like a soldier now even though his blanket roll was held together by twine. Another piece of twine held the flapping sole that had come loose from his right shoe. More string laced together a long tear in the back of his shirt. One leg of his breeches was held together by a big patch that he had cut from one end of the blanket.

The supply wagon was waiting for him at the headquarters. Up on the seat was an old man dressed in coveralls and a big straw hat.

“Be ye the young man I’m to haul?” asked the driver with a wink of his eye.

“Yes, sir,” replied Tad.

“Well, throw your gear in back and climb up. It’s a goodly distance. I’ll be wanting to start as soon as possible,” said the driver.

Tad wedged the drum down in the sacks of food in the back and then tossed his blanket roll on top. He climbed up beside the old man, who flipped the reins lightly. The wagon began rolling along at an easy pace.

“Ye are a young one to be a soldier. How old are ye?” asked the old man.

“I’m twelve,” answered Tad. He was glad that the driver had called him a soldier.

“I’ll be seventy-four years old come this next November. If I was but four years younger, I’d be carrying a musket, though I never was much good with a gun,” said the old man.

They rode on through the day. The weather was hot, but there was a small breeze created by the wagon’s slow movement.

“Well, do ye think we’ll win?” asked the old man.

“You mean the war?” asked Tad.

“Aye, or whatever it is we’re a-doing. I never thought war meant so much blamed chasing around and so little fighting,” the old man said as he shook his head back and forth.

“We’ll win,” said Tad confidently. “We’ve got this general from Virginia. Things will change now.”

The old man sighed. “It’s a young man’s war, I’d say. The old mother country can keep the war going a long time. You’ll be a grown man before it’s over, and I’ll be hoeing potatoes in heaven.”

Tad laughed at the old man’s half humorous, half melancholic prophecy.

“There’s a bushel of apples back there,” said the old man with a smile. “They’re kinda runty and not worth much, but I reckon they’d tide us over if you’d reach back there and grab us some.”

Tad, always hungry, quickly did as the old man asked. He bit into the just-ripening apple. The bittersweet taste was almost as good as a cool drink of water.

The wagon neared the line being held by the Marblehead regiment. Tad could see the tents and cook fires of the soldiers, who were holding the front against any sudden attacks out of Boston over the main road.

The wagon pulled up in front of a small make-shift tent. “This be as far as I go, lad. Take care of yourself and that fancy drum,” he said with a wave of his gnarled hand.

Tad thanked the driver and hopped nimbly to the ground. He was happy about serving with a line regiment, even if the assignment was only temporary.

“You’ll live here near the headquarters for the time being,” said a captain after Tad had reported for duty. Tad guessed that he would have no tent over his head come night. The officer had pointed to the ground by the little tent when he said sleep here.

Tad stowed his blanket roll against the outside of the small tent. He kept his drum with him. He chuckled when he thought about what the captain had said about the small tent that served as a headquarters.

He walked along the road that led to Boston until he came to a wall made of rocks that blocked the road. Sitting behind the wall were several soldiers.

“Hi there, drummer boy. This is as far as you can go,” said one of the soldiers. “Beyond this wall there’s a short way to the main barricade. It’s not a good idea to go out there in the daylight, though our boys holding it would be glad enough to see a friendly face.”

Tad nodded and sat down with the soldiers. They asked Tad about the blue French drum and how he happened to become a drummer. As they talked, Tad heard the staccato beat of a drum.

“Who is that drummer?” asked Tad. “I was told this regiment had no drummer.”

“Ha! That’s our good friend over on the other side,” one of the soldiers said as he jerked his thumb in the direction of Boston. “He comes out and plays for us every day about this time.”

Tad listened to the beat for a few moments. Suddenly his face broke into a smile. “That’s Packie. I’d know his beat anywhere.”

Tad stood up behind the wall and adjusted the drum strap. Then he began to play, picking up the same beat as the British drummer, but with an ending that Tad made up on his own. Then he stopped and listened.

The British drummer echoed Tad’s beat and then added more to it. Yes, it’s Packie for sure, thought Tad as he began playing again.

“Listen to them go!” shouted one of the soldiers. “We got us a duel with drums.”

It was no duel, though. Tad stood at attention and played as well as he could. Though the soldiers could not see, there were two tears rolling slowly down his cheeks. They were tears of happiness, not of sorrow. Packie was alive. And Tad would continue to hope that someday he would find David, too.

Chapter 15 - A Scary Night Outside Boston

Tad could not sleep. It was a hot night in August, but he was not sure of the day or the date. Days had followed in quick succession since the terrible battle out on Breed’s Hill. Soldiers who had not fought in the battle were already calling it the Battle of Bunker Hill even though the real fighting took place on the nearby Breed’s Hill.

There was much to think about. He knew Packie was alive. He was convinced that the drums had proved that to be true.

Sadly, David’s fate was still a mystery. Tad knew that Ben thought David had not survived when the British took the redoubt on Breed’s Hill. Nevertheless, Tad continued to hope that somehow David was still alive.

Then there was the Marblehead regiment. The men in this regiment were unlike any of the men in the regiments that he had seen thus far. The regiment was composed of men who made their living by fishing. They were strong men and led by good officers. Their camp was clean and orderly, which was certainly not the case in some of the other regiments as he well knew from delivering messages to officers.

He saw that like most of the regiments, the Marblehead regiment had its share of boys and old men.

As was usually the case, the Marblehead men found the blue French drum to be of considerable interest. The commander of the regiment, Colonel Glover, had quickly recognized that the drum was French and had remarked that he wished he had some French muskets as well for his regiment.

His main concern had been the drum calls and training his men and officers to recognize the different drumbeats.

Tad's open eyes stared up at the stars overhead, but he did not really see them in his mind. His thoughts returned to David. Maybe he was a prisoner. There were reports that the British had taken some of the redoubt defenders prisoners. Maybe David was somewhere in Boston. The word Boston caused his mind to shift from David to the Stelles. He had not seen them for over four months. He knew that life was probably very hard in Boston for the people trapped in the besieged city. He felt tears beginning to form in his eyes, and there was a lump building in his throat.

Tad sat up and rubbed the tears from his eyes. He gave up trying to sleep.

He reached into a small canvas bag in which he kept his few possessions and pulled out a rag. He began polishing the French drum which was beside him on his blanket.

When Tad was troubled or puzzled, he often polished the sides of the blue drum. Sometimes, things stuck in his mind seemed to fade away, at least for a while.

This night, however, polishing the drum did not help.

He slipped on his shoes. He had lain down to sleep in his clothes as he had done every night since joining the army now besieging Boston.

There was a small fire close by. This was the regimental headquarters. Besides the fire, there were several boxes which were used as chairs and a small makeshift tent for the regimental commander.

Tad picked up his drum and rag and walked over to the fire and sat down on a box.

The duty officer on watch during the night came over and sat down on another box.

On the other side of the fire, there was a young soldier curled up asleep on the ground. Tad did not know his name. The young soldier was a messenger for the regimental commander.

"You should be getting some sleep," the officer said softly.

"Can't go to sleep," Tad replied. "What time is it?"

The young officer stared up at the stars before answering.

"Don't have a watch, but I'd make it to be a little after midnight. There's tea in that pot by the fire. Help yourself to a cup, if you like. You can use my cup. It's there by the fire."

"Thank you, sir," Tad answered, "But, if I drink tea, I'll be awake the rest of the night."

"I hope it works that way for me," said the officer. "Being on duty during the night and keeping awake is a hard task."

The officer paused and then asked, "Have you heard any word from your British drummer friend? I was there when you two were talking with your drums. Never heard such drumming in my life!"

"I haven't heard Packie's drum since then," Tad said. "I hope he's all right."

"Maybe his regiment's been relieved and back in the barracks resting up," the officer said. "I wish we'd get a chance to go back in reserve so we could take life a little easier."

Tad laughed. "From what I saw before I joined this regiment out here on the Boston road, those in the rear do a lot of drilling and marching. They don't get much rest."

"That's probably the truth of the matter," the officer nodded in agreement.

Colonel Glover came out of the little tent and approached the fire.

The lieutenant and Tad jumped up.

"Easy there, lads," the colonel said in a low voice.

"Colonel Glover, I hope we didn't wake you up," said the young officer.

"No, Silas, you did not. Chatter back here is not a problem, but if you were out at the barricade in front of our line, that would be a different matter."

The colonel glanced at the sleeping soldier. "And, it would be a good idea if you awakened your messenger here and asked him to make a trip to the barricade to find out what they are hearing in their front."

"Yes, sir," Silas replied.

Tad was not surprised at the informal nature of the conversation between Silas and the colonel. He well remembered watching the British soldiers and officers in Boston before the fighting started. The British officers insisted on strict formality. The use of first names was unthinkable.

"Wait," said the colonel, "I've got a better idea. It's been a while now since I went to inspect the men in the front line. I think I'll just stroll out there and spend some time with them"

"I'll accompany you," said Silas, "For I can see that you are not armed."

"No, Silas," replied the colonel. "You remain here. If there was to be any trouble, it will be your job to call the regiment into line and be prepared for a fight."

"Then take my pistol, sir," urged the young lieutenant.

"Then you would have no weapon," said the colonel. "I'll take this young drummer boy with me. I wish my men would pay as much attention to keeping their muskets as clean as he does his drum."

Colonel Glover turned to Tad and asked, "Well, lad, are you up for a short walk with me?"

"Yes, sir," Tad answered. He had never been out to the barricade, but he had studied it from a safe distance. He knew that the men manning the barricade had to keep their heads down in daylight. Sometimes a British soldier would crawl forward and hide during the night in the hope of a shot at a careless American. Sometimes the British fired a cannon shot at the barricade. It was not safe to be out in the open.

"But, Colonel Glover," said Silas, "the drummer boy is not armed, either."

“Why, he has his drumsticks, now doesn’t he? If we are attacked, the lad can beat a call for help on his drum, or better yet, he can beat a lively tune on the heads of the British soldiers.”

Silas laughed despite his concern for the Colonel’s safety.

“At least take the messenger with you,” Silas said. “He’s not much older than our drummer boy here, but he’s got a musket, and he knows how to use it.”

“We’ll be fine, Silas. Let the messenger sleep. He probably needs it. We all could use a bit of a rest.”

“Being here on the front for so long is our own fault,” said Silas. “If the Marblehead regiment wasn’t about the best regiment in the army, General Washington would have us back out of the line.”

“Probably true enough,” replied Colonel Glover as he stepped out toward the barricade. “Come along, drummer boy. By the way, what is your name?”

“Tad Wheeler, sir,” replied Tad.

“Oh, yes, now I remember,” said Colonel Glover. “You came to us highly recommended by Colonel Stark. He’s a man who sets a high standard. Fetch your drum and come along now.”

Tad quickly slipped the drum strap over his head and shoulder and followed the colonel into the dark.

Although Tad had not been out to the barricade since joining the Marblehead regiment, he knew that the barricade was held by not more than fifty men. They stayed awake all night watching for the British. He knew that some of the men lay on the ground out in front of the barricade and listened for the approach of the British.

They had small piles of tinder, mainly twigs, leaves, and small logs. When they heard the approach of any British, their job was to set fire to the tinder and then run back to join the men behind the barricade. That way, the men behind the barricade could see the British and use their muskets to good advantage.

It did not take long for Tad and the colonel to come up behind the barricade. As they approached, several men rose up in front of them.

“Who goes there?” came a whispered challenge from one of the men.

“Colonel Glover and the drummer boy,” the colonel answered in a strong whisper.

“Colonel Glover? What in the world are you doing out here?” one of the men asked.

“Why, I thought I’d see how you boys are doing. Everything seems all quiet. How are the listeners in front of the line making out?”

“They’re a mite bit jumpy this night, I’d reckon,” came a whispered reply.

Another man joined the group, asking as he came up, “Here now, what’s all this fuss about?”

Even though it was dark, Colonel Glover recognized the man’s voice and answered. “Good evening, Captain Hamlin. I’ve come out to see how things are going. Are the boys listening out front a little nervous tonight?” asked Colonel Glover.

“A little,” replied Captain Hamlin. “We could stand to be relieved from this forward duty. My men need some rest.”

“I know,” said Colonel Glover. “Maybe we can change out your company for another tomorrow night. Now, let’s tour along the barricade.”

“Watch your step, Colonel, and follow me,” Captain Hamlin said as he led the way.

It was a very dark night. The only light came from the stars above. The two officers, followed closely by Tad, moved slowly along behind the barricade which was made of fence posts and boards and in some places, piles of dirt.

Tad could see the dark forms of men and could tell that the barricade barely came up to his chest. He could not see muskets, but he was sure they were probably leaning against the barricade.

There was an angry scream from out in front, and flames from the tinder fires lit up the night.

Tad jumped when he heard the scream. Then he heard men shouting, “The British are here!”

Tad could see shadows on the other side of the barricade. He could hear men running. There was no firing of muskets, however. This was a fight with clubs and bayonets and fists!

Several men climbed over the barricade. One came over the barricade near where Colonel Glover and Tad were standing.

“There’s British all over the place,” he panted as he climbed down off the barricade.

“So it appears,” said Colonel Glover calmly. “It’s time to wake up the regiment, drummer boy. Beat the call to arms and make it loud enough to wake up the regiment.”

Tad took the sticks from their loop on the drum strap and began a long, rolling beat with all his strength. The drum roll could easily be heard back in the regimental camp. As he beat the drum, Tad could see fires blazing up behind them. The regiment was up and would quickly form a line.

There were still no shots being fired, but he could hear angry men fighting.

Suddenly a group of men scrambled over the barricade. They were British and the fight swirled around Tad as he kept beating the call to arms.

“Now, lad. Beat the advance. Silas will know what it means,” Colonel Glover shouted as he faced a British soldier with a bayonet fixed on the muzzle of his musket.

Tad stood firm, his hands working the drumsticks, the drum beat calling for the advance rolling out for all to hear. He could see the British soldier moving toward Colonel Glover with the bayonet poised for a strike.

The British soldier feinted one way and then the other, but the colonel was not fooled. He waited until the soldier lunged. He dodged the bayonet and caught hold of the musket, and wrestled it away from the soldier and then struck the soldier with the butt of the musket. The soldier fell to the ground.

Before Colonel Glover could make another move, a second British soldier came over the barricade and struck the colonel in the back with his musket. The colonel fell to the ground. The soldier then raised his musket for a jab with the bayonet.

Tad slipped the drum strap over his head, dropped the drum and leaped upon the British soldier's back. He wrapped his arms around the soldier's neck. The soldier tried to throw Tad off, but he held tight. Colonel Glover rose from the ground and his hard right fist smashed the soldier's face. Both the soldier and Tad fell to the ground.

As Colonel Glover helped Tad up, the sound of marching feet could be heard. The Marblehead regiment, nearly seven hundred strong, was coming to the aid of their company holding the barricade.

The British soldiers making the silent night attack were fleeing now back to their lines.

Colonel Glover put his hands on Tad's shoulders and asked, "Are you all right?"

"I think so," Tad answered.

"You did a brave thing. You saved my life," said Colonel Glover.

The Marblehead regiment, formed in a line two ranks deep, was upon them.

"Colonel Glover, Colonel Glover?" came a voice from in front of the ranks. "Where are you, sir?"

"Over here, Silas," Colonel Glover shouted. "Send the first rank out over the barricade to sweep the ground in front. Look for our people and any British who are wounded and down. Let's have no firing of the muskets. It's too hard to tell who's who in the dark."

Silas hurried in the direction of the colonel's voice and quickly reached the colonel and Tad.

"Are you all right, colonel?" he asked.

As he spoke, the first rank of the regiment passed by them and over the barricade.

Captain Hamlin and several of his men joined the group.

The two British soldiers on the ground began to stir. It was clear that they were regaining their senses after their engagement with the colonel and Tad.

"We'll take care of these two dandies," said Captain Hamlin.

The British soldiers were helped to their feet.

"We'll take them and any other prisoners back to headquarters," Silas said to Captain Hamlin.

"It was a night attack, no firing. All bayonets and musket butts," Captain Hamlin said. "There must have been a hundred or so of them, all light infantry, I'd judge."

"Your men performed very well, Captain," said Colonel Glover. "Do you know yet how many we lost and how many prisoners we captured?"

"I'm still checking," replied Captain Hamlin. "Near as I can tell, we had ten men hurt, but none killed. Most of the injured will be all right in a couple of days. Counting the two you captured, colonel, I think we must have at least twelve altogether."

"I only captured one. Tad, here, got the other," Colonel Glover said.

"I don't think I captured anyone," Tad said. He was embarrassed by the colonel's praise. "I was hanging on for dear life when you hit him, sir."

The men laughed. Tad's modesty appeared to impress them.

The men of the regiment returned to their quarters, and the men on guard at the barricade resumed their positions where they would peer out into the dark, looking for the British in case they returned.

Tad sat his drum down by his blanket. He was thirsty and hungry after the excitement out at the barricade. He found his tin cup and walked over to a water barrel that served the headquarters as a source of drinking water.

Silas was there with a smoke-blackened container.

"I'm making a pot of tea," he said. "It won't take long. A hot cup of tea should be just the thing after all the excitement this night."

"Thanks," answered Tad, "but, all I want is a cup of water. I think I'll have no trouble going to sleep now."

"You've had a busy night, that's for certain, Silas said. "I recognized the call to arms, and I could guess what was going on from all the noise. Then I thought I heard the drum beat for rallying around the flag."

"That might have happened," Tad said. "I was so scared that I'm not sure what calls I was playing."

"You might have been scared, but you did what had to be done. Colonel Glover said he's going to ask that you be permanently assigned to the Marblehead regiment. That's high praise," said Silas.

"That would be an honor," replied Tad as he dipped his cup in the barrel and drank until the cup was empty.

He dipped another cup from the barrel, exchanged good nights with Silas, and then returned to his blanket.

He sat down on the blanket, carefully balancing the cup of water. He fished about in his bag until he found a half biscuit he had saved from supper and began eating it. The water was warm, but it helped the biscuit down his throat. He was sleepy, but he fought off sleep until he finished the biscuit and the water.

His eyelids felt heavy, but they would not stay closed. There was so much to think about. He had been very scared, just as he had been scared when he marched out to Breed's Hill with the New Hampshire regiment, and he really did not remember just how it was that he made the decision to slip off his drum and jump on the back of the British soldier. Everything seemed to have happened in a fog.

His eyes seemed to see fog for a moment. He was asleep.

Chapter 16 A New Friendship Begins

Tad awoke with a start and jumped up from his blanket. There was much commotion. Not far away, there was a man on horseback. The horse was skittish, but the rider, dressed in a strange looking uniform, easily controlled the animal.

Silas saw Tad and yelled, "Come on over, sleepyhead. This rider's been asking about you."

Tad rubbed the sleep from his eyes as he approached the group around the horse and rider. He stared hard, and then shouted, "Ben!"

The rider slipped a leg over the horse's head and dropped to the ground. He grabbed Tad's hand and shook it vigorously.

"How are you doing, Tad?" he asked.

Before Tad could answer, one of the men standing nearby shouted, "Our drummer boy captured a British soldier. That's how he's doing. I'd warrant there's not another drummer boy in the whole army who's done that!"

"What's this, Tad? Was there an attack here last night?" Ben asked.

"Indeed, there was," said Colonel Glover as he strode forward. "I presume you have a dispatch for me, lieutenant?"

Ben came to attention and saluted.

"Yes, sir," he said as he handed a folded sheet of paper to the colonel.

While Colonel Glover unfolded the sheet and scanned it, Tad stared at Ben. He somehow looked older in the uniform, and he must have been promoted to lieutenant.

Tad had many questions to ask Ben, and he could hardly wait for a chance to talk to his friend.

Colonel Glover took his time with the sheet of paper. Finally, he looked up at Ben and said, "So it's true. We are to be relieved tonight by the Rhode Island regiment."

"Yes, sir," Ben replied.

Colonel Glover looked around. "Silas?" he called. "Come with me. We've got planning to do. Where we are going tonight will be a long march." He looked up at the sky and continued, "And, the weather is changing. We'll be marching in the rain this night for certain."

Silas hurried to Colonel Glover's side. The colonel gave him the dispatch and then turned back to Ben.

"My compliments to General Washington. Tell the general I will be at the new camp by sunrise tomorrow as ordered."

Colonel Glover and Silas walked away, and the soldiers went about their tasks.

Both Tad and Ben spoke at the same time, and then laughed. "You first," Tad said.

“What’s this about you capturing a British soldier?” Ben asked. “I’ve never heard of a drummer boy doing that.”

Tad shook his head. “It wasn’t really that way. We were attacked last night. I was with Colonel Glover out at the barricade. The British light infantry came in with a silent night raid. Colonel Glover was attacked by two of them. He took one of the soldier’s musket away from him and hit him with it. The other soldier knocked the colonel down with his musket and was going to bayonet him. I was so scared I didn’t know what I was doing, except that I jumped on the soldier’s back. He tried to throw me off, but I hung on for dear life. Then Colonel Glover recovered and hit the soldier in the head with his fist and laid him down on the ground.”

Ben whistled in amazement. “General Washington will hear about this, I can promise you that.”

“It didn’t amount to anything,” Tad protested. “Please don’t tell the general. He’s got enough to listen to without that.”

“Oh, I’ll not have to tell the general. After a scrap like you people had last night, Colonel Glover will have to write a report on the action for General Washington. Your colonel strikes me as a man who doesn’t waste words, but he’ll write a full enough report.”

“It doesn’t have to be too full,” Tad said. He looked at Ben and then continued, “You are a lieutenant now. What is that uniform? How did you get a horse?”

“You like it?” Ben said as he whisked some dust from his sleeve. “It’s our new uniform. This is what the Continental Army will be wearing, at least someday. Right now, it’s like everything else. There’s only a few for the many.”

“We’ll be the bluecoats against the Redcoats,” Tad said. “The generals won’t have any problem knowing who’s where.”

“I kind of fancied a different color of trim on the collar and lapels of the coat,” Ben said. “Maybe a yellow or red instead of the buff. I never heard of the color buff before. It looks light brown to me.”

“I think it’s a fine-looking uniform,” said Tad. “And, I wish I had one of those tri-cornered hats like you’ve got. Fact of the matter is, I don’t even have a hat. What I’ve got is a woolen cloth that keeps falling off my head.”

“I’ll see if I can find you a hat back at headquarters. And that’s where I best be riding off to.”

“How did you come by a horse?” Tad asked.

“That’s part of my new job. I’m what they call an aide- de- camp. What that is, is a glorified messenger boy for General Washington. I keep asking for an infantry command, but the general is always saying, no. He can really say that word. When he says no, it’s like distant thunder which makes you want to find someplace safe from lightning.”

Ben held the reins lightly in one hand and easily mounted the horse.

“You be careful, Tad. I’ll be around to see you when you get set up in your new camp.”

As he rode away, he turned in the saddle and shouted, “Good luck!”

Tad waved and watched as his friend rode away. Ben really did look like a soldier in that uniform. He smiled as he considered how different Ben and Silas were from young British officers. He remembered how the British had strutted about Boston back before this fighting started.

A young soldier approached. He did not look much older than Tad.

"The colonel wants you," said the young soldier. "That lieutenant from headquarters is a friend of yours?"

"Yes," replied Tad. "We shared a tent back when I was attached to headquarters."

"I wish I had a horse," the young soldier said. "It would sure beat walking."

Tad and the young soldier quickly found Colonel Glover.

"Your friend brought good news," the colonel said. "I need to talk to the officers. Get your drum and beat the officers' call. I hope my captains will recognize the call."

"Yes, sir," Tad replied as he turned and hurried over to his blanket and drum. He slipped the drum strap over his head and paused for a moment while he searched in his mind for how the officers' call was to be played. Satisfied that he had the right call, he began beating the drum. He kept repeating the beat as the captains of the companies began assembling around Colonel Glover. Captain Hamlin was out at the barricade, but he could hear the beat and he hurried back across the open ground to join the other officers.

"That's enough," Colonel Glover said to Tad. "That drum's a handy tool."

The colonel stared at his officers for a moment and then said,

"Pick a spot on the ground and sit down. If you haven't already heard the good news, we are going to be relieved tonight. The Rhode Islanders are coming up to relieve us."

"About time," one of the captains said.

"That's true enough," the colonel agreed. "The bad news is that we've got a long march ahead of us tonight. I figure it to be about eighteen miles. We're going to hold a stretch of beach way out on the flank."

"It'll be good to be close to water again," spoke out another captain. "Any chance we'll have some boats? We could do some fishing and maybe eat a little better."

Colonel Glover smiled. "Maybe General Washington will find us some boats. We are seamen and not land men. Now, this march tonight will be hard going. We'll get rain, I think. Make sure the gun powder is kept dry. Men can dry out the next day, but wet or damp gunpowder is useless."

"Eighteen miles is a long walk," Captain Hamlin said. "What time are we going to be relieved?"

"Early, I hope," answered the colonel. "Now, Captain Hamlin, you will begin bringing your men back from the barricade as soon as it's dark. Keep about a dozen men on guard. Your first company will be at the back of the column when we march. You'll have to make sure there are no stragglers. We don't

want anyone to be left behind. Captain Jeffers, your second company will lead us out. The rest will follow in order of companies two through ten. Keep the men moving. We'll set a reasonable pace."

"What about food?" asked Captain Jeffers.

Colonel Glover shook his head. "There's not much food on hand. Have the boys eat up whatever there is. The food can travel as well in their bellies as in a cart."

"Then we'll be traveling light enough," laughed Captain Jeffers.

"There's two other matters," Colonel Glover said when the laughter stopped. "We will form an advance guard. Each company will detail four good men for the advance guard. They will be led by Major Silas Smith."

"Major? I thought Silas was a lieutenant," said Captain Hamlin.

"He was this morning," Colonel Glover said, "But I need a major to command the advance guard. Any one of you captains deserves to be promoted to major, but I need you to lead the companies. Silas will take the advance guard out today. I want him to have some rank so he can keep other outfits and wagons from slowing up our march. He can pick a good spot out about nine or so miles. There's some farms there, and maybe he and the advance guard can find some food. At any rate, the advance guard will take kettles and tea along with them. By the time we get that far, the boys will be happy to have a cup of hot tea and maybe something to eat when we take a rest break.

That's all I've got for now. Time for you captains to get about your work."

Captain Jeffers smiled as he said, "Colonel, I think that's about the most words I've heard you say since this fighting started."

Colonel Glover shook his head slowly and replied, "Being on land seems to require more talking than when we're on our boats."

The colonel turned to Tad.

"I've got orders for you, too. You are to go over to my tent and tell the cook to feed you up as best he can. Then, you are to get some sleep. We have a hard night ahead, and you and your drum will be needed."

"Yes, sir," replied Tad.

With all the excitement of the morning, he had almost forgotten that he was hungry. Moreover, it was coming up on noon, and a quick glance at the sun confirmed what his stomach was telling him.

He hurried to his bag and pulled out his tin cup and plate and his wooden spoon.

The cook was busy at his fire. There was a pot which Tad knew was filled with tea. There was a heavy metal pan with a lid on top. That was the makeshift oven the cook used for making biscuits.

"Give me your plate, drummer boy," said the cook with a smile. "Today is a treat, and that is for certain. I've got a surprise for you. We have baked beans to go with the salted fish, and there's plenty of both. Sit down at the colonel's table and eat like a true gentleman."

Tad sat at the table. Two boxes served as chairs. The cook brought over the plate which was heaped with baked beans and fish. Atop the food were four biscuits, and on top of the biscuits was an apple that was still mostly green and just beginning to turn yellow.

“There now, that’s a real feast, I’d say,” said the cook.

Tad’s eyes opened wide. It had been a long time since he had a plate filled with so much food.

“Be sure to eat that apple,” the cook said. “What with all the miserable food we’ve had, it’s a wonder we don’t all come down with scurvy. Men need to eat fresh food like apples and onions to keep from getting the sailor’s disease.”

Tad knew about the disease called scurvy. Sailors who were on long voyages and only given biscuits and salted meat to eat could get very sick.

He stuffed the biscuits and apple in his pockets for later, and then set to work on the beans and fish. He was so hungry and eager to eat that he did not notice the young soldier coming over to the table with a full plate of food. He sat down on the box opposite Tad and said, “Don’t remember when I’ve seen so much food. This was probably supposed to feed us for the next three or four days,”

Tad nodded agreement as he continued to eat.

The young soldier warned Tad not to eat too fast, or he’d get sick at his stomach.

Tad laughed. “You sound like my mother. She always wanted me to chew my food a hundred times before swallowing.”

The soldier mumbled through a full mouth, “Hope you weren’t eating soup.”

They both laughed.

“I never did know your name. All I ever heard you called is drummer boy.”

“I’m Tad Wheeler. I came over from Boston.”

“Yes, I know about that. My name is Jed. We must be about the same age, I’d guess.”

“I’m almost thirteen,” Tad said.

“Well, I guess I’m a little older since I’m almost fifteen. I think I’m old enough to be in the line with a musket, but my father doesn’t think so. I’m stuck with being a messenger boy for the colonel.

“Your father is here?” asked Tad.

“Yes. Both my father and my grandfather. They’re in Captain Jeffers second company.”

Tad was surprised.

“Your grandfather? He’s in the army, too?”

“Yes, he is,” replied Jed.

“Who’s taking care of things at home?” Tad asked as he spooned up the last of the beans.

“My mother and my two sisters. I’ve got an older brother, but he had to stay at home. He’s got what they call a club foot and can’t march. He takes care of the garden and when we come in with a good day’s load of fish, he’s one of the best there is at cleaning fish. He must be twice as fast at cleaning fish as even my father.”

“Do you go out with your father to fish?” Tad asked.

“Started a few months before this fighting began,” Jed said. “We’ve got a fine boat. We fish all day and then come in before sundown. Then we have to clean and salt the fish.”

“I’m an apprentice printer,” Tad said. “I can set type and do a fair job of setting up a form for the press.”

“Really! That means you can read,” said Jed. “My mother tried to teach me how, but I never could get the hang of it.”

The two boys finished off their big meal and returned to their campsite near the colonel’s makeshift tent.

Tad visited the water barrel because the salted fish and the warm day had made him thirsty. When he lay down on his blanket, he thought about Jed and his family. Jed was a year older, and he was a little taller, and there were freckles. His hair was reddish-brown and some of the hair on the back of his head stuck up in the air. He had a funny way of talking, and Tad was surprised to hear that he could not read.

Since joining the army, Tad had met so many people who had done so many different things. He had thought that Mr. Stelle’s print shop was the center of the world, mainly because so many interesting people came to the shop to have work done. He thought about the Stelles, the print shop and then David came into his mind. Where was David? Would he ever see his friend again?

Chapter 17 A Hard Night’s March

Tad’s eyes opened, and he stared up at heavy gray clouds overhead. He thought he felt a sprinkling of rain drops on his face. There was a cool breeze that felt good after the heat of the past days.

Jed was sitting on the ground close by. “Been waiting for you to wake up. It won’t be long before its dark.”

Tad scrambled to his feet. “Are the Rhode Islanders here?”

“They’re back a-ways. They will wait out of sight of the British until dark,” Jed said.

Tad took his cup and visited the water barrel. The water in the barrel was running low. Men who had water bottles or canteens had filled them for the march.

There was a low rumbling of thunder off in the distance. At least, Tad hoped that it was thunder and not cannon.

The camp was bustling with activity as men prepared for the march.

When Tad returned to the camp site, he asked Jed, "How are we going to move the water barrel and the cook's pots?"

"There'll be a wagon and a team of horses come up after we leave, and the regiment's equipment will be loaded on it. We won't have much to work with when we get to our new place until the wagon arrives," said Jed.

When night finally came, so did the rain. It was a light rain, but occasional lightning flashes revealed that the heavy clouds overhead were still there, and no one doubted that the marchers would indeed have a wet night.

Each company stood ready for the march. No one cheered as the Rhode Islanders passed by. Every effort was made to keep as quiet as possible. If the British suspected that a relief was in progress, they might make good use of their cannons, even if some of their gunpowder was wet from the rain.

Colonel Glover talked to the colonel in charge of the Rhode Island regiment. Tad heard Colonel Glover use the name Greene.

The march began. Colonel Glover, Tad, Jed, and Captain Jeffers led the way. The second company followed, and behind them the rest of the companies in the regiment. The companies marched in a long column of four men wide in each rank. Tad and the lead part of the column were some distance ahead on the road before the 10th Company, and then the 1st company which had held the barricade, formed the end of the column. When they had marched far enough to be safe from the British, men began to talk. There were bursts of song from some. Everyone was happy to be away from the line they had held for so long.

The rain fell on the marching men. After a mile or so of marching, the rain changed from a steady drizzle into a heavy downpour. There was no way for the marching men to keep dry.

Tad felt drops of water running down his back. His shirt was soaked through. His feet were wet, and the dirt road was turning into slippery mud.

"Can you play the drum in this rain?" asked Colonel Glover who was marching beside Tad.

"Yes, sir," Tad replied.

"Good," said the colonel. "Give us a lively marching beat. It will pick up the men's spirits a little. Mind, though, not too fast a beat. We've got a long way to go before we can rest."

Tad took the sticks from the loop on the strap and began to play. The sound of the drum drifted back along the column of men.

Colonel Glover stepped to the side of the road and tried to look back through the dark at the long column. he watched as the second company filed by him. Then he hurried back to the front of the column and took his place by Tad.

“That old French drum is doing good work for us,” he told Tad. “The men are marching with straight shoulders. Their spirits are up.”

The colonel’s praise lifted Tad’s spirits. The drum was not heavy, and he was a strong boy, but he had started to let his head sag down a bit, and that was the same as his spirit. The wet shoes and clothes did not seem to matter so much.

As he kept the drum sticks busy with the regular marching beat, he began to add in occasional changes that caught the colonel’s attention.

“I’ve not heard that kind of beat before,” he said.

“Sorry, sir,” replied Tad. “I was just adding in some of my own thinking about how a drum could sound.”

“Don’t stop doing it,” the colonel said. “I kind of like it. Seems to make for a livelier step.”

The hours passed, but it seemed to Tad that time was standing still. He had no idea how far they had come, nor how far they were going to march before they reached the resting area that Silas was supposed to set up for them.

It seemed strange to Tad that Silas was now a major and how it had come about. The ideas of leadership in the American rebel army were really very different from the British army. Ben was a leader, but he had never led anything before the fighting started. Now he was a lieutenant. For that matter, Colonel Glover started out as a colonel, but as Tad understood it, the leader of the Marblehead regiment had been a fisherman. Jed’s father and grandfather were also fishermen, but they were not colonels. Tad had to admit, though, that Colonel Glover was a good leader of men. He was sure that counted for a lot.

“I see a light up ahead,” cried Jed.

“Where?” asked Colonel Glover.

“There, just off to the right of the road,” Jed said.

“We will stop here until we find out about that light,” said Colonel Glover. He then turned to Captain Jeffers. “Pass the word back to halt. Then I want you to take ten men and Jed here forward and find out what that light means. I’m hoping it is Silas, and this is our resting place for an hour. When you get there and find out, send Jed back with the word.”

Captain Jeffers quickly followed his orders. The column stopped, and the captain and his small group moved forward.

Tad was sure that the light did not mean trouble, but he knew Colonel Glover was right to take no chances. He held his drumsticks ready for whatever call Colonel Glover ordered.

They did not have to wait very long. Jed came running back and reported to Colonel Glover.

“It’s Silas and his boys, Colonel. They set a lantern for us. They’ve somehow made some fires and the tea is hot and ready.”

Colonel Glover smiled. "That's a good report, son." He then turned and faced the column and shouted, "Forward march, men! We're going to rest up ahead for an hour." As the command was passed down the column by the captains of each company, there was an outbreak of cheering.

Colonel Glover laid his hand on Tad's shoulder and said, "Now, lad, give us a happy marching beat to let Silas know we are coming."

The column soon closed in around the light, which was indeed a lantern hung from a tree limb. Over the limb and several others was a canvas sheet that kept most of the rain off the lantern. Scattered about in a small wooded area were a good dozen smoldering fires. Each company had at least one fire, and the men in the advance party from each company kept calling out the number of the company as the men found their rightful fire and pots of hot tea.

It was a happy moment for the Marblehead regiment. The march was half done, and they were soaking wet. Nevertheless, there was a chance to rest for an hour, and a cup of hot tea would do wonders for the men.

Tad had pulled his cup out of his kitbag. He had a full cup of hot tea and a log to sit on. The log was wet, but so was he, and it was good to be able to sit after so many hours of marching.

Tad pulled one of the biscuits out of his pocket. It was a soggy biscuit, but it tasted good. He was joined on the log by Jed. Tad asked if he wanted a biscuit, but Jed said no.

"I saw what you did with your biscuits when we had that big feed, and I did the same," he said as he pulled a biscuit from his pocket.

"How did you see that lantern?" Tad asked. "I couldn't see anything. I had too much rain in my eyes."

"It was easy enough," Jed mumbled as he ate his biscuit and washed it down with a drink of tea. "Back home, everybody says I can see farther than anyone. It's a gift, I guess."

"It's a good gift to have," Tad replied.

"Sometimes when we're out on the water and there's bad weather, my father puts me up in the bow to keep watch when we're rowing for home. I can see a long way off." Jed stopped talking and looked up at the sky. "The rain's letting up. We'll be marching without rain in our faces."

"How can you tell?" Tad asked.

"I don't know for certain," Jed replied. "It's just the way the sky looks. We'll be seeing stars before long."

Jed was right. The rain was slackening up, and by the time the regiment was formed up to resume the march, the rain had stopped.

The Marblehead regiment was on the road again. After about an hour's march, the column came to a junction with another road, and Colonel Glover ordered the regiment to make a column left movement which put the column on the new road.

The new road was a proper road made of gravel that had been pressed down by heavy rollers pulled by teams of oxen. Even though it had been pressed, there were still stones, and Tad got a quick

reminder that his left shoe had a big hole in the bottom. Even stepping on a small pebble caused him to wince and after a half- hour of marching on the road, he began to limp.

Colonel Glover noticed that Tad was limping, and called a halt to the column.

“Beat the officers’ call,” he told Tad.

The drum began to speak its message, and Tad kept up the beat until all the officers were gathered around Colonel Glover.

“How are your men handling this road?” he asked.

The captains reported that the road was very hard on the men’s feet.

“I’ve got men who don’t have shoes. They are marching barefoot,” one of the captains replied.

“If we stay on this road for very long my company will be crippled,” Captain Jeffers added.

“I feared as much,” Colonel Glover said. “What we are going to do is march alongside the road. We’ll double up the column by marching on both sides of the road. Companies one through five will march on the left side, and companies six through ten will march on the right side. The sides of the road aren’t very wide, so we’ll go with two man ranks instead of four. Go back to your companies now and form them in this new formation.”

It did not take long for the captains to bring their companies into the new formation. When they finished, Tad and Colonel Glover led the way on the left side of the road, and Captain Jeffers and Jed led on the right side.

The going was hard at first. The roadside was not very wide and it sloped down toward a ditch which was nearly full of water after the rain. Colonel Glover did not ask for a marching beat because he knew that Tad was sometimes struggling to keep from slipping down into the ditch.

For two long hours, the regiment moved slowly forward. The men were weary now and not so careful about how they stepped. Sometimes, men slipped down into the ditch and had to be helped out by their friends.

It seemed to Tad as if they had been marching forever. His feet hurt, and his legs were sore. The drum that had felt so light at the start of the march now seemed like a heavy weight pulling at his shoulder.

Tad was half-asleep when he felt Colonel Glover’s hand on his shoulder. He heard the colonel shout out a command for the column to halt. They had reached another crossroad.

Again, the column turned left onto a new road.

Once they were on the new road, Colonel Glover ordered the captains to pull their companies back into the regular regimental marching formation.

The road was neither rocky nor muddy. Tad guessed that it was more like a sandy road, and he was grateful for the softer walking surface when they resumed the march.

“It won’t be long now,” the colonel said to Tad. “This is a sandy road, and we are walking toward water. Give us a happy marching beat, if you please, lad.”

Tad was awake now. He felt better, and the drum rolled out that message to the soldiers behind.

As he played, Tad could hear the soldiers just behind him exclaiming that they smelled water, salt water. They knew they were close to the ocean, and they knew the ways of the ocean. The men talked about how good it would be if they were out again in their boats on the ocean.

Tad heard Jed cry out, "Dawn's coming!"

It still seemed like night to Tad, but as he stared out into the dark, he noticed that he could see farther.

The regiment marched for another hour, and Tad could see the land around them. It was sandy, and there were patches of weeds growing up out of the sand. Tad was sure that he had never seen so much sand in his life.

The sun was not yet up over the horizon when they saw what looked like a great wall of sand ahead of them.

"It's a big sand dune," cried Jed. "The ocean's got to be just on the other side."

Colonel Glover stopped the column just short of the long and high dune.

"Beat the officer's call," he said to Tad.

Tad beat the call and the captains came up to join Colonel Glover.

"This is where we are supposed to be. Get your companies off the road and begin setting up camps. There was supposed to be water and supplies here for us, but I don't see anything except sand. Tell your men to go easy on their water bottles."

"Most of my men are out of water," said one of the captains.

"Then, they will just have to go thirsty for a while," answered Colonel Glover.

The captains returned to their companies and the men began unrolling their blankets. They were looking forward to a good sleep after marching all night.

Several of the men climbed up the side of the dune and stood on top. What they saw surprised them, and at first, they were speechless. Then they began shouting words of alarm.

One of the men tried to run down the back slope of the dune. Instead he tripped and rolled over and over down the sandy slope. He got to his feet and ran toward where Colonel Glover, Tad, and Jed were standing.

"Colonel Glover! The whole British navy's out there not five hundred paces off our beach!"

Chapter 18 A Day of Tricks and Cannon

A stunned silence quickly gave way to shouts and groups of men talking and pointing toward the ocean. Word spread through the companies about the British navy being just on the other side of the long sand dune.

"If the British are here in force," Colonel Glover murmured, "Then it is clear why General Washington wanted us out here on the flank."

He turned to Tad and Jed and smiled. "Come along lads. Let's have a look at the whole British navy."

They climbed the dune and when they got to the top, Tad thought maybe the man sounding the alarm was right. At least, if it wasn't the whole British navy, it was certainly a goodly part.

Colonel Glover shielded his eyes with his hand and stared out at the ships that seemed very close to the beach.

"Looks like three troop transports and two warships," Colonel Glover said. "Look there, they're running out their guns! Quick now, back down the slope with you."

The colonel had a hand on each boy's shoulder and pushed them toward the slope. As they stumbled down the slope, there was a loud bang from out in front, and a cannon ball sailed over their heads and landed harmlessly in the sand.

"Call the regiment into line!" Colonel Glover ordered. Then he turned to Jed and said, "Find Silas and tell him to come on the run."

Tad wasted no time in beating an urgent call to the regiment to come into line. As he beat the call, he could see men grabbing their muskets, and forming into companies. The companies quickly formed a line and began marching forward toward the dune and where Colonel Glover and Tad were standing.

"Now, lad, beat the officers' call," Colonel Glover said. "We need to consider what we are going to do about the British."

As Tad was beating the call for the officers to gather, Silas and Jed hurried up to join them.

"What's happening?" Silas asked as he caught his breath.

"There's five British ships just offshore," Colonel Glover said. "It looks like they might try to land soldiers here."

When the captains were assembled, Colonel Glover explained the situation to them. He told them that the British warships could each fire a broadside of eighteen cannon, and the transports might be carrying twice as many men as were in the Marblehead regiment.

"General Washington must have guessed that the British would try something like this. That's why we were relieved back at the Boston neck and sent out here."

"It looks like we just made it in the nick of time," said Captain Hamlin.

“We’ve only got enough gunpowder for maybe six volleys,” Silas said. “That won’t be enough to stop them if they do have a thousand or so men on the transports.”

“If they have that many cannon, we can’t stand atop the dune and fight them. They’ll blow us off the dune with their cannon,” Captain Jeffers added.

“The problem seems clear enough,” said Colonel Glover. “They’re too much for us to handle. We don’t have any horses. By the time we sent a runner back six miles to headquarters with a request for reinforcements, the battle might be over.”

“I can make the run,” Jed said. “I can outrun most everybody in the regiment.”

Colonel Glover smiled. “I know that, lad, and you may yet get the chance, but maybe there’s another way.”

“What other way?” Silas asked.

The colonel stared thoughtfully up at the dune before speaking.

“The British can’t see through the dune. They know we are here, but they don’t know who we are or how many. If we make them think we were about half of the Continental Army, why, they might reconsider their plans for a landing, pull up their anchors, and go back to safe harbor in Boston.”

“You mean we are to fool them?” asked Silas.

“That’s about the way of it, I think. Some of our men thought it was the whole British navy out there. Why shouldn’t they think we are the most of our army? answered Colonel Glover. “Now, here’s what we will do. All ten of our companies will spread out along this dune. One by one, each company will climb to the top of the dune and form up, but don’t take long to do it. Once atop the dune and formed up, each company will scramble back down before the cannon on the ships can be aimed and fired. After we do that, we’ll shift positions and do it all over again. The trick will be to make the British think we are several regiments instead of just one.”

The captains returned to their companies, and Colonel Glover gave Tad his orders.

“You are to make the British think you are a dozen drummer boys. Pick your way along the back slope of the dune, pop up and play a call, any call, and as loud as you can.”

The colonel nodded at Jed, and said, “I want you to help him keep his footing. Work your way all along the dune.”

“This will be a grand deception,” said Silas as he headed for the dune to make sure the companies kept shifting their positions.

Although they were tired and thirsty, the men in the regiment were in good humor as they began their work. They were laughing about the prospects of fooling the British.

Tad and Jed began their movement along the back of the dune, popping up, sounding a quick and loud staccato beat on the drum, and then dodging down out of sight.

Once when they appeared on top of the dune alongside a company, they heard a shout from one of the men in the company.

“Ho, Jed! How is it going?”

“Good, Poppa. And you?”

“We are good. Your grandfather and I could both use a drink of water, though.”

“That was my father,” Jed said proudly as he helped Tad climb back down off the top of the dune.

The British fired at least ten cannon shots, but the Marblehead men were too quick. No one was injured.

It would never be known for certain, but Colonel Glover said he was sure that the turning point had come when Captain Jeffers led Second Company out on the top of the dune. He was one of the few officers in the regiment who owned a sword. When his men were formed up, Captain Jeffers turned and faced the British ships and calmly saluted them with his sword.

After that, the company disappeared down the back slope of the dune just before several cannons fired at them.

Colonel Glover was sure that the British officers on the ships could see the bold move made by Captain Jeffers through their telescopes. That must have convinced them that a large army was present in their front, and that landing men on the shore under such circumstances was not a good idea.

The British ships raised anchors and sailed away. No one would ever know what they planned to do, but the men in the Marblehead regiment would long remember the great deception.

The regiment was given orders to take a well-deserved rest.

Tad found his blanket and laid it out on the sand. The blanket was still wet from the rain, but the sun was warm. Like the rest of the men in the regiment, he was very thirsty. He remembered his apple and gratefully pulled it out of his pocket.

He saw Jed watching him, and quickly asked, “Would you like half this apple?”

Jed smiled. “I would, if you are offering.”

“Have you got a knife?” asked Tad.

Jed produced a small folding knife from his pocket and cut the apple in half. Both boys made faces as they tasted the tart juices of the unripened apple, but despite being green and very tart tasting, the juices were welcome to thirsty throats.

Jed suddenly raised his head. “Look back yonder along the road. Looks like wagons coming. There’s a horseman, too. Coming at a full gallop, I’d say.”

Tad strained his eyes, and at first, he could see nothing except the road. Then he saw movement.

“Something is coming,” Tad said. “I can’t see half as well as you. We better tell Colonel Glover.”

They quickly found Colonel Glover who was near the bottom of the dune.

“Colonel Glover!” Jed shouted, “There’s wagons coming up the road.”

Colonel Glover stared as far down the road as he could. “Yes, now I see them,” he said. “I expected one or maybe two wagons with food and water, but not this many. Why, there must be six, seven, no, I make it out to be eight wagons. Wonder what this is all about?”

The rider galloping out in front of the wagons quickly approached the camp.

Tad could see that it was Ben, and then he heard Ben shout, “Tad! Tad! Where is Tad Wheeler?”

Colonel Glover smiled. “I thought it might be an important dispatch for me from General Washington.”

Tad and Jed waved, and Ben saw them. He rode up and slid off his horse.

“Tad, there’s good news! Your friend David is alive!”

“What?” cried Tad. “David is alive? Where? How do you know?” Tad’s legs felt weak, and his eyes began to water, and there was a lump in his throat.

Colonel Glover quickly moved to Tad’s side and put a strong arm around Tad’s shoulder.

“It’s true,” Ben said. “We got a dispatch before dawn this morning from a spy in Boston. The British are holding David and maybe a dozen more of our men in some old hulks rotting at a wharf on the Boston waterfront.”

“I know those old ships,” Tad said. “They are tied up along an old dock that no one uses anymore. They’ve been there for years.”

“This is good news, indeed,” said Colonel Glover. “Pray tell me, is there perhaps a message from General Washington for me?”

Ben suddenly remembered his military manners, blushed a little, and quickly saluted Colonel Glover, who returned the salute.

“Begging the colonel’s pardon, sir. General Washington’s compliments to the colonel. General Washington wishes to know how things are going here, and to say that four boats are being brought forward by wagons along with provisions, water, shovels, and materials for the repair of the boats.”

“Four boats?” Colonel Glover asked. “I wonder what General Washington has in mind. The men will be happy to see the boats. Unfortunately, the British navy is paying us close attention, and I doubt we can get much fishing done here.”

Ben cleared his throat and spoke. “There’s more news from General Washington.”

“Continue your report, lieutenant,” Colonel Glover said as he smiled.

“Yes, sir. Tad is to return with his drum to headquarters. He’s to go back with the wagons after they have been unloaded.”

“What’s this?” Colonel Glover said. “I’m to lose my drummer?”

“Just temporarily, I think,” replied Ben.

“General Washington’s going to hold a parley with the British out on the Boston neck road. He wants Tad to be the drummer.”

Colonel Glover was surprised. “A parley with the British? I doubt much good will come of it. What does the general hope to gain?”

“We are going to deliver a letter from General Washington to General Howe, the British commander. The letter will propose an exchange of prisoners.”

“That means David will be back with us soon,” Tad said happily.

“Do you know the drum beat for a parley?” Colonel Glover asked Tad.

“Yes, sir. I’m sure I do.”

Tad remembered when Packie explained that the parley was a big moment, a very formal affair. The drum beat coming from one side, told the other side what was coming next.

“Will Tad be returning to us after the parley?” Colonel Glover asked. “Having a drummer who knows what he’s doing is better than having four boats we probably can’t put in the water because of British warships just off our beach.”

“British warships? Here?” Ben asked.

“True enough,” Colonel Glover said. “You rest easy a while, and I will write a brief report for General Washington.”

He turned to Tad. “Son, you best put together the few belongings you have and be ready to ride a wagon back to headquarters. The wagons are about here, now. Fetch yourself some food and water from the supplies coming up.”

“Yes, sir,” Tad and Ben answered at the same time.

“Where’s your tent?” Ben asked Tad.

Both Jed and Tad laughed. “We don’t have a tent,” Jed said. “Our blankets are by the colonel’s tent, and it isn’t nothing but an old sailcloth hanging down from a rope.”

Ben joined in the laughter. “This must be the poorest army in the world. We don’t seem to have much of anything, and always not enough of that.”

“True,” said Tad, “but we do a fair job of taking on the British, and they’ve got most everything.”

The wagons came up, and on each of four wagons there was a large boat. Nearly half of each boat hung out far over the back of the wagons.

Men from the Marblehead regiment gathered around the wagons and stared at the boats. Even though they were hungry and thirsty, the boats were something they had greatly missed in the months since they had formed the regiment and marched toward Boston.

After a few minutes of inspecting the boats, the men burst out in laughter.

“Why, these aren’t boats at all,” one of the men shouted. “What we have here are four wagon loads of firewood stacked to look like boats.”

The boys and Ben hurried over to see why the men were laughing.

Tad could see that the boats did indeed look in much need of repair. Even he, with his little knowledge of boats, could see that they were old and there were gaps between some of the boards.

Captain Hamlin hurried over to the crowd around the boats.

“Here now!” He shouted. “Get those boats off the wagons, and be careful about it. I don’t want them sunk before they get to water.”

The men sprang to work with a willingness, though they were still laughing. The boats were quickly unloaded and gently turned upside down on the ground.

Ben approached Captain Hamlin, saluted, and said, “There’s some supplies for repairing the boats on a couple of the wagons. I think there’s some boards and tar.”

“We’ll need a lot of supplies to repair these boats,” said Captain Hamlin as he slowly shook his head. “Now, here is a good question: where are the oars for these derelict old boats?”

Ben appeared surprised. “The oars? Oh, yes. They must be on the wagon that’s still on the way. We had trouble with a wheel. It should be here soon.”

The wagon drivers were turning their teams and the wagons in preparation for the trip back to headquarters.

Tad returned to Colonel Glover’s tent. and quickly packed.

Colonel Glover came out of his tent, a folded paper in his hand.

“Ready to go?” he asked Tad.

“Yes, sir,” Tad replied.

“I hope you will come back to us,” Colonel Glover said. “You are a good drummer. More than that, you are a good soldier. I think I probably owe you my life. If you hadn’t jumped on that British soldier, he might have run me through with that bayonet.”

“Thank you, sir,” Tad said. He could feel his face beginning to turn red.

“Well, go along with you, now,” said the colonel. “And good luck with the parley. Maybe you will have your friend back from the British soon.”

Tad saluted the colonel, who returned his salute.

He met Jed at the wagon with the water barrel and food supplies. Jed was helping unload the water barrel. When it was on the ground, Jed helped Tad pull his cup out of the bag and draw a cup full of water.

“You’ll be wanting to get some biscuits and a plate of that salted fish before you go,” said Jed. “Won’t seem right, you not being here with that fancy drum, and all.”

Tad emptied the cup and then drew off another. "I'll skip the fish. I've still got biscuits from yesterday." He drank a second cup of water, and then handed his cup to Jed, saying as he did so, "You must be as thirsty as me."

"I guess so." Jed answered. He took the cup and drank two cupsful before passing the cup back to Tad.

"You be careful with that parley business. Captain Jeffers explained it to me. I don't know about such matters. It doesn't seem right, trusting the British not to open fire."

Tad smiled. "I think it will go all right. Maybe some of those British we captured when they tried that night raid on us will be the ones who we exchange for my friend."

Jed nodded agreement. "That would be a good thing. You'd best hurry along. Pick a good wagon to ride back. That way you can get some sleep in the back of the wagon."

So much had happened that Tad forgot how tired he really was after the long night's march, the great deception against the British warships, and the exciting news about David. He felt a little light-headed.

"Are you all right?" Jed asked.

"Yes, I think so," Tad replied. "I'm just a little wobbly. It's nothing that a couple of biscuits and a nap won't cure."

"You take care," Jed said. "I've got to go find Colonel Glover, now. He'll be needing me, I'd guess."

The two boys nodded at each other and then parted. Tad was sure that he would be back in a couple of days. He would not like to lose a friend like Jed. He knew how hard it was to lose a friend.

The wagons were lined up on the road ready to begin the return trip.

Ben rode up and said to Tad, "I've got to be off to headquarters. General Washington will need to see Colonel Glover's report about the British warships."

"See you there," Tad replied.

As Ben rode away, the wagon driver looked down from his seat.

"Are ye the drummer boy going back to headquarters?" he asked.

"Yes, I am," Tad answered.

"Well, climb on up here. If you want to catch some shut-eye, climb in the back and find a soft spot on the floor."

"Thanks," Tad said. He unslung his drum and lifted it up over the side boards. The kitbag and his blanket roll followed. Then he climbed up and over the boards and lay down. He pulled a biscuit out of his pocket and began eating it. As he ate, he laid his head down on the blanket roll and used it as a pillow. He was asleep before he finished the biscuit.

The old man on the seat looked back at Tad and shook his head. "This business with the British is making old men out of children."

Chapter 19 Dressing up for a Parley

Tad felt someone tugging at his shoulder. He opened his eyes.

“Never saw a man or boy who could sleep like ye did.”

Tad turned to see who was talking. It was the old wagon driver.

“We’re here, boy, and bless me, but ye slept the whole way. I was careful as I could be to keep the wheels out of any holes so ye wouldn’t bounce too much. It must have been a while since ye slept last, I’d warrant.”

Quickly sitting up, Tad glanced around. “How long have I been asleep?” he asked.

“About six hours, I’d make it,” answered the driver.

“We marched all last night,” Tad said as he climbed down from the wagon.

“Thank you for the ride. I don’t think I’d have done well trying to march back here.”

“Glad to be of service, young man.” The driver paused and then added, “That’ll be a French drum, I’d guess.”

“Yes,” Tad replied. “My father, Mr. Stelle, got it back in the French and Indian War.”

The old driver nodded his head.

“I was in the militia back in those days. Didn’t see any of the fighting, though. Just like now, I spent my time carting things back and forth. Never carried a load of boats before though. Can’t figure that out.”

Tad nodded, “Sometimes I have a hard time figuring things, too.”

“Well, good luck to ye, lad. Time to be moving on, I’d guess.”

“And good luck to you.” Tad said with a wave of his hand. “Maybe you’ll be giving me a ride another day.”

“Wouldn’t surprise me none. Think I carried ye and the French drum out to Boston road a while back.”

The headquarters building was busy, and Tad did not see Ben. He thought that his lieutenant friend was probably riding his horse somewhere to deliver a message from General Washington.

An officer who Tad did not recognize came out of a door and stopped in front of him.

“What have we here?” the officer asked.

Tad straightened his shoulders and stood at attention. “I’m Tad Wheeler. I’m a drummer, and I’m supposed to report here.”

“Oh, I see,” said the officer as he looked Tad up and down and then shook his head.

“This will never do. When was the last time you had a bath?” He proceeded to answer his own question before Tad could speak. “Not for many a month, I’d warrant. And those clothes! They are surely a disgrace to a ragbag.”

The officer quickly walked all the way around Tad, who was beginning to blush, not sure whether to be just embarrassed, or both embarrassed and angry.

“And those shoes and stockings,” the officer continued. “This will never do.”

At that moment, Ben came out the door. He was brushing dust from his uniform when he saw Tad.

“You’re back,” Ben said with a smile. “I hope you got some sleep on the way.”

Tad nodded yes, but was not sure he should speak directly to Ben as long as the other officer was watching. Tad was sure that the other officer was a man of some rank, maybe even a general, though he wore no sign of rank that he could see.

The officer turned to Ben. “This is the drummer for the parley?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” replied Ben. “He has just returned from duty with the Marblehead regiment.”

The officer’s tone of voice softened. “You are the boy who captured a British soldier?”

“Not exactly,” replied Tad. “I just jumped on him and held on until Colonel Glover could hit him with his fist.”

The officer laughed. “I’d have given a good many shillings to have seen that.” He then turned to Ben. “Lieutenant, you have a new assignment. Get this lad cleaned up. A bath, maybe two or three baths, a haircut, a uniform, and new stockings and shoes.”

The officer paused and then stepped around behind Tad. “Lift your foot, young man. I want to see the bottoms of your shoes.”

Tad was reluctant to lift his right foot, and he really did not want to lift his left foot at all.

“Lift your foot,” the officer ordered.

Tad lifted first one foot and then the other. The officer could see the bottoms of both of both feet through the holes in the soles of his shoes.

Then Tad felt a hand on his shoulder, the hand turning him so that he faced the officer.

“You marched eighteen miles last night in these shoes?” the officer asked gently.

“Yes, sir,” Tad said. “It wasn’t a problem except when we were on the gravel road. Some of our soldiers do not have any shoes. It was awful hard for them.”

The officer looked at Ben, “You take care of this young man. I want him ready for the parley. You don’t have much time.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Ben as he saluted.

The officer returned his salute and walked away.

“Who was that?” Tad asked. “Is he a general?”

“No,” replied Ben. “That was Colonel Knox. He’ll probably be a general soon, though. He’s in charge of artillery, the cannon.”

“He looks kind of young to be a colonel,” Tad said.

“He is young. I think he’s about twenty-five or so. Comes out of Boston where he had a bookstore.”

“I wonder if Mr. Stelle knew him,” Tad asked.

Ben shrugged. “Probably. Now, let’s go about the business of making you presentable for the parley. You’ll share my tent.” Ben paused when he saw the look on Tad’s face. “Don’t worry,” Ben said. “It’s a different tent from the one we shared before the battle out on Breed’s Hill. This one is a little bigger and does not have as many holes in it.”

Ben led the way to the tent. Tad could see the new tent was a much better shelter, but he was concerned about the safety of his drum. He remembered how Mr. Stelle’s gold piece and the leather kitbag had been stolen when he joined the army.

“Will my drum be safe here?” he asked. “I’m not worried about the rest of my things because they aren’t worth stealing.”

Ben replied. “I think you can safely leave your drum here.” He paused, looked at Tad, and then said, “The big problem is going to be finding a uniform for you. I do believe you’ve grown a little taller. What are you now? Twelve?”

“Almost thirteen, I think,” Tad answered.

“You’re almost big enough now to stand in the line with a musket,” Ben said. “Now, here’s what we will do. You can use my soap, wash cloth, and towel. There’s a small stream back over that little ridge behind us. You go take a good bath in that stream. By the time you finish, I’ll be back with new clothes for you. You keep washing yourself until I get back. That way, you won’t have to put those dirty clothes back on again. Why, if you put them back on, you’d be dirty again in an instant.”

Ben hurried away back to the headquarters, and Tad stowed his drum and gear in the tent. He picked up the soap, rag, and towel where Ben had laid them out and walked back over the ridge.

The small stream turned out to be wider than Tad expected. There were men here and there on this side of the stream. Some were bathing and some were washing their clothes. There were a few who were swimming, and Tad took careful note of where they seemed to be standing and where they were swimming. He did not know how to swim, and so after he had taken off his clothes and shoes, he stepped carefully into the water.

The water was cool, but after the first sensation, it felt comfortable. He waded in up to his knees and began scrubbing himself.

It had been a long time since he had bathed, and he smiled as he thought what Mrs. Stelle would have to say about that. She believed he should have a bath at least once a week, though not always that often in the winter. The Stelles had a large tin tub which was big enough for him when he was little. When he got older, he had to stand in the tub to wash himself.

The soap and water felt good. Tad was happy to hear that he was to have clean clothes for the parley. He had thought about the parley, and he may even have dreamed about it when he was sleeping in the wagon while on the way to headquarters, though he was not sure about that. He remembered thinking about David and that the parley would result in David being released as a part of a prisoner exchange.

Tad knew it was very important that the Americans make a good show at the parley. He knew how much importance the British put on such meetings. There was a strict code of conduct and appearance. He scrubbed even harder to get the dirt off his body that had accumulated over the months of not having a bath. While he scrubbed, it occurred to him that he had been rained on many times, but rain did not seem to count. Again, he smiled when he thought of what Mrs. Stelle would have to say.

When he had scrubbed until he could scrub no longer, he soaped his hair and rubbed hard and then waded carefully out into deeper water and ducked his head under and rinsed out the soap. He kept his eyes tightly shut, but even so, soap and water got in his eyes and for a few seconds, he could see nothing.

While his eyes were still closed, he heard Ben's voice.

"You better come out of the water, now. You'll turn into a fish if you stay much longer."

Tad's eyes cleared and he could see Ben standing on the shore. He had a bundle of clothes.

"I think I'm about as clean as I've ever been," said Tad as he waded ashore. "Are those my clothes you are holding?"

"Yes," said Ben. "Clean and new clothes from top to bottom. We found a uniform that should fit."

Tad quickly grabbed the towel and vigorously dried himself.

"I'm to have a real uniform like the one you wear?" Tad asked. "And a tricorne hat, too?"

"Blue and buff, and all the trimmings," Ben laughed.

It did not take long for Tad to put on the uniform. It was made of good cloth, and he was excited about having a chance to wear it, but equally interesting to him was the pair of clean white stockings that came up to his knees and tucked under the breeches. He looked over at the old pair of stockings.

"I doubt that there's much value left in those old stockings," he said.

Ben agreed with him. "Your old stockings are in sad shape.

After putting on his shoes, Tad stood at attention and Ben walked around him as if he was inspecting the drummer boy.

"Two problems," Ben said as he straightened Tad's hat.

"What problems?" Tad asked.

"We've got to get your hair cut, and we need a new pair of shoes for you," Ben replied. "The haircut's not really a problem. We have a barber at headquarters. When he's not cutting hair, he is a wagon master and sometimes pulls teeth. I don't know if he's better at being a barber or being a dentist. He's slow and he grumbles a lot, but he's a good man. I've picked him to carry the white flag for the parley."

“Will he make a good appearance?” Tad asked.

“He dresses up well, and he is a steady man,” Ben replied.

“He sounds like the man who drove the wagon I came back in from the Marblehead camp,” Tad said.

“Probably so,” Ben nodded. “Now, your shoes are a different matter.”

Tad looked down at his feet. His shoes were a sorry-looking part of his appearance.

“Where will we find shoes?” Tad asked. “I don’t have any money.”

“That’s not a problem,” said Ben. “General Washington said the cost was to go on his account. We’ll go see Mr. Riddle. He owns a leather shop near here, and he has several apprentices. They make shoes, belts, straps, and harness for horses.”

“David was a leatherwork apprentice before we joined the army,” Tad said.

As they were walking back to the headquarters, Tad holding his old clothes all bundled up and tied with the stockings, Ben said, “I’m not so sure about Mr. Riddle.”

“What do you mean?” Tad asked.

“Well, sometimes I’m not sure that Mr. Riddle is exactly on our side in this matter.”

“You think he’s a Tory?” Tad was puzzled. How could a man sell goods to the army, and at the same time, be on the side of the British?

“I’m not sure,” Ben said. “Maybe it’s more that Mr. Riddle seems to have a lot of doubts about our cause.”

“Mr. Stelle was that way sometimes,” Tad said. “Even so, he was still a patriot and risked everything to print pamphlets for the Sons of Liberty.”

“It may be that Mr. Riddle is a thoughtful man like your Mr. Stelle.” Ben thought about it for a moment and then continued, “Mr. Riddle’s wife is surely on our side. They have taken in several of our sick soldiers and she has nursed them back to health again. They have a daughter, too. Her name is Emily, and she is sure a pretty one. She must be about sixteen, I’d guess.”

The barbering did not take long. The chair was just that, a simple kitchen chair under a shady tree outside the headquarters.

Tad quickly recognize the old man standing by the chair. He was indeed the wagon driver who drove the wagon back from the Marblehead camp.

The old man was surprised when he saw Tad. He looked Tad up and down and said, “Ye have changed into being a soldier boy.”

Ben laughed. “It took a lot of soap and a whole river to get the job done.” Ben turned to Tad and continued speaking. “Tad, this is Sergeant Grumley. He’s the one who will carry the white flag with us when we go out on the parley.”

Sergeant Grumley nodded and said, "We be old friends by now. I was the driver who took a boy and a fine French drum to the Boston Neck just after the fight out on Breed's Hill, and I carried the same boy and the same drum back from that ocean camp."

"I remember now," Tad said. "You had a wagon-load of apples."

"Well, now I've got a handful of cutting shears," the old wagon master said, "And, I don't know if they're strong enough to cut that brush pile, but, sit ye down and we'll get about the matter."

Sergeant Grumley was an older man, or so he appeared to Tad, but he stood upright, did not slump, and was sharp-eyed. He wore the breeches of the uniform, but no coat. He wore a smock over his shirt. Tad was unsure about how the old sergeant would measure up when it came time to meet the British in a very formal affair.

The old man cut quickly, but spoke slowly. "Appears to me to be a good day for now, but it'll surely rain before night."

Ben, standing close by, laughed.

"I figured you'd see the bright side of it."

"When are we going to do this parley, do ye think?" Sergeant Grumley asked Ben.

"Maybe on the morrow, but I think it will be the day after." Ben cocked his head so he could look up at the sky and then winked at Tad before saying, "Course, it might rain."

"Probably so," Grumley nodded in agreement as he finished Tad's haircut. "Probably so, I'd say."

"My head feels about a pound lighter," Tad said as he and Ben walked along a road toward Mr. Riddle's leather store. "And Sergeant Grumley is about like you said he was."

"Once you get to know him," Ben said, "He's a good man. He never gets over-excited about anything. The officers think highly of him because he is so dependable. They just wish he could be a little more cheerful."

Tad was impressed when they reached Mr. Riddle's place. There was a store beside a good-sized, two-story house with several workshops and sheds behind the house.

They entered the store and a bell above the door rang. A large man with a square face and broad shoulders came from a backroom. He was followed by a woman who Tad guessed was probably his wife, and a young girl who, like Ben had said, must be about sixteen. She was the same height as Tad. She, like her mother, wore a linen cap on her head. Her hair was tucked under the cap except for one stray curl that had escaped the cap.

For some reason that Tad could not explain, he suddenly felt very bashful. His face was overly warm, and he hoped he was not blushing, and at the same time, he did not understand why he should feel uncomfortable. "Gentlemen, I'm the proprietor of this store, and this is my wife and daughter. They were just on their way to the house."

Both women made a slight curtsy and then left the room. Tad felt better when they were gone.

“What can I do for you soldiers?” Mr. Riddle asked.

“We’re here to buy a good pair of shoes for my friend,” Ben said as he nodded toward Tad.

“I don’t have much left in stock right now. And, I do wish to know just who is going to pay for these shoes?”

“I have been authorized to charge the shoes to the account of General Washington,” Ben replied.

“Well, now then,” Mr. Riddle said thoughtfully. “That puts a different look to it. General Washington pays his bills. Now, if it was to be the Congress sitting down there in Philadelphia that was to pay for the shoes, I would have to decline the opportunity to sell them. Near as I can tell, that Congress has never paid any of its bills.”

“Money’s a little tight,” Ben said.

“It is indeed,” Mr. Riddle agreed. “I think we will be eaten out of house and home by this army. My wife keeps taking in sick soldiers who suddenly develop large appetites once they are in my house, and not one penny for it have I seen from that Congress.”

“We haven’t been paid yet, either,” Tad said with a touch of sharpness in his voice. “But, we keep on soldiering just the same.”

“What’s this?” said Mr. Riddle. “Why, young man, you are barely big enough to lift a musket to your shoulder.”

Ben quickly interrupted. “Tad here’s a drummer. We are going to hold a parley with the British, and we need him to be properly dressed.”

“I see,” said Mr. Riddle as he rubbed his chin with a large hand stained brown from working in his tannery turning cowhides into leather.

“You’d be the boy with the French drum I have heard so much about. Well, maybe I do have a pair of shoes that will fit you, but they will set General Washington back a pretty penny.”

He turned and entered the back room and returned with a pair of black leather shoes. They were sturdy shoes with large buckles.

“These look about right for you. Try them on for size,” Mr. Riddle said as he handed them to Tad.

There was a bench close by where Tad sat down and pulled off his old shoes and put on the new ones. He stood, took a few steps forward and then backward.

“They fit just like they were made for my feet,” Tad said.

“I make the shoes to about three different sizes, and they fit most feet,” Mr. Riddle said. “If you want, I can get rid of those old shoes for you. There’s not much left to burn from the look of them.”

“No,” cried Tad quickly. “Once this parley is over, I’ll probably go back to the Marblehead regiment. There are men in the regiment who are barefoot. Even a bad pair of shoes is better than none.”

“Very well,” Mr. Riddle said. “You can keep your old shoes. I know about the barefoot men in this army.”

Ben nodded and said,

“And, winter is coming on.”

“Don’t want to hear that,” Mr. Riddle said. “I’d have to see some money before I could begin to put shoes on the feet of every barefoot soldier in this army. I do not understand how you people expect to beat the British when you don’t have any money, shoes, gunpowder or enough muskets.”

After they left Mr. Riddle’s store, Tad said, “Mr. Riddle may not be a Tory, but he must be one of the most reluctant rebels I’ve seen.”

“That’s for certain,” Ben said.

“These are really good shoes,” Tad said as they walked along the road. “Please give General Washington my thanks. I’ll pay for them someday, I hope.”

“You’ll be able to thank him yourself. He will meet with us before we go up to Boston neck road for the parley.”

Chapter 20 Meeting the British

The meeting with General Washington was brief. The general talked to Tad, Ben, and Sergeant Grumley before they left for Boston neck road and the parley.

His instructions were simple. All they had to do was deliver an envelope containing General Washington’s proposal for a prisoner exchange to the senior British officer present at the parley. They were to do nothing else. If the British offered any provocations, tried to make trouble of any kind, they were to withdraw with as much dignity as possible.

Sergeant Grumley was very impressed by the general’s statement that they were to withdraw with as much dignity as possible.

As the sergeant and Tad climbed up on the wagon that would take them to the American lines, Tad could hear Grumley muttering to himself.

“What’s wrong?” Tad asked as he took his place on the seat by the sergeant.

Ben, riding his horse alongside the wagon, laughed and said, “Yes, Grumley, what’s bothering you?”

Grumley picked up the reins and flicked them up and down on the backs of the two horses pulling the wagon.

“Well, Grumley?” asked Ben.

“Well, sir,” Grumley answered. “It’s the general’s words about withdrawing with dignity,”

“That seems like a proper instruction to me,” Ben said.

“Maybe so,” Grumley replied, “But I don’t exactly see how it is we can be dignified if the whole British army is chasing us with their bayonets. I do believe I can run faster if I’m not trying to be dignified. Besides, I know it’s going to rain.”

Both Ben and Tad laughed, and Tad thought he even saw a brief smile on the always serious face of the sergeant.

“We won’t have to run,” Ben said. “That’s why you are carrying the big white flag and Tad will be beating the drum call for a parley.”

“I just don’t think too highly of walking out across a field toward the British, and the only thing I’ve got in my hands is a stick with a bed sheet tied to it.”

They made good time even though the wagon was loaded with supplies for the Rhode Island regiment. There was no rain as Sergeant Grumley always expected, and the evening gave strong indications that the next day would be a fine day.

The Rhode Islanders were glad to see the supplies, and very curious about the morrow’s big event.

They met with Colonel Greene who led the Rhode Island regiment. He smiled when he saw Tad.

“I’m glad to see that you have one of the army’s new uniforms. The last time I saw you, when we relieved the Marblehead regiment, you appeared to be the worse for hard wear.”

“Yes, sir,” answered Tad. “We were happy to see your regiment come up. Our new place down on a beach may be just as close to the British, at least, the British warships.”

Colonel Greene nodded. “We heard about Colonel Glover’s great deception. We might not be as pretty as the British, but I think we can teach them a few tricks.”

Supper was no different than usual. There was barely enough to eat, and Tad knew his stomach would be growling for something more when morning came.

When the next morning came, Tad was indeed hungry and there was not enough to eat, and Sergeant Grumley found the pole and the flag just as he had expected. It was indeed a bed sheet fastened to a pole. It was a large flag, and the British would have no trouble seeing it.

“Never saw such a big bed sheet in all my life, and the pole is as big as a small tree. It’s a powerful lot to carry around, but it might just come in handy at that when the British come at us with their bayonets.”

Tad was surprised when three boys with drums came up to him.

“We’re the regimental drummers, one of the boys said. “I’m Michael, that’s Anthony, and Morgan.”

Tad nodded. “I’m Tad Wheeler.”

“We saw your French drum when we came up to relieve the Marbelheaders,” Morgan said. “It’s a fancy drum. Ours are about as old, but were owned by the militia.”

Anthony was the smallest of the three drummer boys. Tad was sure that he could not be more than eleven. When Tad asked him about his age, Anthony bristled and answered sharply, “I’m almost twelve. I can march and do my job as well as anyone.”

Both Morgan and Michael laughed. “He doesn’t like being asked about his age,” Morgan said.

“Are you three going to beat the parley call with me today?” asked Tad.

“No,” replied Morgan. “We’ve been told to keep our drums silent.”

“We aren’t allowed to stand out in front of the regiment with the officers, which is where we belong,” said Michael. “It’s not fair, but the officers say we’re too young to be out front. Today we’ll have to stay behind the lines and wait for instructions to be passed back to us.”

“About all the drumming we will do is to sound either the advance or retreat,” said Anthony.

The meeting with the drummer boys was broken up when officers began shouting commands. The three drummer boys hurried away and began beating the call for assembly.

Tad was suddenly very nervous. He brushed his uniform with his hands and checked to see if his tri-cornered hat was squarely on his head.

Then he picked up his drum and slipped the strap over his shoulder and his head. The strap caused his hat to slide just a little, and Tad quickly pushed it back in place.

After much shouting and the playing of the drums by the three drummers, the line was formed in two ranks just beyond the barricade. The officers stood in front of the line.

Ben, holding the envelope, Tad in the middle with the drum, and Sergeant Grumley with the white flag, moved out in front of everyone and paused.

Tad began to beat the call to parley. He repeated the call several times, but nothing seemed to be happening in the British line. The British soldiers stayed behind their barricades. There was no answering drum call.

“Let’s march forward,” Ben said in a low voice. “Tad, you keep playing the call to parley.”

They moved forward until they were very nearly within musket range.

Ben said, “We’ll stop here and wait to see what happens. Tad, you keep beating the call to parley.”

Minutes passed. Tad could hear Sergeant Grumley muttering, “I don’t much like the looks of this.”

Finally, they could see some commotion behind the British barricades. Six men, all officers by the look of their uniforms, and well mounted on horses, passed through an opening which suddenly appeared in the barricades.

The horsemen cantered leisurely toward the three Americans. The riders seemed to ignore the lines of the Rhode Island regiment drawn up some distance behind the white flag and drum.

Five of the horsemen drew up in a line facing the drum and white flag. The sixth guided his horse up to within a few feet of Tad, Ben and Sergeant Grumley. The horse was skittish and pawed the ground while turning from side to side.

“Steady,” murmured Ben so Tad and Grumley could hear.

The officer appeared to be a tall man mounted on a big horse. His uniform was clean. His boots were shiny, and he wore a sheathed cavalry saber.

The horse shied about just in front of the three Americans, but they held steady. Tad was sure that the British officer was trying to scare them, make them move or even run, but he was determined to stand fast. David’s life might depend upon it. He knew that Ben and Grumley would never break ranks. Ben was right about Grumley. He might never see the bright side of life and grumble all the time, but he would hold fast no matter what danger appeared.

“What is this masquerade?” the British officer asked with a smile that was not a smile at all. Tad felt his face begin to blush, only this time it was not from embarrassment, it was from anger.

Ben spoke, his voice under control, but just barely.

“General Washington presents his compliments to General Howe. I have a letter from General Washington to General Howe. The purpose of this parley is to present the letter to General Howe. Will you accept the letter?”

“A letter? A letter? The officer laughed and the horse danced even closer to the three Americans. The British officer swung his horse around so that he faced his companions drawn up in a line behind him. “Did you hear that, chaps? The monkeys have learned to write.”

The mounted men laughed, and the officer wheeled his horse about. The horse’s head narrowly missed Tad.

“I would remind the officer to my front, who is representing the honor of the British army, that there is a proper way to conduct a parley,” Ben said coldly and loud enough for the horsemen behind the British officer to hear.

“Faugh!” cried the officer as his hand gripped the hilt of his saber. “I’ll not be lectured by a farmer or shopkeeper playing at being a soldier. You had better mind your manners when you are in the presence of your superiors. I could not duel you because you are not my equal, but my saber could indeed cut a patch of weeds to the ground.”

“Will you accept the letter?” Ben asked.

The British officer guided his horse to a position directly in front of Ben.

“There is no General Washington. There is a farmer from the Virginia colony present, I suppose. There is no army opposing us. It is a rabble who have some arms and who can only fight when hiding behind trees or dirt redoubts. Everything you have has been stolen. Why, even the drum you use for this masquerade you call a parley, was obviously stolen from the French.”

“That’s not true,” Tad shouted. He could not restrain his anger and he had to speak, though afterward, he knew he should have kept quiet.

The officer looked over at Tad and said sharply, "That pretty speech would have cost you dearly, boy, if you were in the British army. It would have earned you twenty lashes laid on your bare back by a stout man with a good whip. You would learn to keep your silence, indeed."

Ben answered the officer. "The practice of flogging your soldiers for small offenses is known throughout the civilized world. Now, once again, under the proper practices of a parley, I ask if General Howe will receive this communication from General Washington."

"Does the letter from the Virginian ask for mercy and promise to disband the rebels here assembled?" asked the officer.

"I am not authorized to discuss the intent of the letter," Ben said. "However, I can assure you, sir, that the letter does not involve surrender either of the Continental forces or the British forces." Ben paused and there was a flicker of a smile that briefly appeared on his face. "If, of course, you are authorized to propose a surrender of the British force occupying Boston, then I shall be more than happy to report such information to General Washington."

"Oh, this is too much! This masquerade is at an end. General Howe has sufficient amusements in Boston. He does not need to examine a farce. And as for you, whatever your rank, perhaps we shall meet on the field of battle. A place where you are not hiding behind a tree or a pile of dirt."

"I look forward to that day," Ben replied.

The British officer wheeled his horse about and galloped past his line of five friends who also wheeled their horses and followed.

"What now?" Tad asked.

"We failed," Ben said. "I'm sorry."

"Wasn't your fault," Grumley said. "I surely did want to use this flag pole for better purposes, I can tell you. A few knocks on the top of that Britisher's head would have taught him some manners."

"You are right on that point," Ben agreed. "Now, let's turn about and march at regular pace back to our line. Give us a proper marching beat, Tad."

On the way back, Grumley kept looking over his shoulder.

"The British are up to something."

"Keep the pace. Don't hurry," Ben said.

A few steps later and Grumley spoke, this time with an unusual quickness to his speech.

"I do believe they're bringing up a cannon. We'd better hurry or we're likely to have a cannon ball chasing us."

Both Ben and Tad looked over their shoulders. They saw British soldiers pushing a small cannon out in front of a barricade.

"Looks like a three-pounder," Ben said. "Hold to our pace. I think they are trying to scare us into running. I will not run."

Tad was not worried about the cannon. He was angry at the British officer. Packie, the British drummer, had told him about how some of the British officers could be overbearing and arrogant. He was not surprised at the officer's attitude, but the refusal even to take General Washington's letter meant that David would not be exchanged and would still be held a prisoner in one of the old hulks tied up to a Boston dock.

A firm resolve began forming in Tad's mind. Somehow, David must be rescued.

They reached the Rhode Island line, and Colonel Greene hurried to their side.

"What happened?" Colonel Greene asked.

"The British refused to take the letter," Ben said. "Worse yet was the complete disrespect the British officer had for us."

"I see," answered Colonel Greene. "We must move now. They've run out a cannon, and I suspect they mean to do some mischief."

As the colonel spoke, there was a loud explosion. The British had fired the cannon. An iron ball weighing three pounds came speeding toward the Rhode Island line. The ball hit the ground in front of the first rank and rolled with great speed and hit two men in the front rank and a third man in the second rank. All three men fell to the ground.

"That is a terrible violation of the rules of parley," cried Ben.

"Not really," Colonel Greene said calmly. "You and the flag of truce have returned to our line. It is not a violation of the parley, but it certainly is bad form."

"They have contempt for us," said Tad angrily. "They must be taught otherwise."

As he spoke, Tad watched the Rhode Island line adjust to the effects of the cannon shot. Men from the second rank took care of the wounded men, pulling them to behind the second rank. The first rank closed up so there was not a gap where the two wounded men had fallen.

Colonel Greene issued orders quickly, and the Rhode Island line began moving to the rear, company by company. The moves were done with an almost stately precision.

As Tad, Ben, and Grumley followed them back behind the barricade and then on farther back to the camp area, Tad expected to hear another blast from the British cannon, but the British did not fire a second round.

Once back in the camp, Ben said, "General Washington must know what has happened as soon as possible."

"What are we to do?" Tad asked.

"Sergeant Grumley will drive the supply wagon back to headquarters. You can ride with him," Ben said.

"Can you get me in to see General Washington?" Tad asked.

"Probably," Ben replied. "I have a good idea what you want to ask him."

Tad nodded. "I want his permission to rescue David. I cannot let him stay a prisoner."

"Don't get your hopes up," Ben said. "And don't go thinking that you can slip off and try it on your own."

"Please do what you can," Tad said. "I must rescue David."

Chapter 21 Can Just One Be Saved?

Tad sat on the driver's bench beside Grumley on the trip back to headquarters. The horses knew the route very well, and Grumley let them have their way. Occasionally, he looked over at Tad, but kept his silence. Tad was wrapped up in his thoughts and paid no attention to Grumley or the people they passed on the road.

Tad had gone over and over what happened at the parley. The Americans did everything according to the rules of war. The Rhode Islanders had performed well. Grumley had been as steady as a man could be. Ben was very proper and stood up to the British officer, but without really causing any offence.

The fault lay with the British. There was no getting around it. Packie had sometimes talked about the British officers and how they could be very arrogant.

So much had depended upon the parley. Now, David was going to continue to stay in the British prison in the old hulk.

There was another possibility. The British might ship him and the other prisoners back to England. The British did not consider prisoners like David to be soldiers. The British considered the Colonials to be rebels and the penalty for rebellion was hanging.

Tad knew that he had to do something. There must be a way to rescue David.

He remembered the small boat that had been under the dock. He and David escaped from Boston in that small boat. He shook his head slightly as he remembered how they could not see in the fog and had bumped into a British warship.

Grumley saw Tad's head move, and he asked, "Are ye all right?"

Tad glanced over at the man beside him, smiled, and said, "Yes. I was just remembering how David and I bumped into a British warship when we escaped by boat from Boston."

"Bumped into a warship, did ye?" Grumley chuckled. "I've had a few bad times myself, but I do declare that I never bumped into a warship."

"We were lucky," Tad said. The fog hid us from the people on the ship."

"Ye be thinking about boats ever since we started back?" Grumley asked. "Could be ye are making a plan to rescue your friend?"

Tad quickly glanced over at Grumley, and he could see the old man had a rare smile on his face.

"How did you know?" asked Tad.

"Why, boy, ye were thinking so hard your thoughts were making noise, and I couldn't catch a nap like I usually do on these supply trips."

Tad thought about what Grumley said and then replied, "I guess I was trying to figure out how to get David away from the British. I need a boat, and a dark night."

Grumley was silent for a brief moment. He tapped the horses with the reins because the animals were going a little too slow.

"What kind of boat be ye thinking ye need?" Grumley asked.

"Oh, a small boat like David and I had when we escaped from Boston."

Grumley shook his head. "Can't say I like the sound of that! A small boat on top of a great pile of water, and more likely than not, it'd be a leaky boat."

"I hope it won't be leaky," Tad said.

"Ye might get lucky at that," Grumley answered. He flicked the reins again and the horses stepped up their pace.

"A small boat," Grumley said as if to himself. He turned to Tad and asked, "How many prisoners are the British holding?"

"I think General Washington's spy reported there were twelve prisoners."

Grumley nodded. "And all twelve are being held in an old ship rotting at the dock?"

"Yes," said Tad thoughtfully, for he had a good idea where Grumley was going with his talk.

"When ye go to rescue your friend, what are ye going to say to the other eleven poor souls being held by the British?" Grumley asked softly.

Tad sat up straight on the bench. What could he say to the other eleven who were going to be left behind to face the dreaded consequences?

Tad shook his head slowly. "I see what you are driving at. I can't just rescue David. I have to rescue them all."

"That's about the way of it, as I see it," Grumley said. "It appears that ye are going to need some help and a little more than a small rowboat."

"Now, I don't know what I'm going to do," Tad said, the worry in his mind making his words sound strained.

"Well, if it comes to it," Grumley said, "I'll lend a hand. It can't be anything quite as foolish as marching toward the British with only a pole in my hand with a white bedsheet on it. And, that's true enough even if the boat is leaky, and I don't believe there's any other kind of boat."

Tad laughed despite his troubles. Grumley certainly had a way of seeing the worst of everything, and yet, willing to take part despite his concerns.

“We’d need a good-sized boat to carry all twelve of the prisoners,” Tad said.

“More likely a small warship,” Grumley said, “and we don’t have any of those.”

When they reached the headquarters, Tad jumped down from the wagon seat, and took his drum out of the back of the wagon.

He looked up at Grumley and said. “We did our best at the parley.”

Grumley smiled. “I still wish I had tapped that British officer on the top of his head with my pole. He needed to learn some manners, I’d say. Good luck with whatever plan ye come up with to save the prisoners.”

Tad waved as Grumley guided the horses back on the road and continued on his way to where the wagons were kept and the horses stabled in a shelter.

Tad entered the headquarters building. His mind was jumbled with a number of thoughts trying to come together. Grumley had turned things upside down. Tad knew he had been wrong to think just of David. The other prisoners had to be rescued as well. Still, he knew that if he had not been so strong in his wish to rescue David, all the prisoners would have been left to the mercy of the British.

“Tad. you’re back!” Ben said. Tad had not seen Ben with his mind being so tangled up.

“Yes,” Tad replied. “Can you get me in to see General Washington? I have a request to make.”

“Yes,” Ben replied. “You can go in now, but don’t take too long. What is your request?”

“I want a leave of absence,” Tad said.

“That’s not something the General grants very often,” Ben said. He looked worried. “You will need a very good reason, and I think I know what your reason is. You want to try to rescue your friend, right?”

“Yes,” Tad said as he sat the drum down by the corridor wall. “But it’s not just David. If we rescue one, we have to rescue them all.”

Ben nodded. “That’s going to put you in a better position, but I still don’t know. Well, never mind, come along, and remember your manners when we enter the general’s office.”

The office was just a short way down the corridor. Tad picked up his drum and followed Ben. They stopped in front of a door and Ben knocked gently, and then opened the door.

General Washington sat behind a desk, a stack of papers in front of him. There were two chairs in front of the desk, and to one side of the room there was a large table covered with maps.

“Come in,” General Washington said.

Tad stepped forward, removed his hat and tucked it under his left arm and saluted. The general saluted in return and asked, “What can I do for you? Lieutenant Morrison here said you wished to speak to me.”

For a few seconds, Tad was nearly speechless. General Washington was an imposing figure. He was a tall man and powerfully built, but it was not just his size that caused men to be so respectful when they were in his presence. It was the way he bore himself, the way his eyes seemed to stare into a man's heart and brain. There was a greatness about him that even the British were beginning to discover.

Tad stammered, and then gained control of his mind and his mouth.

"I wish to have a leave of absence, sir."

"You have been with the army for a long time?" General Washington asked.

"Since before the fighting out on Breed's Hill, sir," Tad answered.

"That is a long time for a boy your age to be away from home," said General Washington. "Your parents must be worried about your welfare."

"I'm almost thirteen," Tad replied. "My parents adopted me when I was a baby. I'm sure they are worried, and I've had no word as to how they are faring in Boston. That is not the reason I want a leave of absence. I have a friend who is being held a prisoner in Boston, in an old hulk of a ship tied up alongside a dock. He was one of the men captured when the British took the redoubt on Breed's Hill."

"I see," said General Washington thoughtfully. "Then the outcome of our attempted parley must have been a bitter disappointment for you."

"Yes, sir," Tad replied. "We did the parley correctly, but the British officer was arrogant."

"I have had some experience with such officers," the general said. "Now, I am curious about how you plan to rescue your friend."

"It's not just David, my friend, sir. I could never rescue David and leave the rest behind."

"That is a commendable sentiment," said the general. "Rescuing all the prisoners would be a difficult task for one person, even someone who is as resolute as I believe you to be."

"There must still be Sons of Liberty members in Boston," Tad said. "If I could get back inside Boston, I'm sure they would help."

"That is an interesting idea," General Washington said thoughtfully. "I know you are a brave young man. You have been mentioned favorably in dispatches from the colonels you have served under. If you were a few years older, we should consider making you a lieutenant and you would serve in the line."

"Thank you, sir." Tad said as he felt his face beginning to blush. "If I could have a leave of absence, I don't think I would be gone very long."

General Washington was silent. He stared at Tad, and then spoke.

"No, there will be no leave of absence, but there will be action taken."

The general paused, his eyes looking at Tad who could hardly keep from squirming.

"We shall meet again tomorrow at the Marblehead regiment camp. We shall discuss the matter of a rescue mission with Colonel Glover."

“Yes, sir,” Tad said. His spirits were greatly lifted by General Washington’s words. David might yet be rescued from the British.

Things moved quickly after Tad left General Washington’s office. He caught a ride with a supply wagon going out to the Marblehead regiment. Ben was dispatched by horse to carry a message from the general to Colonel Glover.

At last, Tad told himself, powerful people were moving to save the prisoners.

Chapter 22 Four Boats Waiting

When the wagon carrying Tad along with supplies for the Marblehead regiment arrived at the seashore camp, Tad could see that the men of the regiment were busy. Ben had galloped on ahead and delivered the message from General Washington about the meeting tomorrow and Colonel Glover was not a man to waste time. The regiment would be ready to receive the Virginian general who commanded what was changing from colonial militias into the Continental Army.

Tad reported in at the tent where Colonel Glover was seated at a table, and standing nearby was Jed, the young messenger boy.

“Good to see you back,” Colonel Glover said. “I’m sorry that the parley didn’t work out.”

“We did everything correctly,” Tad said. “The British would not even take the letter General Washington had written to General Howe. They refused to recognize us as an army.”

“Doesn’t surprise me,” Colonel Glover said with a shake of his head. “They need to be taught a lesson.”

“Where did you get that fancy uniform?” Jed asked as he stared at Tad.

“Oh, I was cleaned up for the parley,” Tad laughed. “I had to have a bath, and I got a haircut, the uniform, and a good pair of new shoes.”

Jeb whistled when he saw the shoes. “That’s a fine pair of shoes. Those buckles make you look like gentry.”

“I think that was the idea,” Tad said. “There were three of us, an officer bearing the letter, a sergeant carrying a white flag, and me with my drum. We all had uniforms. The Rhode Islanders were drawn up in line behind us. They looked good, though they did not all have uniforms.”

Colonel Glover frowned. “The officer who carried the letter, it was the same man who brings me messages, right?”

“Yes, sir,” Tad replied. “He stood firm and did not back down from the British officer.”

“Well, he told us about the British firing a cannon and wounding some of the Rhode Islanders,” Colonel Glover said. “That was a sorry business. I understand it was not technically a violation of the rules of parley, but it was an underhanded business. They should be made to pay for such behavior.”

Tad nodded agreement.

I think that is why General Washington is coming out to visit on the morrow.”

“I figured as much.” Colonel Glover said. “I wonder what he’s thinking.”

“I have an idea about that,” Tad said. “I think he’s working on a plan to rescue the prisoners being held in Boston. You remember, the men taken on Breed’s Hill?”

Colonel Glover stood up and stared out to where men were working on the four boats.

Colonel Glover smiled, “The Virginian is a sly fox. Now I can guess why we got those four boats.”

“We won’t go far in those boats, Jed said, shaking his head back and forth. “Never saw such poorly made boats. Why, back home, we’d have used them for firewood.”

“We may need a bucket or two to bail out water,” Colonel Glover said. “Now, you boys stay here and keep an eye on headquarters for me. I’ve got to inspect the companies and see how things are coming. Don’t wander off or get into mischief in case I need you.”

The two boys sat down on the shady side of the tent, and Colonel Glover hurried away to check on his officers. There was much work to be done in preparation for the arrival of General Washington.

The boys sat for a brief time in silence until Jed asked, “Were you scared when you were out on that parley?”

Tad nodded. “I was at first, I can tell you. I didn’t know we were going to go so far out. We were standing almost within musket range of the British fortifications.”

“That close? Just three of you, and not a musket between you?” Jed asked.

“Yes,” Tad answered. “When that British officer was trying to make us run, I got angry. The British officer was making his horse kind of jump around, and once the horse nearly bumped into men.”

“Sounds like he was trying to shame you,” Jed agreed.

“That’s it. That’s a good way to put it,” Tad agreed. “I got about the same opinion from General Washington when I went to see him after the parley.”

“You talked to the Virginian?” Jed asked. The tone of his voice left no doubt that Jed thought his friend was stretching the truth just a little.

“It’s true! I did talk to General Washington. I asked him for a leave of absence.”

“What’s a leave of absence?” Jed asked. “Never heard of such a thing.”

“Generals can grant a soldier a leave of absence to go home and take care of things,” Tad said.

“Is that why you asked for whatever it is?” Jed replied

“No, I wanted a leave of absence so I could go rescue my friend, David. Once the parley failed, it seemed the only chance to get him away from the British.”

“How were you going to do that?” Jed asked.

“David and I escaped from Boston in a small rowboat. I figured that if I could find a boat, I could slip back into Boston and somehow rescue David.”

Jed jumped up. His eyes flashed. “We could do it! You and me. I could row you over to Boston.”

“You’d go with me?” Tad asked.

“Sure I would. It beats just sitting here or running around with messages. We could get your friend out of there, I know it.”

Tad shook his head. “There’s a problem.”

“You mean the British ships?”

“There’s a problem besides the British ships, and I do know they can be a real problem. When we escaped from Boston, it was a foggy night, and we rowed right into a warship.”

Jed laughed. “Now, that must have been really scary.”

“We got away in the fog,” Tad said. “Truth is, the biggest problem is the other prisoners. How can we take David out and leave the others behind? That would be cruel.”

Jed sat down and scratched his head. “I see what you mean.” He stared thoughtfully at the ground and then raised his head and said, “There’s just never anything simple in this fighting business. It’s not like fishing. There’s the ocean and the weather, but you know how they are going to behave.”

“I never thought of it that way,” said Tad as he remembered back to when he and the Stelles lived a peaceful life working in the print shop.

The day passed with little incident. Colonel Glover kept both boys busy carrying messages. Everyone was told to have muskets and clothes clean for the next day. The men were ordered to wash and comb their hair and trim their beards.

The next morning, both Tad and Jed were so busy they did not have a chance to talk. There were many messages to carry to the captains.

By mid-morning, the regiment was drawn up in line facing the road. Only one company was not in line, and that company was assigned to keep watch in the small redoubts that had been dug into the top of the lone sand dune

Out in front of the line were Colonel Glover and Major Silas Smith. Behind them ten paces were the captains of the companies. Behind the captains were the soldiers formed into two ranks.

Tad stood with the captain of the company most nearly in the center of the lines.

There had been a question about an honor guard, but the regiment had no regimental flag nor was there a flag for the Continental Army. Colonel Glover decided that since there were no flags, there was

no need for an honor guard. Tad knew that the colonel had tried to find men who could play the fife, a flute-like instrument, but he could find no players and no fifes. Tad and his French drum would have to do the honors for General Washington's arrival.

They did not have to wait very long. Everyone could see the approach of the general and his escort.

General Washington was in front of the horsemen approaching the camp. It was impossible not to see him or to mistake him for someone else. He was a commanding figure atop his horse. He was an excellent horseman, and he seemed at ease on the cantering horse. Just behind him was another officer who was not quite so comfortable on a horse. Tad recognized him as Colonel Henry Knox, the man who had insisted that Tad be cleaned up for the parley. Behind the colonel were several staff officers, including Ben.

As the mounted group came close to Colonel Glover, he gave a signal, and Tad began to play a call that Packie, his British drummer friend, had taught him. Packie said it was a pomp and circumstance drumbeat and only used for very important occasions. The captains called their men to attention.

General Washington dismounted and his escort did likewise. Ben hurried forward to take the reins of General Washington's horse. Another officer took the reins of Colonel Knox's horse.

General Washington and Colonel Knox stepped forward until the general was a few feet in front of Colonel Glover, who saluted. General Washington saluted in turn.

The two men exchanged words, but Tad could not hear what was said. He was certain, though that the words were complimentary and proper. Everyone knew that General Washington very much appreciated proper decorum, although the army he commanded was often short of such manners just as it was short of everything else.

The two men, followed by the other officers, marched to one end of the line. Tad ceased his drumming.

General Washington and Colonel

Glover, followed by the others, marched slowly down the length of the line. The general was paying close attention to how the soldiers looked. Sometimes he asked Colonel Glover brief questions and got equally brief answers.

Tad thought the Marblehead men looked in fine shape. He had seen other regiments and knew the Marblehead men were among the best. He remembered other inspections he had seen while at headquarters. He knew that it was customary for General Washington and the commander of a regiment to ride horses down the long line. There were very few regiments that had horses for the officers, and the Marblehead regiment was one of those lacking horses. Tad noted that General Washington did not hesitate to dismount from his horse and walk alongside Colonel Glover in order to inspect the regiment.

It was clear to Tad that this tall Virginian general understood the importance of even small matters.

After the inspection and refreshments, which included tea and something that was a cross between cookies and biscuits that the cooks put together out of their limited supplies, the meeting between General Washington and Colonel Glover got underway.

The meeting was held under a canvas awning that gave some protection from the sun. It was an August day, but not very hot. There were clouds overhead, and cool sea breezes which drifted in over the sand dune.

General Washington and Colonel Glover were seated at a small table. There were only two chairs. The staffs of both officers sat on the ground or on supply boxes. For the meeting, Colonel Glover had Tad and Jed close at hand in case messages had to be sent. Closer to the colonel were Silas and Captain Hamlin who commanded the first company.

General Washington spoke first.

“My compliments to you, sir, on the condition of your regiment. I wish the other regiments in this army were as deserving of compliments.”

Colonel Glover bowed his head slightly and replied, “Thank you, sir.” Colonel Glover paused and then spoke more forcefully. “I think you have something in mind for my regiment. I hope it is not something too far beyond our means. I would also want to make the point that in another month, this weather is going to change. My men do not have clothes or quarters for the cold winter that is coming.”

General Washington smiled. Colonel Glover had a reputation for being a courteous man, but also being a man who was quick to come to the point.

“You are aware,” said General Washington, “of how the British treated our parley attempt?”

“I am, sir, and I am in agreement with the sentiments expressed by everyone. The British need to be taught some manners,” said Colonel Glover.

“That is truly spoken,” General Washington agreed. “What I propose to do is rescue the twelve soldiers being held by the British in a hulk tied up to a Boston dock.”

“And, that is why we were given the four boats, I presume,” said Colonel Glover.

“I thought the boats would be better off if they were given to men who would know how to use them if the need arose,” General Washington said.

Colonel Glover smiled and said, “With all due respect, sir, whoever picked those four boats did not have much of an eye for seaworthy craft.”

“They were all we could find available,” General Washington answered “But, I trust that you and your men will know how to make them useable.”

“We are busy at that task, sir.” Colonel Glover said. “Now, what do you propose?”

General Washington leaned forward. “I want your men to use the four boats to affect a rescue of our men the British are holding prisoner. It will mean slipping into the Boston harbor at night and a quick raid and then escape back to our positions.”

“That is a tall order,” Colonel Glover said. “We do not know where the hulk is tied up or what the British have in the way of a garrison to guard the hulk. As for going in and getting out, there is the not small matter of the British warships. Their lookouts will be watching the waters about Boston, I’d warrant.”

“We shall need a rainy night, or perhaps a foggy night,” General Washington said. “As for the conditions ashore on the dock, yes, it is true that we need more information. Unfortunately, my spy does not seem to have an ability to find out about the conditions at the hulk. We need to send in a party to examine the conditions.”

“That would be a mission for one boat, a crew, and a very brave man,” Colonel Glover said thoughtfully. “My men have no knowledge of Boston.”

“I have a volunteer who knows Boston well,” said General Washington. The general looked at Tad as he spoke, and Colonel Glover was quick to understand.

“Tad’s a drummer. He is just a boy!” Colonel Glover said quickly.

At that moment, Jed jumped up from his seat on the ground.

“I can go with Tad,” he shouted.

The men under the awning were startled by Jed’s shout. There was a moment of silence which was ended by laughter.

Jed stood his ground. “It would be best if there was two of us, each to watch the other’s back. For that matter, we’d not need one of the leaky boats out yonder. We could do it in a small boat, just the two of us. That’s the best way.”

Jed finally realized that everyone was staring at him, and he began to stammer, and then stopped talking, but he did not sit back down on the ground. He stood as straight as he could and did not back down.

“This is not good,” Colonel Glover said. “They are boys. It is true that they have nearly reached their growth, but they are still boys. I cannot agree to send boys into Boston. Why, if the British were to catch them, we all know what the penalty would be. The British would hang them, and the fact that they are boys would not stop the British for a second.”

It was a tense moment. Colonel Glover did not appear ready to back down, and General Washington’s calm face showed signs of a frown gathering like a storm cloud.

Tad stood up. “Colonel Glover, I am ready to go. If necessary, I would go by myself with nothing more than a small rowboat. I know there are dangers, but I must rescue my friend from the British.” Tad paused. His eyes caught sight of Jed who was still standing and nodding yes as Tad spoke. Tad returned the nod and continued. “We need to do this not only for my friend, but to show the British that they cannot get away with trying to shame us. When we stood at the parley, the British officer was trying to use his horse to make us run away like rabbits. Please, sir, this must be done.”

There were murmurs of agreement heard from most of the participants at the meeting.

Colonel Glover looked first at Tad and then to Jed. "Very well," he said softly. "What a terrible war this is when we have to use children." He looked down at the table, shook his head slowly, and then addressed General Washington.

"Sir, my young drummer boy has a reason that is honor bound for going into Boston, but Jed here is another matter. Before I can agree to his going, I must ask his father and grandfather for their approval."

General Washington nodded and said, "I had not calculated upon the prospects of sending in two boys, but it does make sense. Now, the young man's father and grandfather? Where are they?"

"They are members of this regiment, sir," answered Colonel Glover.

"It is not every army that has three generations in one regiment," General Washington said. "I think we have achieved much with this meeting. It is time that we return to headquarters. I am sure that there are other pressing matters." General Washington paused, smiled, and then added. "There are always pressing matters, it seems."

"My orders, then?" asked Colonel Glover.

General Washington arose from his chair and spoke.

"Your orders, Colonel Glover, are to conduct a reconnaissance and then bring out the prisoners held by the British. I cannot tell you how you should proceed. You will know best how to achieve what we all desire. You have a free hand, but sadly, not much in the way of equipment."

Tad remained silent as General Washington and his escort mounted for the return ride to headquarters. His silence masked his feeling of excitement. At last, the mission to save David was really going to happen. He knew he should be thinking, at least a little, about the dangers ahead, but there would be time enough for that kind of thinking.

Chapter 23 Small Matters Make Long Waits

Tad watched as one of the Marblehead soldiers used a wooden mallet and a sharpened wood peg to pound a thin strip of rope soaked in what looked like tar into an almost paper-thin crack between two boards.

When the soldier finished, he slapped his hand on the boat and declared, "It's as tight as it's ever going to be, and that's the truth of that."

It had taken four days to finish the boat's repair, and even so, most of the men in the regiment were quick to speak of their doubts about the boat's safety.

One of the soldiers put it clear enough when he said that it was 'a bucket fore and a bucket aft' kind of boat. At the same time, however, most of the men agreed that if anyone could keep the boat afloat, it was surely the men from Marblehead.

Jed's father gave his permission for Jed to go on the mission with Tad, but reluctantly. He asked that he and Jed's grandfather be part of the rowing crew who would take the boys to Boston.

Colonel Glover would not have it so.

"I'll not put three generations of one family at risk in one leaky boat."

Then there was the matter of the knife. Jed's father gave him a very large folding knife. It was a knife that would certainly be handy on a fishing boat, but it was also the kind of knife that would be just as handy in a desperate knife fight. Colonel Glover said that if the boys were caught in Boston, the British soldiers would surely look upon the knife as being a weapon. Jed would have to make do with his smaller knife.

So many details, Tad told himself. He was anxious to go on this mission, and even this mission was just another detail in the preparations for the rescue.

Then it was the uniforms. Colonel Glover insisted that the rowing crew be dressed in the army's new uniform. That matter was taken care of back at headquarters. Eight uniforms were obtained by taking them from men who had been issued them earlier. There were to be nine uniforms in all. The ninth uniform was given up by Tad. As Colonel Glover pointed out, Tad could not sneak about Boston dressed as an American soldier.

There was a reluctance on Colonel Glover's part to explain why he wanted the crew to have uniforms. He really did not have to explain his reluctance to talk about the matter. Everyone understood that if the crew was captured, they might be hanged as spies. If they were in uniform, they could claim to be prisoners of war because they were soldiers and not spies. It would be a different matter for Tad and Jed.

Tad's old clothes were brought out by sergeant Grumley. Tad had forgotten about his old clothes and shoes. When he unwrapped the bundle, he quickly saw that his clothes had been washed and his stockings mended.

"My clothes? Who washed them? Who mended my stockings?"

Sergeant Grumley smiled. "Why, the lieutenant took care of that."

"Ben washed my clothes?" Tad asked.

"Lieutenants don't do laundry," Grumley replied. "He took them over to the Riddles. Mrs. Riddle and Emily did the work."

"It was good of Ben to take care of this for me," Tad said.

Grumley chuckled and said, "Oh, I doubt that it was any problem at all. Your young lieutenant seems to find more than one reason to visit the Riddles, especially when Emily is about. He fancies talking to the girl, I do believe."

"Why would he want to talk to Emily?" Tad asked.

Tad had good reason to be surprised by Grumley's unusual good humor, and he clearly did not understand the older man's answer to his question.

Grumley said, "Ye are so much of a man most of the time, I forget how young ye are."

Then he turned serious. "I asked to go on this trip with ye. So did your lieutenant friend. We were told no." He turned his head, cleared his throat, and passed a hand across his eyes. He looked back at Tad. "I'll probably not see ye again before ye leave. Ye take care, young man." As he turned and walked away, he pulled a rag from his pocket and blew his nose.

For several days, just before dawn and just after dark, the eight men picked from first company and Captain Hamlin took the boat out on the water and rowed. Captain Hamlin would be in charge of the crew. By now, they were outfitted in the uniforms, and Tad was back in his old, but clean and mended clothes. He was sorry about having to give up his new shoes, but it was necessary. No apprentice boy in Boston could ever afford such a pair of shoes.

Captain Hamlin reported that the boat behaved reasonably well and probably would not sink. However, the men from Marblehead were still of a mixed opinion on that point. Captain Hamlin said the testing of the boat was also a good time to give the rowers some much needed exercise. It had been too many months now since they had bent their backs over the oars. All things considered, Captain Hamlin said he thought they were ready to go.

Tad was overjoyed, but his smile did not last long. Colonel Glover said that it would be impossible for the men to row the boat to Boston and back in one night. They needed to set up a base much closer to Boston.

Finally, a place was found, a small, almost hidden cove from which the boat could issue forth, cross the water to Boston, and easily return within the hours of darkness.

Silas was dispatched with a party of ten others to serve as a base crew for the mission.

At last, one night as dusk folded into darkness, Tad, Jed, Captain Hamlin, and eight rowers pushed off in the boat. They had a good four hours of rowing ahead of them. Jed was placed up in the bow of the boat where his keen eyesight would be of great value.

The rowers began stroking the oars. They made almost no noise as they rowed. Captain Hamlin cautioned everyone not to speak at all, but if necessary, to speak in a whisper because sound travels best over water.

Tad sat on the floor between rowers on their benches. Captain Hamlin stood just behind where Jed lay up on the bow of the boat. As the hours passed, the rowers kept a steady pace.

Jed whispered loud enough for all to hear, "I see the lights."

Tad tried to look around Captain Hamlin, but he could see nothing.

"Yes," Captain Hamlin said softly. "I see them. Three lanterns making a triangle. We'll pull in there, lads."

There was enough star light so they could just barely make out the small cove into which the boat glided.

A voice called out from the shore, "How's the fishing?"

“Worst I ever saw,” answered Captain Hamlin. “We’ve reached our port, lads,” he told the rowers. “Put us up on the beach.”

With quick, hard strokes, the rowers drove the boat up on the beach. They secured their oars and jumped out and pulled the boat up onto the sand. Other men appeared out of the shadows. It was Silas and his crew. Many hands made quick work of dragging the boat well up on the beach where it was covered with sand and weeds.

Tad and Jed jumped to their assigned work. They had makeshift brooms which Silas provided. They carefully swept the sand, erasing the marks left by the boat being dragged and the footprints of the men who had done the work.

Silas led them back behind a dune where a camp and several makeshift sailcloth tents had been set up. There was a small fire.

“We have hot tea for you and biscuits,” Silas said. “How was the trip?”

“The tea sounds good,” Captain Hamlin replied. “We made the voyage without trouble. There’s some water in the bottom of the boat, but not much. There was no sign of any British warships.”

“There’s two anchored out there about half the way to Boston,” Silas said. “You’ll have to slip between them somehow.”

“We need a good rainy night,” Captain Hamlin said as he blew on his cup of hot tea.

The next day proved fair, but not as warm as the day before. August was coming to an end.

Captain Hamlin made sure that lookouts were posted, and he spent much of the day laying in a good vantage point with Tad beside him.

Colonel Glover had reluctantly surrendered his telescope to Captain Hamlin, and he was making good use of it. The Boston docks could be seen, but not much of the detail. There was no doubt about the four old hulks and their location.

“Runaway apprentices sometimes tried to hide in the old hulks,” Tad told Captain Hamlin.

“Seems a poor place to hide,” the captain replied. “It wouldn’t take much searching to find them.”

“People were scared of the hulks,” Tad said. “Some people thought smallpox was there. Others feared getting trapped below by walking on rotted wood.”

“The apprentices must have been desperate young men to hide in the hulks,” Captain Hamlin noted.

“It was a hard life for some,” Tad answered. “My parents were different. I was both a son and an apprentice. They did not want me to go to that part of Boston at all.”

Captain Hamlin chuckled and then said, “Docks can be a dangerous place to lark about for either boy or man.”

It did not take long for Captain Hamlin to pick out the course over the water that he wanted to follow. There was a swampy area at the end of the docks that would make a good landing place.

There were two British warships at anchor about a mile apart. On a dark and rainy night, it should be possible for a boat to ghost through between them without much danger of being seen. Tad was surprised at how easy it looked. There should be no problem in making a passage to Boston.

Once the route was decided on, Captain Hamlin brought Jed up to the lookout position. He showed Jed the docks, the warships, and the swampy area where they wanted to go. Jed then spent the afternoon studying the scene before him, etching each detail in his mind so that on the rainy night to come, he could recall the scene in his mind.

Ben came riding in to the camp.

"I have instructions from General Washington," he said to Captain Hamlin.

"Has this business been cancelled?" asked the captain.

"No," replied Ben. "You are to go the first night the weather is favorable. What I have is a letter that Tad is to carry to the general's spy in Boston."

"That's not a good idea," Captain Hamlin said. His face furrowed into a deep frown. "We are putting the lads at great risk. This does not help. If the British find such a letter on the boy, it will go hard indeed."

Tad took the letter from Ben. It was a small envelope.

"I think our worries are over," Captain Hamlin said. "By the time Tad spends several hours in the rain and then wades ashore, that letter will be a soggy mess and the ink smudged beyond recognition."

"We had not thought of that," Ben admitted. He seemed puzzled for a moment and then his hand reached to a small leather pouch tied to his belt. "We can use my coin purse. It's been empty for a long time, anyway."

Ben untied the strings holding the purse shut and secured to a belt, and handed the small leather bag to Tad. The envelope was folded over and stuffed into the leather purse and secured to his belt.

"Who do I deliver it to?" Tad asked.

Ben spoke slowly and clearly, but in a lowered tone of voice. "You are to go to a tavern called the Four Swans down on the docks. Do you know it?"

"Yes," replied Tad. "Of all the places in Boston that Mr. Stelle thought were bad, this was the worst. I was never to go there or even near there."

Silas, who had come up to join the group, laughed. "It sounds like the kind of place where spies and that sort could be found."

"It's General Washington's orders," Ben said. The sharpness of his speech made it clear to everyone that the matter was not to be debated. It was an order that had to be carried out regardless of possible danger.

Ben paused and then lowered his voice again and spoke to Tad.

“You are to give the letter to the proprietor and tell him that the letter is for a Mister L.”

“A Mister L,” Tad repeated.

Jed had also joined the group during the discussion. “Maybe they will give us some rum,” he said.

The men laughed, and Captain Hamlin said, “And maybe your father will tan your britches for you if such a thing happened.”

Silas asked Ben about the militia company behind them. The company had been assigned to watch this cove, but had pulled back when Silas informed them that the Marblehead detachment would take over.

“The militia is still there,” Ben replied. “There aren’t very many of them though. I doubt if there’s more than thirty in the whole company.”

“Well, I don’t think we’ll need them,” Silas replied. “It’s been quiet here.”

“How soon do you think you can make the crossing?” Ben asked.

“Not this night,” Captain Hamlin replied. “Maybe tomorrow night. The air seems a bit damp, but there’s not enough freshening of it to warrant a storm.”

Tad knew the Marblehead men had a sense of the weather that puzzled him. He had never given much thought to the weather since he worked indoors. The Marblehead people made their living from the sea. They had learned to read the sky for clues as to the next day’s weather. Their lives could depend upon it.

The group drifted away to look after other matters. The rowers and Jed were to get as much sleep as possible. The other Marblehead men kept watch.

Ben and Tad were alone. Ben put his hand on Tad’s shoulder. “Be careful, Tad. This is a dangerous mission you are about. I asked General Washington for permission to go along with you and the Marblehead boy, but the general said no.”

Tad smiled. “If everyone who wanted to go with us were to do so, we’d need a fleet of boats to make the crossing.”

Ben nodded. “I know Sergeant Grumley wanted to go.”

“This will not be a hard trip,” Tad said. “I know what I am to do. Besides delivering this envelope, I am to find the hulk where the prisoners are being held, count the guards, and learn how many soldiers are close by in case of trouble. That will not be hard to do. We can stay hidden while we are doing our job.”

Tad did not add one other possibility that was tucked away in his mind. Maybe there would be a chance for him to see his parents. He had not seen them since April past, and he had no way of knowing whether they had fared poorly or not.

“Take care, Tad,” said Ben.

“I’ll be back before you know it,” Tad replied.

Chapter 24 A Desperate Mission Begins

A day passed and then another day, and Tad began to fear that it would never rain. He could not recall another time in his life when he had wished so hard for rain.

The rain finally came. The clouds gathered all the morning long, and in the afternoon, the wind picked up and rain came down.

Captain Hamlin was ready to go as soon as it was dark. The rowing crew would not take muskets along on the trip. The rain made them a very doubtful weapon. Instead, the crew was armed with knives, cutlasses, and clubs. Tad had never seen a cutlass before. It was a dangerous looking weapon. The blade was wide and heavy. It was meant for fighting close in, and was used mainly as a hacking and slashing weapon.

Just before they pushed off from the shore, Captain Hamlin gave each of the boys several coins.

“Put these coins in a safe place. You many need them to buy food. We won’t return until the next rainy night. You must be standing in the swamp where we let you out.”

Both boys took the coins and put them in the best pockets they had.

Captain Hamlin put a hand on each boy’s head and looked up at the sky.

“Protect them, almighty God.”

The boat was shoved off the beach by Silas and the Marblehead men who would keep watch at this place until the return of the boat from the night’s mission and then the return of the boys.

They had not gone far before everyone in the boat was wet. The rowers did not seem to mind the rain. They rowed with great strength but without seeming to strain. There was no sound from the oarlocks for they had been well-greased to prevent any squeaking.

Jed lay up in the front of the boat. He shielded his eyes with his hand. Tad wondered how he could see anything with the rain coming down so hard.

Captain Hamlin stood behind Jed. Again, Tad could not understand how Captain Hamlin hoped to find his way to the point where the boys would step out of the boat.

Sometimes Captain Hamlin touched the first rower on his left, and the boat would make a slight move to the left.

On through the night the rowers, four on each side of the boat, pulled on their oars. In the dark, it was impossible to even tell if they were moving.

Tad thought he saw a glimmer of light off in the distance. That might be a light from one of the anchored warships they had to pass between.

Weeds! Tad could hear weeds brushing against the side of the boat. All the rowers save one lifted their oars out of the water. The one who did not lift his oar, stuck it down in the water to check the depth.

"It's time, boys," whispered Captain Hamlin. "Good luck."

Jed quickly climbed over the side and into the water. Tad hesitated. The rain was still pelting down. There was darkness everywhere. He had become disoriented during the boat ride.

Captain Hamlin whispered, "Are you all right?"

Tad shook his head and tried to wipe the rain drops from his eyes.

"Which way is land?" he asked.

Captain Hamlin chuckled softly and then whispered. "Follow Jed. He'll not miss Boston."

Tad slipped over the side of the boat and into the water. It was cold, but not a problem.

Jed took his hand and pulled him along. In just a few steps, they were out of sight of the boat. They did not know that Captain Hamlin was going to hold his position until he was reasonably certain they had reached shore without being discovered by the British.

The boys waded through the water and the weeds. They were almost chest-deep when they started. There was a slight current and the wading was not easy. Tad could feel his feet sinking into mud with every step and he hoped he would not lose a shoe.

Then they were out of the water and on a muddy bank that sloped down to the water. There were patches of weeds here, and both boys gratefully sank down in a patch to catch their breath and to decide on what to do next.

"Don't remember when I've been so wet," Jed said.

"We are wet, but we made it." Tad replied. "Now, I think we should make our way to the Four Swans tavern and deliver this letter."

"Will the tavern be open?" Jed asked.

"I think so," Tad replied. "We left just after sundown. I don't think it's near the middle of the night, yet. They stay open late. Mr. Stelle used to say that he doubted if anything that was honest ever happened that late unless it was sleep."

"We have some places like that back home," Jed said. "Now, I could guide you ashore, but I have no way of knowing how to find these Swans."

"Follow me," Tad said. "It's not a long walk. The rain seems to be letting up a little."

"That's not so good," said Jed. "You keep a sharp eye out for any Redcoats."

They had not gone far before they reached a street. There were warehouses on both sides of the street. Back behind the warehouses on the left side of the street were the docks. The street was dark and there appeared to be no one out. The rain had lessened, but there was still more than enough to discourage most people from walking about outside.

It did not take long for the boys to find the Four Swans tavern. If Tad had not known about where the place was located, they might have walked past it without knowing it. There was a sign that had four swans painted on it and nothing else. The sign was not large, and it was weather-beaten.

They looked through the dingy panes of glass that formed a window near the door. They could see light from several candles but not much else.

“Can you see if anyone is in there?” asked Tad.

“No,” answered Jed. “The window’s too dirty. We’ll just have to chance it.”

Tad led the way. The door was heavy and creaked noisily when he pushed it open. Both boys entered the tavern. A quick glance about the room revealed that there was no one there. Tad hesitated. He was not sure what to do next.

The problem was taken out of his hands when a burly man stepped into the room from what appeared to be some kind of almost hidden walkway to the back of the building. The man put both hands on the bar and glared at the boys.

“What kind of trade is this coming just after midnight? You boys have no business here. I’d warrant your masters are up just as late looking for the likes of you.”

Tad approached the bar. Jed followed close behind.

“Well?” roared the man behind the bar. “What is it? You’ll get no ale here, mind you.”

“I, I have a letter,” stammered Tad. “I have a letter for a man named Mister L.”

The man’s mask of anger quickly disappeared, and was replaced by a look of some concern mixed with a slyness which was his natural defense against danger.

“Have you now,” he said slowly. “And what be the letter about? And who is it from?”

“That is none of your business,” Tad said sharply. “We were told to deliver it here for Mister L.”

“Why then deliver it,” the man said. “Put in here on the bar, and I’ll see to it that Mister L receives it quick enough.”

“Are you Mister L?” asked Jed.

“No,” laughed the man. “And thankful I am for that.”

Jed whispered in Tad’s ear. “I don’t like this man. I think we should hold on to the letter until we can find someone else here to give it to.”

Tad nodded and then faced the man. “We have decided to wait until we can deliver the letter to Mister L ourselves. When do you expect him to come here?”

The man seemed disappointed, but again a sly look played across his face.

“Oh, I fear it will be a long time before he comes here again. A long time, indeed. You’d might as well give me the letter.”

“No,” Tad said as he stepped back by Jed.

“Well, this is a sorry business,” the man said as he eyed the two boys and could clearly see that they were on the defensive but not scared. “Look at the two of you standing there dripping water on my floor, and I have no doubt you each have a knife ready to pull from some pocket.”

“We mean no harm,” said Tad. “We were paid to deliver a letter, and we mean to make sure it goes to the right person.”

The man stared at the boys for a long moment, and then nodded. “We need to take this upstairs, I think, to a person who knows Mister L right well. She’s the proven owner of this establishment, and you’d do well to mind your manners with her.”

“She?” Tad asked

“That’s right,” the man said. “Don’t be fooled by that. She’s as hard as any man and as quick with a knife as any of you young alley rats. Now, follow me.”

The man picked up a candle holder with one hand and motioned to the boys to follow him with the other.

They hesitated and then moved forward. They followed him through the door to the back which opened on a narrow hallway and then stairs. They climbed the steep stairs. The stairway was so narrow that only one person at a time could proceed upward. At the top of the stairs, there was a door. The man knocked several times, paused, and then knocked two times. They could hear someone on the other side of the door moving what sounded like a heavy bar.

They entered. There were several candles giving a yellow light to the room. Behind a table sat a large woman. Her face was scarred, and Tad knew the scars meant that she had survived smallpox, the dreaded disease that had taken his parents when he was not more than a baby.

“What’s this? What’s this?” she asked in a raspy voice. “Why have you brought two alley rats into my room when I’m counting the pitiful results of a day’s work? Alley rats, and worse yet, half-drowned alley rats from the look of it.”

There were several small stacks of coins on the table and an open small box with a large lock on it.

“They claim to have a letter for Mister L,” the man said. “They don’t trust me enough to give me the letter.”

The woman smiled. “They may be dripping wet alley rats, but they are not without their wits.” She peered at the boys and asked, “Well, now. Truth from you if you don’ mind. Do you have a letter for Mister L?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Tad answered.

“Well, now. We have some manners,” she said. “Maybe you are not the alley rat you appear to be. Give me the letter.”

Tad hesitated. He glanced over at Jed who shrugged.

“Oh, come on, now, boy,” she said with a sharpness in her voice that made Tad think of the cutlasses the rowers had tucked under their seats on the boat.

“I know who the letter is from, but I do not know how it got into Boston. I can make a good guess, though, judging by your wet clothes. The Virginian is a sly one.”

Tad was surprised. How could she know? Or, was it just a guess on her part. Still, she referred to the Virginian and that could only mean one man.

Tad reached inside his shirt and pulled out the leather purse. When he removed the letter from the purse, he could feel how damp it was. He wondered if the ink had run. He stepped forward and laid the letter on the table.

The woman picked it up. Tad noticed that her hand was pudgy and each finger had a ring.

She laughed and said, “This is a wet letter. Burning will be hard.”

She held the letter to a candle and the paper sputtered and smoked, but finally took flame and she dropped it on the table and watched as it burned.

“What are you doing?” Tad cried. “That letter was from General...” Tad felt Jed’s elbow poke him, but Jed’s effort was not necessary. He caught himself in time, or so he hoped.

The woman laughed. “We know well enough who wrote the letter.”

“Why did you burn it?” asked Tad.

“Because,” said the woman, a tone of sadness coming into her voice, “Mister L is spending his last night on earth. The British are going to hang him tomorrow for being a spy.”

“No!” cried Tad.

“True enough,” said the woman. “The British arrested him three days ago. He was caught trying to board the old hulk where the British are holding some rebel prisoners.”

“The twelve men captured when the British took the redoubt on Breed’s Hill?” Tad asked.

The woman smiled, “And, would a boy in Boston know about Breed’s Hill?”

Tad was flustered and he feared that his face was turning red.

“There’s always lots of talk around Boston,” he muttered.

The woman laughed. “Don’t worry. You are among friends. You best be very careful, though. It’s obvious to me that something’s afoot about the men being held in that old hulk. The British have their faults, but being slow to understand is not one of them.”

Tad looked at the woman. He was trying to decide just how much to trust her. Finally, he made a decision.

“I have a friend who is being held prisoner in the hulk,” Tad said softly. “I want to get him and the other eleven men out and safe.”

The woman held both of her hands up in front of her face and joined the fingers together and then peered over them at Tad.

“So that’s the way of it,” she said. “You’re here maybe as much on your own as for the cause.”

“I guess it looks that way,” Tad replied cautiously.

“We can’t rescue your friend,” the woman said. “He may not even be alive. That report Mister L sent about twelve men being held is an old one. Now, there’s only seven, and they are in bad condition.”

“How do you know this?” Tad asked.

“Oh, we know a lot, we do. The British guards and the relief spend much of their off-duty time here at the tavern. If it weren’t for their custom, why, I’d have no business at all. And once the soldiers get a pint or two in them, their tongues get loose.”

This bit of news struck Tad hard. They had come so far and the end was in sight, and now to learn that David might be dead was a shock.

“We need to find out what we can about the guards and how they are relieved,” Tad said. “Is there some place where we can lay up and keep watch for a day?”

“Oh, there is that,” the woman answered. “There are two old warehouses across the dock from the hulk. The British use one as a barracks for the guards. The other one is fallen in, mostly, but there are places in it where two boys could lay up for a spell if necessary. You should be able to see the hulk without too much difficulty.”

“That would be good,” Tad said. “I know the building. We can find it.”

“Good,” said the woman. “Now, it is late. I am tired.” She turned to the burly man who had stood by the door. “Take them to the kitchen and feed them. Give them some blankets out of the closet and take them out to the shed behind. They will be safe enough there, and can get some sleep. Feed them well, now, mind you.”

The man nodded and turned to open the door.

Tad said, “We can pay for our food.” As he spoke, he felt Jed’s elbow poke him.

The woman saw Jed’s move and laughed. “Your friend’s no fool,” she said to Tad. “You would be wise to listen to him, and he would be wise if he took his hand off the knife in his pocket.”

With that, the man and the two boys climbed back down the narrow steps and then passed through a doorway into a kitchen. Both boys were given a bowl of stew that was still a little warm. They eagerly devoured the stew. The man laughed as he watched them eat.

“Wherever you boys are from, I can see that eating is not something you do very often.” He ladled out more stew in both bowls, and the stew quickly disappeared.

Soon both boys were tucked in blankets in the old shed. There were piles of old canvas in the shed that made a soft bed.

When they were settled in, Jed spoke softly.

"I think that was the scariest woman I ever saw."

"That's for sure," Tad answered.

"Do you think we can trust her?" Jed asked.

"I don't know," Tad said. "I just don't know. Worse yet, I don't think we have any choice in the matter."

Tad tried to sort out the puzzle. The letter to Mister L was now ashes. The British had Mister L and were going to hang him. Had he told the British very much? He remembered when he was a prisoner of the British and how Captain Ackerly was going to whip him until he talked. There was so much to think about, but he was so sleepy. He could hear Jed breathing deep and easy and knew that he was asleep.

His eyes closed so gently that he did not even realize they were closed.

Chapter 25 The British Teach a Hard Lesson

The door to the shed banged open and both boys sat upright in alarm.

"You scalawags going to sleep forever?"

It was the burly man standing in the doorway. He held two tin cups and a small jug in one hand and a cloth-wrapped parcel in the other.

It was daylight and the day was well underway. The boys got to their feet.

"We overslept," Tad said. "I had hoped to be up just before dawn."

"You missed your mark by a couple of hours," the burly man said. "I brought you hot tea and some bread and meat. You have to eat it our here in the shed. It wouldn't do for you to be seen in the tavern. It's not just the British. There's sometimes people looking for runaway apprentices, too, and you both look like you could fill the bill on that account. Be careful when you slip away from the shed. There's a lot of British soldiers about, this being the day they hang Mister L."

With that said, the man returned to the tavern. The boys made quick work of their breakfast.

"Being a spy sure means getting fed better than being a soldier," Jed said.

Tad laughed. "Spies may eat better, but they come to a sorry end."

Jed reached into a pocket and pulled out one of the biscuits they had carried for food.

"Look at this," he said as he made a face. "The biscuits got so wet they came apart. It looks like they'd have to be cooked again."

Both boys emptied the doughy mess from their pockets and wiped their hands on an old rag that hung from the wall of the shed.

“Now what do we do?” Jed asked.

“We need to slip out of here and find a way to get into that old warehouse where we can see the dock and the old hulk,” Tad said.

The warehouse was not far away, but it was daylight, a bright, sunny daylight.

Tad had thought to find an alleyway where it was unlikely they would run into any British soldiers. Jed had another idea, and he pointed to a hammer, tool box, and a saw that were on a bench at one end of the shed.

“There’s what we need,” Jed said. “You take the saw and I’ll carry the hammer and the tool box. That way, anyone seeing us will think we are going someplace to work.”

Tad nodded. “That’s a good idea.”

The boys sauntered forth armed with the tools and the hope that they looked like boys off on a job.

They had not gone far when they saw a British patrol consisting of four soldiers.

“Ho, there, you lads,” yelled one of the soldiers. “Stand fast.”

Both boys stopped as the British soldiers approached.

“Where be you going?” asked one of the soldiers.

“We are supposed to work on a warehouse,” Tad said. “It needs repair.”

“Small amount of good you boys are likely to do,” said another soldier.

The soldiers laughed. “It makes no difference. You have a better job to do. We need people in Boston to witness a hanging this day. Maybe they will learn a good lesson. Come along with us.”

The boys reluctantly followed the British patrol. Other people were rounded up and joined the column. Tad recognized where they were headed. It was a large commons close to where he had lived with the Stelles. He began considering a visit. It was something that he had thought about many times, but had always put it out of his mind because it would be too dangerous. For a brief moment, he had to swallow hard, and he could feel tears beginning to form in his eyes. He realized how much he had missed his home.

Other British patrols had been busy. When the boys reached the commons, a goodly-sized area of park-like land surrounded by buildings and streets, they could see a large crowd gathered. It was a quiet crowd, the people well aware of why they were forced to be present.

In the middle of the commons there was a square formed by British soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder and with bayonets fixed to the muzzles of their muskets.

Inside the square, the British had erected two large posts with a beam across the top of the posts. Tied to the cross-beam was a rope that dangled down a short distance. There was a noose at the bottom of the rope.

Tad got a quick sense of fright when four British drummers marched into the square and stood to one side of the gallows. He looked close to see if any of the drummers was his friend, Packie.

It was with a sense of relief and yet worry when he saw that Packie was not among the drummers. He did not know what would happen if Packie were to see him. Would the British drummer look the other way and not turn him in as had happened when he and David escaped from Boston?

At the same time, he wondered if Packie had been hurt in the occasional raids and skirmishes that had occurred since the siege of Boston started.

The drummers began beating a slow and terrible beat. Packie had shown Tad the beat and said that he hoped the young boy would never have to play it.

As the drums beat, soldiers on one side moved so an opening was created. Several officers on horseback rode through the opening and into the square and took up position near the gallows.

They were followed by a horse-drawn cart with soldiers marching alongside and just behind it.

Standing in the cart was a man. He stood erect. His hands were tied behind his back. Despite his situation, he stood with his head up and acted as though he had no fear whatsoever.

Tad gasped, "It's Hollister! How can this be? He's a Tory, a Loyalist!"

"Careful," Jed whispered. "We don't want people looking at us."

Tad clamped his mouth shut. His mind was filled with confused thoughts. Hollister was Mister L. That made sense, but he was a Tory! It had been Hollister who had tried to arrest him and David before they were about to escape from Boston. How could this be?

The British officers drew their sabers when some of the people brought forth to witness the hanging began talking in angry tones.

A soldier climbed up in the cart and adjusted the noose around Hollister's neck. The back end of the cart was open. Hollister stood just a few steps from the end. As the soldier hopped down from the cart, another soldier moved to the horse's head and took hold of the halter.

The drumming stopped. One of the officers rode up to Hollister and asked,

"Do you have any last words?"

Hollister looked out at the people. His head was still held high. He spoke in a clear and controlled voice that carried out to the people witnessing his ordeal.

"I proudly die as a free man for the cause of liberty!"

The crowd broke into spontaneous cheers despite the close presence of British bayonets.

The horses carrying the British officers shied at the noise and danced about.

One of the officers urged his horse up to the front of the cart.

“And so you shall!” cried the officer as he hit the cart horse on the back with the flat of his sword. The cart horse jumped forward and it was all the soldier holding the halter could do to keep the horse from bolting.

It was enough. The crowd moaned as if one person, and Tad turned away, sure that he was going to be sick.

The British soldiers forming the square raised their muskets so the bayonets presented a shiny, but dangerous line that must not be crossed.

The officers rode around the inside of the square yelling at the people to disperse.

“Go about your business now, and remember this lesson well. What you saw is what will happen to those who rebel against the king and Great Britain.”

Slowly, the people began to move away from the commons. Jed picked up the tool box with the hammer tucked in it. With his free hand, he took hold of Tad’s arm and began pulling him away.

Tad moved like a boy in his sleep. He still felt sick at his stomach, and he knew that he did not dare to look at the gallows.

When he realized that Jed was guiding him back toward the dock, he stopped.

“Are you all right?” asked Jed. “You look awful pale.”

“There are some people I want to see,” Tad said. “I want to see my father and mother.”

“You sure that’s a good idea?” Jed asked.

“I don’t know. I just have to see them. Come on, this way.”

“This don’t seem right to me,” protested Jed as he walked beside Tad.

Tad breathed deep. He no longer felt sick at his stomach.

“We can hide out at the printing shop until its dark,” Tad said. “Then we can make our way back to the dock and the warehouse. We’ll be in position by dawn and we can keep watch on the hulk.”

Again, Jed disagreed, but he continued to walk alongside Tad.

“This doesn’t make good sense,” Jed said. “We won’t look much like apprentice boys going on a job with tools if we are caught out after dark.”

Tad realized that Jed was probably right, but he had a yearning to see the Stelles that could not be overcome by good sense.

“You are right about one thing,” said Tad. “We had best stay the night and go out at dawn. We’d for sure look like apprentices going out on a job.”

By now it was past noon. The sky remained clear, and Jed noted that there would be no rain that night. They would easily have another day, and maybe even a second day to watch the hulk.

"It would be good to sleep comfortable and with a full stomach for two nights in a row," Jed said.

The front of the print shop was a welcome sight. Tad opened the door and peered inside. There were no candles lighting the interior, and there was no one in sight. He swung the door back and forth, but no bell jingled as it always had in the past.

He moved into the room and was followed by Jed.

"Is there anyone at home?" Tad called.

The door between the shop and the living quarters opened. There were faces in the doorway.

Tad stepped forward. "It's me. I've come home."

"Tad? Tad?" came a woman's voice.

There was a rustle of clothes as the woman in the doorway rushed forward and enfolded Tad in her arms.

Tad could feel her tears on his cheek as she held him tight.

She was followed into the room by Mr. Stelle who held a candle in his hand.

"Welcome home, Tad," said Mr. Stelle. His manner was more restrained than his wife's, but there was no doubting the deepness of his feelings.

Mrs. Stelle backed away a step, but still held Tad's arms. She looked closely at him.

"You're so thin!" she said. "You haven't had enough to eat."

"Thinner perhaps," Mr. Stelle agreed, "But I do believe you have grown an inch over the past five months." He paused and looked toward the door of the shop. "Come, this is no place for a reunion. We do not know who might come through the door, and I think Tad and his friend here would do well to keep out of sight."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Stelle as she and the boys followed Mr. Stelle into the living quarters.

They sat down around the kitchen table. "I mean," said Mr. Stelle, "that Tad and his friend are in Boston on some kind of an errand, and I am sure it is a very dangerous errand."

Tad nodded. "That is true, but I cannot talk about it now. This is my friend, Jed. He is with the Marblehead regiment. There are certain things we must do here in Boston."

"Does that mean you will be leaving Boston? You haven't returned to stay?" asked Mrs. Stelle.

"We have to go back," Tad said. "This isn't over yet, and it won't be over until the British leave Boston."

"I am sorry to hear that," Mrs. Stelle said. "This has been going on for months. Times are hard here. We have a hard time finding food. Your British friend, the drummer, he has stopped by to see us sometimes. He always brings a basket of food with him."

“Packie? You’ve seen Packie? How is he doing?” Tad asked.

“We do not know,” replied Mr. Stelle. “We have not seen him now for a good three weeks. What about David? How is he faring?”

“David was taken prisoner by the British. We think he is being held here in Boston,” Tad replied.

“I see,” said Mr. Stelle thoughtfully. “I think I know where he is being held, if that might help.”

Tad was surprised. How could Mr. Stelle know where David was being held prisoner?

“Where?” Tad asked. He tried to appear very casual about his question.

Mr. Stelle smiled, and Jed laughed.

“There is an old ship tied up at the end of the long dock,” Mr. Stelle said. “The British have put out the word that the ship, which is nearly rotted away, is being used as a plague ship. People with smallpox are being kept there.”

“That would keep people from snooping around the ship,” Jed said.

“Please be very careful about doing your tasks,” said Mr. Stelle.

“I don’t understand this,” Mrs. Stelle said. “When is it ever going to end?”

“I don’t know,” Tad said gently. “The British are not strong enough to break out of Boston, and we are not strong enough to break in.”

“It’s a stalemate,” Mr. Stelle said. “We shall just have to wait until something happens to tip the balance. In the past, I thought our efforts would be successful. I thought the king and his ministers would come to their senses and their wrongs would be made right. Now, I fear that a long war is ahead of us.”

“The Virginian is making a continental army,” said Jed. “We have some good regiments now.”

“An army?” Mr. Stelle asked. “Why, we are only a collection of colonies. We are not a nation, and we are far from being a continent.”

The talk continued and it soon became time for the evening meal. As Mrs. Stelle set about the task of preparing the meal, the two boys and Mr. Stelle talked about life in the army. Jed was an eager participant in the conversation, and at one point let it be known that Tad had captured a Redcoat.

“I really did not catch a British soldier,” Tad protested.

“That’s not the way old Colonel Glover tells it, Jed said. “The Redcoat was about to stick him with a bayonet when Tad jumped on the Redcoat. Old Glover claims that Tad saved his life.”

“I thought you were a drummer,” Mr. Stelle said to Tad.

“I slipped the drum off and got in the way of the British soldier,” replied Tad.

“How is that old French drum holding up?” Mr. Stelle asked.

“It plays as well as any drum in the army,” replied Tad. “I keep it polished.”

“I never thought when I picked up the French drum from that battlefield during the French and Indian war that it would see service again. If it could talk, what stories it could tell about battles both here and in Europe.”

“Enough of this talk about war,” Mrs. Stelle said sharply as she ladled food on the plates. “You boys eat all you can hold. From the looks of you, it is clear enough that your army does not feed very well.”

Both boys eagerly picked up spoons and made a show of eating, but each boy seemed to understand that food was scarce and the Stelles needed their supplies just to survive. They finished eating and claimed they could not eat another bite when Mrs. Stelle urged them to clean up the remnants of the meal.

They soon retired for the night after asking the Stelles to not let them sleep late. They needed to be on their way by dawn.

The boys crowded into the loft where Tad had slept before leaving Boston.

“This is about like it was in my home back in Marblehead,” said Jed. “My brother and I shared a loft.”

Both boys were silent, each one caught up in his own thoughts about the day.

Tad spoke softly. “It was a good thing that you did not bring up the hanging. It would have bothered my mother.”

Jed answered, “That was clear enough. It sure bothered you a lot. I thought you were going to pass out.”

“It was a terrible thing,” Tad said. “Maybe worse yet, I knew the man, or at least, I thought I did. I must have been wrong about Mr. Hollister.”

“It was the second hanging I’ve seen,” said Jed.

“Really?” answered Tad.

Jed squirmed in his blanket to get more comfortable.

“It was two years ago in Marblehead. They hanged a man for murder. I wasn’t supposed to go, but I snuck off anyway. Most of the boys in town did the same. When my father found out about it, he warmed my britches for me, I can tell you.”

“Well, I hope this business today was my first and last,” said Tad.

“Me, too,” said Jed with a soft laugh. “Especially if it’s us to be hanged.”

“There’s a good thought to go to sleep on,” Tad groaned.

The night passed and before Tad was even sure he was asleep, Jed was shaking his shoulder.

“Time to get up,” Jed whispered. “I can hear your mother stirring around in the kitchen.”

Both boys were still sleepy when they climbed down from the loft.

“Sit down and eat,” Mrs. Stelle said. “A good bowl of hot porridge and molasses will get your day started.”

Mr. Stelle came in from the back of the shop with a basket of sticks for the fire.

“Don’t forget to take your tools with you when you leave,” he said. “The tools are a good disguise.”

“That was Jed’s idea,” Tad said.

“It’s a sorry time,” Mrs. Stelle added, “When boys have to play let’s-pretend in a grownup world.”

“Eat up, lads,” Mr. Stelle urged. “We have plenty of porridge. There’s no need to hold back.”

Mr. Stelle had seen how they had eaten lightly the night before, Tad told himself. He was a man who saw much, but did not always tell everything. Mr. Stelle had been a good teacher, a good father, and Mrs. Stelle had been a good mother. He knew that he owed them much. He also knew that he had to stop thinking about them or he might cry, and the last thing in the world he wanted was for Jed to see him cry.

When the boys left, Mrs. Stelle did cry, and Tad was more than a little misty-eyed.

As the boys walked along with their tools, Jed said, “Leaving your folks behind is a hard thing to do.”

Tad thought maybe Jed was making fun of him and replied sharply, “Mind your own business.”

They walked in silence. When they turned a corner, they gave way so several British soldiers could pass. The British said nothing and both parties went about their business.

“I wasn’t trying to poke fun at you,” Jed said. “I was thinking about my own family. I’ve come to the army with my father and grandfather, but I miss my mother. It’s been some months since I’ve seen her.”

“I’m sorry if I seemed sharp with you,” Tad said.

The boys had no trouble the rest of the way. They passed by the Four Swans tavern. There were no lights showing through the window.

They reached the old warehouse facing the dock and the hulks. There were four old ships tied up at the dock. Three of the rotting hulks were close together. The fourth was a long musket shot away and at the end of the dock. The warehouse where the guards lived was across from the first three hulks.

As they passed it, there were three soldiers standing outside the door. They stared at the boys as they passed, but then continued their conversation about food. They were not happy about their food.

After the boys passed the soldiers, Jed whispered, “The food must be the same in all armies.”

There were two sentries in front of the fourth hulk. They paced back and forth and watched as the two boys entered the empty and partially fallen-in warehouse opposite the hulk. When the boys were inside, the sentries resumed their pacing.

“Look at this place,” said Tad. “The roof’s almost fallen in. It’s not worth repairing.”

“Never mind that,” Jed said. “Did you see the hulk? Why the thing is sitting on the bottom. She’s sunk, and that’s the truth of that.”

“What do you mean, sunk?” asked Tad.

“Why, if the water was any deeper, the ship would be under the water. As it is, it can’t sink any more because it’s on the bottom.”

“I don’t understand,” Tad said.

“Most of the ship is filled with water,” said Jed. “There can only be maybe one deck below topside that doesn’t have any water. It means we will have an easier time of finding the prisoners. More than that, we can easily jump aboard the hulk from the dock. We won’t have to climb any ropes to board her.”

“I’m glad you’re along,” Tad said. “I would have never seen all that.”

The boys found a place where they could keep watch on the hulk without being noticed by the guards. To keep up the pretense of work, one boy watched while the other pounded a nail in a board or sawed through a board.

Tad noticed that while Jed pretended to be working, he was keeping a close watch on the sky.

“What are you looking at?” Tad asked.

“We’d best get all the information we can today because we will be going home tonight, I figure,” Jed replied.

“Rain tonight?”

Tad studied the sky but could not see any real difference at first. Then he saw a thin line of clouds out over the horizon.

Neither boy saw the burly man from the Four Swans tavern as he quietly slipped around the back side of the warehouse and peered in at them through a fallen in portion of the wall.

“Ho, now, what kind of work crew is this? I don’t see much work being done.”

Both boys were startled. When they saw who it was, they were not sure about how to feel. They did not trust the burly man.

“We didn’t see you coming,” Tad said.

“And I might have been a British soldier,” the man said.

“We’d have figured it out,” Jed said as he eyed a pole that could make a good club.

The man smiled. “There’s no need to be eyeing that pole. I’ve brought you some bread and meat and a jug of water.”

He did not enter the building. He set down a small cloth-wrapped bundle and a small jug.

“And, there’s news you should know. The British are spooked. There’s talk of something about to happen in Boston, but they don’t seem to have it figured out.” He stopped talking and peered around and behind him before continuing in a softer voice.

“If I was you boys, I’d be looking to high-tail it out of here. There’s not much more you can do here, anyway.”

The man saw Jed quickly glance up at the sky. He chuckled and said, “So that’s how it is. Yes, I figure it will rain tonight, and a good rainy night has its uses, now don’t it?”

Tad decided to be blunt about their situation.

“There’s some things we are not sure of yet. We think they have four guards, two on the ship and two pacing up and down on the dock. As near as we can tell, there’s another twelve who stay in the warehouse next to this one. What we don’t know is how often they change the guard.”

“That’s easy enough,” the man said. “They change shifts every two hours. Now, if I was really interested in that prison ship, I’d probably poke around it about one o’clock in the morning. That would be in the middle of the time the guards are on duty. They’ll have been on their posts for an hour and have spent just enough time on duty to get sleepy.”

“That is helpful information,” Tad said.

The man nodded. “Glad to be of help. Oh, look over there at the ship!”

Tad and Jed both turned and stared at the ship. They could see nothing that had changed. When they turned around, the burly man was gone.

“He’s a slick one,” Jed said. “He sounds like he’s on our side, but I have to wonder.”

Tad nodded. “Still, his warning is clear enough. I wonder about what the British know.”

“Maybe Mr. L talked before they hanged him,” Jed said. “And maybe the British got spies over in our camp just like we got spies in Boston.”

Tad had not thought of the possibility that the British might have spies watching the army.

“I hope that’s not true,” he said. “What about tonight?”

“If it rains like I think it will, then we sit here until about three hours after dark. Then we’ll make our way back where we came in and wade out to where the weeds are sticking up out of the water and wait.”

“That’s not the best plan I’ve ever heard,” Tad said. “We’ll be soaking wet from the rain and then have to stand in water up to our belts for maybe an hour or more.”

Jed laughed. “On a fishing boat, you can get soaked the first ten minutes out and stay that way for hours. There’s water in the bottom of the boat from the rain and waves washing over the sides, so you stand in water. This isn’t so bad.”

“Well then, that’s the way it has to be. I guess.” Tad said. “What do we do now?”

Jed moved over to the bundle and the jug left behind by the burly man.

“My next move is to eat some of that bread and meat,” Jed said. Both boys busied themselves with their unexpected meal.

Then they kept close watch on the ship. They saw the guards being changed every two hours. Tad noticed that when the guards were in the act of being changed, there were eight men and a sergeant close to the ship. It would be a bad time to storm the ship with a small force landed by boat at the dock.

Dusk turned into night and the first drops of rain began falling. Both boys kept careful watch on the old hulk. They reckoned that a relief of the guards had occurred at six o'clock, and then eight, and finally at ten. When the relieved guards and the sergeant returned to the warehouse to get out of the rain, Tad and Jed began moving carefully through the rainy night to the place where they would wade out into the weedy area and wait for the boat to arrive.

As they began wading out into the water, Tad had a sudden fear that maybe they were not at the same place where they had come ashore.

"Jed, are you sure we are in the right place?" Tad whispered.

"Yes," came a whispered reply. "I marked it well when we came ashore."

Tad's doubts began to rise again after they had stood in water nearly up to their chests for what seemed to be a very long time.

There was no doubt in Tad's mind, however, about Jed as a friend and companion. The mission would have been impossible without Jed's help.

Jed touched Tad's arm and whispered so softly Tad could barely hear him.

"Boat's coming."

The rain and the dark night made it almost impossible to see anything, but then, Tad thought he heard just a slight swish of water, and suddenly the boat was beside them.

Eager hands pulled the two boys aboard. The oarsmen backed the boat out of the weeds and turned for the cove on the other side of the water.

Tad's respect for the Marblehead men rose to new levels. Their ability to move from place to place and remember how to repeat the move in the night and rain was truly remarkable. The army is lucky to have this regiment, Tad told himself.

Chapter 26 Three Lights Upon the Water Mean Trouble

The next day after an all too brief time for sleep, Tad sat at a little table in a makeshift shelter. On the table in front of him were a quill, a small bottle of ink, and several sheets of paper.

When Tad glanced outside the shelter, he could see Ben and Captain Hamlin talking. They were speaking in low voices. He could not hear what they were saying.

One of the pages was already covered with Tad's writing, and now he was working on the second page. His assignment was to write down everything that might be of use to General Washington. Ben was waiting to ride back to headquarters with Tad's report.

The news about Mister L would come as a shock to General Washington. It was not likely that he would have heard of the death of his spy. As Tad wrote the sad part about the death of Mr. Hollister, he paused to consider that maybe General Washington had other sources of information and probably did know of the event.

Tad heard other voices. He recognized the voices and knew that Silas and Jed had joined the others.

Writing the report was not hard. He would remember every minute of the adventure for a long time. He considered leaving out the part about the Stelles, but decided that truth was needed. He hoped the general would forgive him for visiting the two people who were most important to him.

Tad completed his report and signed his name. He folded the two pages together like a letter and walked outside where the others were waiting.

"It's done," Tad said.

"Good," said Ben. "I'm off to headquarters with it as fast as I can ride. From what Captain Hamlin and Jed tell me, you boys had quite a time. I envy you. It seems like all I get to do is ride back and forth with dispatches from people who are really doing something."

One of the Marblehead men brought Ben's horse. As he prepared to mount, he said, "Remember. There's to be no action taken until I return with the general's approval."

"We'll wait," Silas said, "just don't let too many rainy nights go by."

The skies had remained cloudy through most of the day. By late afternoon, the weather began clearing.

Captain Hamlin studied the sky and shook his head. "We're going to be in for some good weather for a couple of days. Nothing to do about it except keep watch for the British, eat whatever we can find, and sleep as much as possible."

"That sounds like a good idea to me," Jed said. "I'd like to return to Boston, though. I think they're eating better than we are."

"The British are, that's for certain," said Tad. "The people of Boston, though, are having a hard time of it."

"The British must be bringing in food from Canada and down in the Caribbean," said Captain Hamlin. "They have quite a port up there at Halifax. I wonder how many ships they have out in the Atlantic heading for Halifax?"

"Reinforcements to come down to Boston?" asked Silas.

"Could be," Captain Hamlin replied. "Or maybe they'll build up an army and attack somewhere else."

“That would mean even more fighting,” Tad said. “How could we do that? We can barely hold our own here.”

Neither Captain Hamlin nor Silas had an answer to Tad’s question.

Jed answered by saying, “The Virginian will figure something out.”

Before the light faded into night, Captain Hamlin used his telescope to study the water between their position and Boston. The two British warships were still riding at anchor a considerable distance apart.

“I hope they do not move closer together. We can slip between them easy enough just as we did on our first trip in and out.”

Tad and Jed took their turn at watch. The Marblehead men were glad to have Jed on watch because of his ability to see. One of the men said, “The boy’s got eyes like a cat.”

The two boys took up station out on the beach. The night was cool and Tad began to wonder if he could somehow make a coat out of his blanket.

They had not been on watch for an hour when Jed nudged Tad and said softly, “Looky, there!”

Tad stared out into the night, and at first, he saw nothing. Then, there it was. Three dim lights.

“What is it?” Tad asked.

“I can’t rightly tell for sure,” Jed replied. “Go fetch Captain Hamlin or Silas, or both of them.”

Tad hurried back to their small camp. Captain Hamlin was sitting in front of a small fire with a cup of tea in his hand.

“Come quick!” Tad said. “We can see lights out on the water. Three of them.”

Captain Hamlin set his cup down on the ground. “Jed see them?” he asked as he got to his feet and moved quickly toward the beach.

“Yes, sir,” Tad answered as he followed.

The two boys and Captain Hamlin stared out into the night at the three lights.

“Longboats!” exclaimed Captain Hamlin. “The British are patrolling in their longboats.”

“They’re splitting up,” Jed said. “Look at that, they are going in different directions.”

“That’s going to make getting into Boston a tricky business even with rain,” said Captain Hamlin.

When two other men took the place of the boys on watch, Tad had a hard time going to sleep. He was worried because each time he was close to rescuing David from the British, something seemed to happen. The parley had gone badly, and now this development. Did the British suspect something?

The next day passed quietly. The two British warships were still anchored in the same spots.

The weather was fair, but there was the beginning edge of autumn creeping into the breezes. Tad feared that David would not be able to survive a winter as a British prisoner. The rescue could not be postponed for very long.

It was much the same for the Marblehead men. They knew they had a dangerous mission to perform, but they did not show much patience. They checked the boat over and over. They cleaned their muskets, even though the weapons were not going to be taken on the mission. There was no use in bringing the muskets.

Night brought stars and not clouds. Marblehead men joined Tad and Jed on the lookout. Just as the night before, there were three lights and then the three lights split and went different directions.

"They seem to be coming out and joining at the same point, then splitting up," Captain Hamlin said. "That is a curious thing. If we time it right, we can come in right behind them and be about our business without them knowing it."

The night passed slowly. Tad kept waking up and had a hard time going back to sleep.

Just before dawn, the lookouts sounded the alarm. One of the lookouts ran back to the camp and shouted, "Boats are coming into the cove!"

The camp turned out. The Marblehead men rushed to the beach and formed line.

A voice rang out from the approaching boats which could just barely be seen in the first grayness of dawn.

"Hello, the beach. Hold your fire!"

"It's Colonel Glover," said Silas. "Stack your muskets and make ready to pull the boats in. Take them back out of sight."

Three boats beached and the occupants laid their oars in the boats, then jumped out and joined the waiting Marblehead men in the task of pulling the boats up on shore and out of sight.

Silas and Captain Hamlin met Colonel Glover with handshakes instead of the usual salutes.

"We were not expecting you," Captain Hamlin said to the colonel.

"It was not the plan," said Colonel Glover, "I could not sit off to one side twiddling my thumbs while this business was going on here."

The boats were quickly hidden away, the beach swept to remove footprints, and tea was brewed. Colonel Glover, Captain Hamlin, Silas, Tad, and Jed sat around a small fire.

"I read your report," Colonel Glover said to Tad. "It was a good report. You and Jed did a fine job in Boston."

The two boys nodded, but did not say anything.

"There's been a new development," Captain Hamlin said. "The British are patrolling with their longboats. They appear to start their patrol with three longboats meeting just off our cove. We can see lanterns."

Colonel Glover nodded. "I have fifty more Marblehead men on the march to reinforce this cove. I was glad I did that when we saw some lanterns out on the water. That makes our job harder, but with bad weather, I think we can slip through them."

"It will be risky," said Silas.

"It'll be Marblehead against the British navy," said Colonel Glover, "Only, it won't be warships, it'll be their longboats against our boats. When it comes to rowing a boat, I'll put our men against the best the British navy has to offer."

Tad heard the colonel's words with a growing sense of excitement. He had feared that the British longboats would make the colonel reluctant to undertake the mission.

"I think the way we do this," said Colonel Glover, "is to slip in behind the patrolling longboats. Three of our boats will tie up very quietly alongside the hulk. It should be easy to climb up the side of the hulk and board her. There are only two guards on board. We take down the guards, lift the prisoners down into the boats, and run for home."

"What about our fourth boat?" Captain Hamlin asked.

"That's the crew with the hardest job," Colonel Glover said. "I want that boat to land just where the boys were landed. That crew, and it will be your boat, Captain Hamlin, will move quickly behind the warehouse where the boys hid out and then take out the two sentries on the dock."

"That still leaves the twelve men in the second warehouse," said Captain Hamlin. He had talked at great length with both Tad and Jed. He had already guessed that he and his crew would play a key role in the rescue.

Colonel Glover paused before replying to Captain Hamlin's comment.

"We need some good luck," Colonel Glover said. "If all goes well, the two guards on the dock and the twelve in the warehouse will never know what is happening until the next morning. If not, Captain Hamlin, then it will be your job to take out the guards and hold off the rest of the guard detail until our escape can be made. The old hulk should hide us very well from the dock. We can slip in and take down the two guards. We'll have enough men to make a quick loading of the prisoners. I suspect they will all be stretcher cases."

"Who is to command the other three boats?" Silas asked. "I see Captains Moore and Hoskins came with you."

Colonel Glover laughed. "Don't be concerned. You are to take one of the boats and be in charge of taking the hulk and loading the prisoners. As each boat is loaded, it is to run for home. Make sure the men on each boat are equipped with cutlasses, knives, and clubs. We'll not go with muskets. The rain makes them useless."

"Thank you, sir," said Silas. "I was afraid that I was going to be sent back to our position guarding the coast."

Colonel Glover replied with a smile that stretched across his weather-beaten face. "I've never seen anything like it. Seems like everyone wants to go on this raid. Even the galloping lieutenant who rides back and forth between us and headquarters was trying to get assigned to go."

"Ben? You saw Ben?" Tad asked.

“Oh, yes. He brought an order from General Washington authorizing our raid. When the weather is right, we are to go.”

Colonel Glover saw how excited Tad was, and spoke directly to the boy.

“There’s one thing about this business that I do not like. Tad, you are to go with Captain Hamlin. Jed, you are to go with Silas. It’s a sorry business, having to use boys on something this risky, but there’s no way around it. You two are the only ones who know where everything is located. If there’s any fighting, you keep back out of the way.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Tad. Jed did not answer, but he smiled.

“Silas, you keep close watch on Jed,” Colonel Glover said. “He’s more than a handful, I suspect.”

By the time the conference was over, the sun was well up in the sky, but as Tad and the others noted, it was shining down through clouds. There was a good chance that by nightfall, the rain would fall.

By late afternoon, the clouds merged into one great cloud full of rumblings of thunder, and the sun disappeared.

CHAPTER 27 A Game of Hounds and Fox

As soon as it was dark, the boats were pulled out of hiding and down to the water. Everything was ready to go, but Colonel Glover waited before giving the final order.

Tad and everyone else knew why the colonel was waiting. The lanterns on the longboats had not yet appeared. Where were the longboats? An hour passed and the men began to fidget. Almost another hour passed before the three lights appeared just as they had before. The lights could barely be seen through the rain.

“This is going to be a strange night,” Captain Hamlin said to Tad and his crew. “I believe this rain will not last the night through, and with this late start, we will be making our way back in daylight.”

Almost another hour passed before they could see the lanterns on the British longboats part company and go their separate ways.

Colonel Glover walked along the beach behind the boats and gave the order, “Launch the boats.”

Finally, the raid was underway. Tad crouched in the front of the boat the way he had seen Jed on the trip out to Boston. He could see nothing, and he wondered how Jed could be so certain. Captain Hamlin stood just behind him. The oars dipped and pulled the boat silently through the water. Behind them were the other three boats moving in line. Captain Hamlin set a course for the boat gliding through the rainy night. Tad had faith in the ability of the Marblehead men to find their way. Captain Hamlin had traveled this way before, and somehow, the route was etched in his mind.

It was a long journey for the rowers, but they never slackened their pace.

Then both Tad and Captain Hamlin saw the lantern off to their right. The British longboat was moving in their direction. Captain Hamlin made a decision. He stopped the rowers. The boats closely behind silently came to a stop. The rowers only dipped their oars enough to hold position.

The British longboat passed in front of them far enough away so that Tad could not see the boat, but the lantern shone enough to indicate that it was close. They could hear voices on the British longboat.

When the lantern faded away to the left, Captain Hamlin whispered a command, and the rowers resumed the journey. They were safely past the patrolling longboat.

On through the night they traveled. When Tad looked back over his shoulder, he could just barely make out the boat following them. When he checked again, he could not see the boat and guessed that Jed had veered away to the left to make the approach to the dock.

Tad saw weeds and could hear them brushing against the side of the boat. That meant they were close to land. A few minutes later, the boat bumped into shore and the men sprang overboard to pull the boat up on the shore.

One of the rowers stayed and guarded the boat. Captain Hamlin, with Tad in the lead, was followed by the other seven rowers. The men were armed with cutlasses, knives, and short clubs stuck in their belts. Tad had a stout stick which he used as a cane.

He led the way as they moved single file through the night. They quickly reached the back of the warehouse.

Tad could feel that the rain was lightening up. It was not much more than a drizzle. He peered around the corner of the warehouse, but could not see the guard who should have been on duty at this end of the dock. Had he gone inside to keep dry during the rain? They could hear nothing from the hulk. By now, Silas and Jed should have tied up on the other side of the hulk and be boarding it. Had Jed misjudged the distance and missed the dock?

Tad slowly crept around the corner of the warehouse. The Marblehead men followed him. When they were almost at the hulk, Tad saw the two guards. They were standing near the hulk and huddled under a canvas they were holding over their heads to keep dry.

The guards spotted the Marblehead men, but it was too late. The Marblehead men were on them in an instant. It did not take long to tie up the guards and stick rags in their mouths to keep them silent.

Tad showed Captain Hamlin where the second warehouse was with the relief guards. The captain led his rowers to the warehouse, and they took up station just outside the door. The two British sentries were left sitting on the dock where they would be no problem.

Tad hurried back to the hulk. He climbed on board and was immediately challenged.

"Stop or I'll shoot," said a voice out of the dark.

"Jed?" Tad recognized the voice and did so with great relief. "It's me, Tad."

Jed slipped out of hiding. "I'm glad to see you," he said in a low voice. "I was afraid you got lost or caught by one of the longboats."

"We had farther to go, I guess," Tad said. "How goes it here?"

"It was easy," Jed said. "There was only one guard on the hulk, and we took him quick. We have loaded two boats and they are already on their way back. We have seven prisoners. When our last boat is loaded, we are out of here. You people ought to run for it now."

A voice called out of the darkness. "Jed, come now, we are ready!"

"See you back at camp," Jed said as he turned and faded into the darkness.

"Good luck!" Tad called after him.

As Tad hurried back to tell Captain Hamlin the good news, he saw the door of the warehouse open and the light of a lantern. Four British soldiers walked out the door, and Tad realized that it must be time for the changing of the guard.

The British soldiers went down in a heap as the Marblehead men leaped to the attack with clubs. British soldiers inside the warehouse pushed the door shut and bolted it. The Marblehead men could not get inside.

A window was smashed, and several muskets stuck out the window. They fired, and the soldiers inside added to the noise by yelling for help.

"Quick now!" Tad told the men. "We must get away! We've got the prisoners. They are on their way back now."

The men, led by Captain Hamlin and Tad, moved quickly, but they did not run.

The Marblehead men and Tad reached their boat. In a moment, they had the boat off the beach and in the shallow water. They jumped in and began rowing.

Tad looked back and saw torches moving along the shore they had just left behind. He heard a drum beating the alarm.

There was a booming noise some distance off along the shore.

"What was that?" Tad asked softly.

"That was a signal cannon, I'd warrant," replied Captain Hamlin.

There was a second cannon fired. This one sounded much closer.

"We are in for a fine game of 'hounds and fox' for sure," said Captain Hamlin. "It will be a good thing, too, though a bit hard on us."

"I don't understand," said Tad.

"While the British longboats are looking for us, our three boats with the prisoners will have a good chance to slip through."

The rain picked up, and Tad was glad to feel his shirt becoming soaked again. The rain would make it harder for the British to see them.

It suddenly struck him. He had been so busy with the raid that he had not realized that David had been rescued and would soon be safe. He wished that he could have seen David, just to be sure, but Jed did say that seven prisoners had been rescued. He would see his friend soon.

All went well for nearly an hour. Then a lantern appeared just off to the left of the Marblehead boat. The British longboat was going to cross in front of them. The Marblehead men rested on their oars and waited. Tad and Captain Hamlin bent low, and the oarsmen leaned down over their oars.

The British passed so close that Tad expected them to spot the Marblehead boat. He could not understand why they did not turn their heads and see the boat sitting silently in the water. They could not have passed more than fifty feet away.

The lantern was bright enough so Tad could see the officer standing in the front of the boat. He counted six rowers on the side of the boat he could see. There were at least four, maybe six royal marines standing in the middle of the boat. At the back of the boat was a sailor manning the tiller. The longboat pulled away and the lantern light disappeared in the rainy night.

“That was a close one,” Captain Hamlin said. The rowers commenced their careful but strong pulling of the oars and the boat glided forward.

“How could they not see us?” Tad whispered.

“It’s their lantern,” Captain Hamlin replied. “The light hurts their night vision. They can’t really see out beyond the light shed by the lantern.”

All was quiet and the boat made good progress. The rain proved spotty, a sudden shower followed by a drizzle. Tad looked back and saw a sight that puzzled him.

“What’s that gray light behind us?” he asked.

Captain Hamlin chuckled. “That’s dawn coming on. We have had a busy night of it, and dawn’s going to catch us still on the water, I fear.”

Tad stared hard out into the still dark night. His eyes were strained from the effort.

Neither he nor Captain Hamlin picked up the ghostly approach of a British longboat coming up on their left rear.

A voice rang out in the night. “Heave to! We are coming alongside you!”

There was no lantern light to give warning. The British had covered their lantern, but now that they were upon the Marblehead boat, they unveiled the lantern.

“Raise your oars!” Captain Hamlin ordered as he picked up a cutlass.

The Marblehead boat slowed almost to a stop as the rowers raised their oars. The British had not expected the boat to stop and they almost overshot their mark. The British rowers did not bring in their oars in time and several of them broke as they struck the Marblehead boat.

“Give them the oars right hard!” shouted Captain Hamlin, and the Marblehead men laid on with all their might.

The British were caught by surprise. The Marblehead men, using their oars like clubs, knocked the British rowers and marines about like bowling pins.

The British rallied and tried to defend themselves. The boats drifted together. Captain Hamlin and the British officer on the longboat found themselves almost face to face.

The British officer had a pistol and he pulled the trigger, but the pistol did not fire. The gunpowder must have been too damp to ignite. As the officer pulled the trigger again, Captain Hamlin’s cutlass slashed downward, catching the officer’s hand and pistol. The officer screamed out in pain and fell back. The pistol dropped into the water.

At that point, a young British midshipman, a boy in training to become an officer, jumped from the British boat and landed in the back of the Marblehead boat. He was about Tad’s age. He waved a sword and shouted in a high-pitched voice, “Surrender, you rebels!”

Tad picked up a cutlass and faced the young midshipman. It was sword against cutlass, and neither boy could be sure of his footing.

The blades rang out as they clashed together. Tad had no idea about how to use the cutlass, but he knew a feeling of desperation similar to when he jumped on the back of the British soldier who was going to bayonet Colonel Glover.

The midshipman slipped and one of the rowers risked being stabbed. The Marblehead man shoved the British boy and he fell, the sword slipping from his hand and hitting the bottom of the boat.

Tad sprang forward and laid the edge of the cutlass at the midshipman’s throat.

“Yield!” cried Tad.

“Never,” answered the midshipman defiantly.

A groan went up from the British in the longboat when the midshipman fell. The men on both boats had paused to watch the two boys fight.

Tad stared at the helpless boy in front of him for a long second or two. The midshipman returned the stare, still defiant.

Tad stepped back and raised his cutlass. “Go now,” he said sharply. “Jump overboard and swim back to your boat.”

The midshipman hesitated and then got to his feet. He was still defiant as he looked at Tad.

“My mother will thank you for this act of mercy, but never expect any thanks from me.” He turned and jumped overboard and swam toward the British boat which had drifted away a short distance.

“Quick now, men!” Captain Hamlin shouted. “Get the oars in the water. Only your strong backs and arms can save us now. The hounds are upon us.”

Tad lifted his eyes from watching the midshipman swim toward the longboat. The sky was gray now, and he could see two more longboats coming in their direction.

Two of the Marblehead rowers had been injured in the fight, and they lay on the bottom of the boat between the rowers.

“Quick, now!” Captain Hamlin said to Tad. “Take a seat and row as best you can.”

Captain Hamlin took the other empty seat and bent his back to the task at hand.

The oar was heavy and Tad had no experience at rowing. The man on the bench opposite him said, “Watch me, and do what I do at the same time.”

Tad rowed as hard as he could. Sometimes he did not get the oar into the water right and the rower behind him got splashed. Fortunately, he was a man known for his good humor. He shook his head and laughed.

On through the gray dawn the Marblehead men pulled at their oars for their lives. The British longboats gained on them and the officers in the boats repeatedly shouted for the rebels to heave to.

Just as Tad thought he could row no longer, a shout went up from one of the rowers.

“Look there! It’s the beach and our boys are standing ready.”

Tad looked back over his shoulder and could see beyond the front of the boat. The beach was in sight, and on the beach was a welcoming party.

The Marblehead men on the beach were drawn up in a rank that stretched at least a hundred men long. Off to the side were two men who Tad guessed were Colonel Glover and Silas.

There was a roar of musket fire from the beach.

“They are firing at us!” Tad cried.

“No,” said Captain Hamlin. “We are still out of musket range. They are firing a warning volley to let the British know what will happen if the longboats come into range.”

The men eased up on the pace of rowing. Tad could see the British longboats were turning away from the chase. It was over. They were safe, and he felt a surge of pride at what they had done, but that surge of pride was quickly overtaken by a great weariness. His muscles told him that he had given about all that he had to give. Nor was he alone in that feeling. The Marblehead men could barely lift their oars for yet another stroke.

A group of men on shore gave their muskets to their friends to hold and then rushed into the water to pull the boat ashore. As Tad climbed out of the boat, he stumbled. Captain Hamlin caught him and helped him to shore. While they walked, Tad said, “I failed as a soldier. I could not take the life of the British boy who jumped in our boat.”

“No, no, you did not fail,” Captain Hamlin said. “An act of mercy in a hard war must surely be of great value.”

Chapter 28 The Issue Must Be Defined

When Tad came ashore and reached the small camp behind the beach, he saw a large canvas tent-like structure with several lanterns and a good fire nearby. The seven rescued men were wrapped in blankets and laying on the soft sand.

There was an older man who Tad guessed was a doctor. He moved from one of the rescued men to another, closely checking each one.

Tad moved closer. He could not see well enough to learn which one of the men was David.

Tucked down deep in his mind was the terrible possibility that David had been one of the five who had died before they could be rescued. He had to believe that David was still alive.

Tad knelt down by the first man. It was not David. He moved to the second man. This man was not David. As Tad moved, he did not see the small group of men by the fire watching him.

The third man was not David. The fourth man was David, and Tad checked again to make sure.

David looked so small, so thin. His eyes were closed. There were sores on his face, and his long, unkempt hair nearly covered one eye.

“David?” Tad said softly. “David, can you hear me?”

There was no response.

“David?” Tad said again.

Slowly, David’s eyes opened. “Tad?”

David’s voice was weak and Tad could barely hear him, but it was enough. Tad’s body gave a great shake that was almost a convulsion. He wept and could not stop himself.

The men at the fire rushed to his side.

Ben was the first to reach him. “Your friend is going to be all right,” Ben said. “You should lay down now and rest. You’ve had a long night.”

Colonel Glover said, “Take my drummer boy to my tent and let him rest there.”

Jed and Captain Hamlin pulled Tad to his feet and helped him reach the tent. When he lay down on a blanket, Jed put another on him. They stood nearby for a few moments. They could hear Tad’s crying and waited until they could only hear his even breathing. Then they knew he had fallen into a deep sleep brought on by the realization that his friend was alive and safe as well as the excitement and danger of the night now turned to day.

Later, Tad opened his eyes. There was much commotion outside the tent. He could hear men talking. There was the sound of a wagon and horses passing close by.

He sat upright. The effort quickly reminded him that he had rowed hard and long the night before. His muscles were sore.

A voice behind him said, "About time you woke up, young man. You have much to do."

It was Colonel Glover. He was seated at a small table. On the table were the usual paper, ink bottle, and quill.

"The wagons are here to take the rescued men back to headquarters for treatment. And, I have orders for you."

Tad did not heed the last words that Colonel Glover spoke. His mind was on David. His friend was going to be taken back where he could be treated and made well again. It was welcome news.

"You need to get your things together and be ready to return with the wagons," Colonel Glover said again.

"I'm going back?" Tad asked.

"Yes," replied Colonel Glover. "I don't know if you remember it or not, but your friend, the galloping lieutenant, was here last night."

Tad nodded. He could dimly remember seeing Ben.

"Well, he had orders for you to return to headquarters. I will miss having you around."

Tad answered. "Yes, sir. Maybe I will be sent back. I think this must be the best regiment in the army."

Colonel Glover laughed. "I think so, too. We will miss you and your French drum."

"There were two Marblehead men who were injured last night," Tad said. "How are they faring?"

"They are going to be all right," Colonel Glover said. "They both got nasty knocks on the head. They'll have a headache for a day or two. You better hurry along now."

Tad nodded and turned quickly to leave the tent and almost knocked Jed down as the Marblehead boy was coming in the tent.

"Don't be in such a hurry," Jed said. "I've got your drum and blanket roll ready for you."

"Thank you," Tad said. "I'm sorry to be leaving."

"Me, too," said Jed. "It's going to be kind of dull around here with you gone. I'll just be another messenger boy again."

The two boys stared awkwardly at each other.

"Well, take care of yourself," Tad said.

"You do the same," Jed replied.

There was a moment of sadness that brought a lump to Tad's throat as they parted.

There were two wagons. The rescued men were loaded three in one wagon and four in the other.

David and Tad were able to ride in the same wagon. The doctor gave Tad a water bottle and told him to offer the men in the wagon a drink as often as possible.

Tad did not know either of the two drivers. He had hoped that Sergeant Grumley might be one of the drivers, but he was probably out on another supply trip.

There was little opportunity to talk to David. Several times during the ride back to headquarters, David opened his eyes and stared straight ahead and then closed them again and slept.

Once, he turned slightly and saw Tad sitting by him.

"I knew you would come" David said in a voice so low that Tad could barely hear him.

The sun was up, but the air was cool. Tad was not sure whether it was still August or if September had come. September would mark the sixth month since he left the Stelle's home and joined the army. The thought of the Stelles was painful. His visit with them had been so short, really only a couple of hours, not counting the time he and Jed had slept in the loft. The man and woman he considered his parents had looked older, and more frail. Life in Boston must be very hard now. How much longer could they hold out? How much longer would it be before the British were forced out of Boston? These were questions for which he had no answer. He was happy to learn that Packie was helping the Stelles with food, but had something happened to the British drummer? The Stelles said they had not seen him for several weeks.

At least, Tad told himself, David was safe now. The thoughts going through his mind slowly faded away as his eyes closed.

Ben was waiting when they arrived back at headquarters. "You get off here," he told Tad.

Tad climbed gingerly down and lifted his drum and kit out of the wagon. He looked in the wagon at David, but saw that his friend was asleep. He paused and then turned away.

"You are a little stiff from your rowing last night?" Ben asked.

"Yes," answered Tad. "Lifting drumsticks is not very good training for rowing."

"A few days rest here at headquarters will do you good," Ben said. "Let's take your drum and blanket roll to my tent. You'll be back with me again."

"Am I going to be sent out to another regiment?" Tad asked.

"Not for a while, I think," Ben replied. "For the present, you are to train drummers from the other regiments and when you are not busy with that, you are to work copying General Washington's orders."

"Copying orders?" Tad said.

"Yes," Ben explained, "General Washington writes his orders, but copies have to be made for all the regiments. General Washington took notice of the report on your mission in Boston. He thought your penmanship was very good."

When they reached the tent, Tad was surprised to see his shoes, the pair bought from Mr. Riddle, on his side of the tent.

"I'm getting my shoes back?" Tad asked.

Ben laughed. "Yes, but I am afraid there is no hope for your uniform. You will get a new uniform if we ever get another shipment."

It was five days before Tad had a chance to visit David who had been put with the Riddle family for nursing care.

Tad entered the leather goods store and was greeted by Mr. Riddle.

"We've been expecting you," Mr. Riddle said as he came from the back room. "Your friend has been asking about you."

"They've kept me busy," said Tad. "I finally got a free afternoon. How is David?"

"Oh, he's doing fine," said Mr. Riddle. "When they first brought him here, I didn't think he had much of a chance, but my wife and daughter have poured gallons of beef broth down his throat. He's sitting up, and I wouldn't be surprised if he wasn't up and walking in a couple more days."

"Can I see him?" Tad asked.

"Of course. By the way, what happened to your fancy uniform? I see you've still got my shoes."

"I had to go back to my other clothes for some business," Tad said as he followed Mr. Riddle to the house and upstairs to a bedroom.

"Yes, I heard about the business," Mr. Riddle said.

They entered the bedroom. David was indeed sitting up in bed and Emily was in a chair nearby.

"Tad! How are you?" David asked. His voice was strong, and the color had returned to his cheeks. The sores were still there, but they were healing.

"I'm fine," Tad said. "You are looking good." Tad took a chair on the other side of the bed and sat down. Mr. Riddle turned and left the room.

"You can't stay very long," said Emily as she tried in vain to push a long curl of hair back under her cloth cap.

"Just a few minutes," promised Tad.

The two boys talked and the minutes passed.

"What happened out on Breed's Hill?" Tad asked.

As David replied, Mr. Riddle stood in the doorway and listened.

"It was a terrible thing," David said. "We waited until the British got really close and then we fired. We reloaded and fired again and again. Then they broke and retreated back down the hill. We thought we had won, but then they formed up and attacked again. We stopped them and they retreated. We could hardly believe it when they came a third time, stepping over the bodies of their own men. I couldn't believe they could be that brave."

David stopped and took a drink of water. Emily arose from her chair and cautioned David. "You must not get too excited."

David looked at her and smiled. "I'm all right," he said and then turned back to Tad.

"We ran out of gun powder and the British came over the redoubt with bayonets and musket butts. We never had a chance then. I must have gotten hit by a musket butt, and I was knocked out. When I woke up, I was in a pile of dead men. My head was bloody, and the British must have thought I was dead. Then I was taken back to Boston along with some other men. There must have been twenty or so of us who were put on the ship there in Boston. At first, it wasn't so bad. They fed us some, not a lot, but enough. The guards had their fun with us. They kept telling us that we were to be hanged the next day for sure. The next day came and we were not hanged. That went on for a while until the guards got tired of it, I guess"

Tad glanced over at Mr. Riddle standing in the door. He saw the man's eyes had narrowed, and his fists were clenched.

"It seemed like," David continued, "Every day, there was less and less food. Men got sick and some died."

"Enough!" cried Emily as she gently pushed David back down on his pillow.

"I'm all right," David said. "The doctor says it will be a while before I can join a regiment again, but I will be able to do some leather work here to repay these kind people."

"You do not have to repay us anything," Mr. Riddle said. "We will always owe you and your friend, the drummer boy, more than we can ever pay." Mr. Riddle paused and rubbed a hand across his eyes. "Maybe someone in that Congress down in Philadelphia will take a pen to paper and write some kind of statement about all this. Tell us just what we are to become. Maybe make some kind of declaration."

"Yes," said Tad. "We know what we are fighting against, but what are we fighting for?"

Chapter 29 A New Year Begins

It was New Year's Day, the first day of 1776, a cold day with low clouds and flurries of snow, but Tad did not mind the snow or the cold as he hurried on his way to the Riddles for a party to celebrate the new year.

Come March of this New Year, Tad would turn thirteen, and he would have served nearly a full year in the revolutionary army.

Tad was certain that he had grown at least an inch since he left Boston. His friend, Ben, had remarked on Tad's seeming to be taller. As he thought about it, he squared his shoulders and brought himself up to his full height even though he was tempted to huddle against the cold.

As he walked, he stuck his tongue out trying to catch a snow flake or two, but his efforts proved unsuccessful. He smiled and hoped no one saw him play at being a child.

The road from the headquarters that ran past the Riddle house was deserted. There were numerous parties, and Tad felt sorry for the soldiers who had to stay on watchful duty. It was a day for songs and laughter and fun. Christmas day, a week earlier, had been a day of prayer and religious observances.

Tad turned off the road and headed up the path to the Riddles' house. He could see smoke coming out of several chimneys. That meant there would be a good fire in every fireplace in the house. The windows in the front of the house were fogged over, the heat inside meeting through the glass, the cold outside.

The path was well marked, the snow having been trampled down by people coming to the party.

As Tad climbed the stairs to the porch, he could hear the voices of happy people inside, and he hurried to the door.

Just as he started to knock, the door opened and there was Mr. Riddle, his broad face framed in a great smile.

"Here's another of our army standing outside in the cold and hungry, I'd warrant. Come in, lad, come in!"

Tad hurried inside. It was indeed warm. There was a delicious smell of cooked meat, and he could see a large table that was covered with cakes and biscuits and platters of meat.

He pulled off his tricorne hat and the muffler he wore over his head under the hat. He thought about keeping his coat on, but the heat in the house was too much for the coat. He slipped out of the coat and looked around for a place to put his hat, muffler, and coat.

Mr. Riddle laughed. "It is warm enough in here. I think my wife is determined to burn up a winter's supply of fire wood for this one day. Give your things to Molly here. She is Emily's cousin up from New York to help take care of some of the sick soldiers in this army. Sometimes, I think my house has become a magnet that draws soldiers."

Tad turned to hand his coat, hat, and muffler, and found himself face to face with a young girl, maybe his age, and he was suddenly struck by the thought that this was the most interesting girl he had ever seen. Her eyes were the brightest blue he had ever seen. As he handed her his things, she smiled and took them, and Tad felt his face burning with a blush that had nothing to do with the fire in the fireplace.

Mr. Riddle laughed. "Well, at least there is one soldier in this army who can still blush. Now, Molly, put his things away and fetch the lad a cup of hot cider and something to eat."

Molly nodded and said to Tad, "Come with me."

Tad followed her. He could see a blonde curl that escaped the white cloth cap she wore on her head. He remembered how Emily had a curl that somehow escaped her cloth cover. He wondered if at how

the curls could be so unruly. They walked into a hall where there was a row of hooks. All but one was in use, and Molly hung up the apparel and then turned to him.

“Now, we shall find you something to eat. You look hungry.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Tad said.

She looked down at his legs and shook her head.

“You do look a fright. You have a large hole in your stocking.”

Tad was horrified. He was sure that this was the most terrible moment in his life. He looked down and sure enough, there was indeed a large hole. He had mended the hole with a needle and thread, but on the way over to the party, his mending effort must have failed.

“We must find a place where we can sit down. I’ll fetch my sewing kit and take care of that hole for you.”

Tad tried to speak, but words did not come out. He knew he was blushing.

“Well,” Molly said, her face showing determination, and her hands on her hips, “Take off that stocking so I can mend it.”

Tad was sure that this was absolutely the worst moment of his life. Facing the British on Breed’s Hill was nothing compared to this moment. The mission to rescue David from the prison hulk in Boston harbor was nothing compared to this situation.

It was David who rescued Tad this time. David peeked around a corner and saw Tad.

“There you are,” David said. “Mr. Riddle said you were here. I see you have met Molly. Be careful. She has a strong mind of her own.”

“David! I’m really glad to see you,” Tad said, his voice almost squeaking as he spoke.

“Come on into the big room. We’ll find a place by the fire,” David said. “And, you must eat. The roast is really good.”

“And, while he eats, I can mend his stocking,” Molly insisted.

“Stocking?” David asked as he looked down at Tad’s stockings. “Oh, I see what you mean. Well, Tad. Come on. You can feast while being mended.”

David took Tad by the shoulder and guided him into the big room. They found a place by the fire and Molly quickly found a plate and piled it high with meat and biscuits and brought it to Tad.

David and Tad shared a bench by the fire. Tad picked up a piece of meat and began eating. It was the best piece of meat he had tasted in a long while.

David laughed as Molly suddenly knelt down in front of Tad, pulled his shoe off and with a deft move, pulled the long stocking free and off his foot. Tad was so surprised he nearly dropped the plate of food.

Molly stood up, and stared at the stocking. She saw that the hole in the long part of the stocking was not the only hole that needed mending.

"It is beyond hope," Molly said with a shake of her head. She turned around, stocking in hand, and hastily left the room.

"I think I am going to find someplace to hide," Tad said.

David laughed again. "I know. That was probably your best stocking, I'd guess."

Tad's embarrassment was soon overcome. Being able to talk to David, the warmth of the fireplace, and the food was a fine combination that eased his mind.

"How are you feeling," Tad asked.

"Oh, I am ever so much better," David replied. "I keep asking the doctor when I can return to duty, but he keeps saying maybe soon. I feel bad about not being with a regiment. I am warm and comfortable here, and I know it is hard on you and the rest of the army, being out in the cold and not getting enough to eat."

Tad nodded. "It's not so bad, now. I have a good place to sleep. We don't have a fire, but I have two blankets to curl up in at night." Tad paused and looked down at his bare foot. "Stockings are a problem, though."

Both boys laughed. Tad saw that David was in good spirit and must be feeling better like he claimed.

Tad had been present after the rescue when the doctor listened to David's lungs. The doctor used a small metal funnel that he held against David's back. The doctor leaned forward so his ear touched the small end of the funnel. The doctor looked worried about what he was hearing.

"It's been a couple of weeks since I've seen you," David said. "What have they got you doing now?"

Tad swallowed the last morsel of meat on his plate before answering.

"Mostly, I'm a messenger boy. Orders go out to the regiments every morning, and I take the orders to nearby regiments. I've been doing some teaching, too. They bring in drummer boys from the regiments and we practice drum calls. Not all the regiments have the same drum bats for the same calls. It can be a little confusing sometimes."

"We didn't have a drummer in the redoubt on Breed's Hill," said David. "Of course, you were down on the side of the hill with Colonel Stark's New Hampshire boys."

Tad reached down and rubbed his bare leg. "I wonder what she did with my stocking?"

David laughed. "I have no doubt that the stocking has joined a rag bin army."

"Oh, I hope she did not throw it away. This is the only pair of stockings I have."

"There's some news I haven't told anyone yet," David said.

"What news?"

David sat upright and proudly announced, "I think I am seventeen, or at least nearly so. My birthday is next month, February something or other. I do not know the exact date, but I'm sure it was in February. That surely makes me grown up, I'd think."

“You are probably right,” Tad replied. “I had just turned twelve when we had to get out of Boston. So, I must be almost thirteen.”

David smiled. “Mr. Riddle claims that our army is nothing but old men and young boys. He may be right, but it’s a good army, nevertheless.”

“When I first met Mr. Riddle,” Tad said, “I wasn’t so sure that he was a patriot. He sounded like a Tory sometimes.”

“No, no, nothing could be further from the truth,” David said thoughtfully. “Mr. Riddle has spent much of his own money taking care of soldiers like myself. Oh, he does grouse a bit about the Continental Congress off in Philadelphia. He claims all they do is talk. He keeps saying that somebody needs to explain why we are doing what we are doing.”

Tad had heard such sentiments from others as well. There was always the question of what the colonies were trying to do. What was the purpose for this fighting?

“I owe Mr. Riddle and his wife and Emily so much,” David said. “They have nursed me back to reasonable health, I think. I try to repay them by doing some work in the tannery and working with leather.”

“You were a leather apprentice back when we were in Boston,” Tad said.

“Yes, and I hated every minute of it,” David replied with a shake of his head. “Now, it is different. I am treated with respect, and I enjoy my work.”

Tad peeked at David out of the corner of his eye and smiled as he said, “And, I think you have become very good friends with Emily, too.”

Now it was David’s turn to blush for a moment. “I think I am very fond of Emily,” he said.

There was an awkward silence as both boys were unsure what to say next.

David broke the silence by asking about Packie. “Have you heard anything about your British drummer friend?”

“No,” Tad shook his head. “There was once, out on the neck of land leading into Boston, that I thought I heard him beating his drum. That was just before we rescued you from the prison hulk. I saw my parents, and they said they had not seen Packie for several weeks.”

“He was a good friend, at least for a Redcoat, I’ll give him that much,” David said.

“If it hadn’t been for Packie, we might not have escaped from Boston,” Tad said.

“I told Molly about our escape, and how you wouldn’t talk even when the British beat you,” David said.

“Why did you tell her that,” Tad asked.

David smiled. “She was very interested. I also told her how you fought a British officer in a sword fight on a boat.”

“Oh, no,” Tad said quickly. “He was not an officer. He was a boy just like me.”

“Your friend, Ben, the lieutenant, he told me about the fight,” David said. “He said the Redcoat was a midshipman in the British navy, and that is like an officer.”

“You shouldn’t be telling stories about me,” Tad protested. “She will think I’m something that I’m not.”

David stood for a second and laughed. “Well, whatever she might think, here she comes, and she surely looks very determined.”

Molly marched into the room. In her hand she held a pair of long, white stockings. They were of the best quality, knitted from a warm thick wool yarn.

She stopped in front of Tad and said, “Take off your other shoe and stocking and put these stockings on.”

Tad blushed. He hesitated, but the young girl’s blue eyes were flashing, and he slowly bent over and unbuckled his shoe and slipped it off. Since she had already taken one of his stockings, it was an easy task to slip off the other, but it was impossible to hide the hole in the toe of this stocking, a hole that matched the one in the other stocking.

As Tad slipped on his new stockings, he heard Mr. Riddle who was watching with great interest, say, “I do believe my best pair of stockings has just joined the army!”

Tad was sure that everyone in the room was watching and laughing at Mr. Riddle’s joke. Tad buckled his shoes and straightened up.

“Thank you, Ma’am,” he said.

“Oh, don’t be so silly. I am not a ma’am. I am Molly. Now, say it just once for me.”

“Say what?” Tad asked. He was truly confused now, and his face took on a deeper reddish hue.

“Say thank you, Molly,” she insisted.

“Thank you, Molly,” Tad said quickly, and everyone in the room laughed.

David was the first to laugh, and as he did so, his face turned pale, and he began coughing. It was a deep, rasping cough.

Both Emily and her mother rushed to David’s side. Emily pulled a small bottle from a pocket in her apron and took the cork out of the bottle.

Mrs. Riddle held David cradled in her arms as Emily tried to put the bottle to his lips. Between coughs, she was able to pour some of the medicine in his mouth. David spluttered, and coughed again and again, but the medicine took effect and he stopped coughing.

“There has been too much excitement,” Mrs. Riddle said. “It is high time you had some rest.”

David smiled weakly. His face was still pale, and he seemed to have a hard time getting his breath.

Mrs. Riddle and Emily helped David to his feet and led him toward the door to the hall.

David turned his head.

“Tad, come back when you can.”

Tad was shaken by David’s sudden coughing spell. He thought David was making such good progress. The last time he had seen his friend, David had assured him that he would soon be back on duty with the army. Now, Tad doubted that David would ever be well enough to pick up a musket and stand in line against the British.

Mr. Riddle saw Tad’s look of concern, and moved closer to him.

“It’s a good thing you people rescued him when you did,” Mr. Riddle said softly. “If he had stayed a prisoner in that old ship much longer, well, it would have been a bad thing, I’d warrant.”

“I thought he was doing so much better,” Tad replied.

“Oh, he has his good days,” Mr. Riddle said. “He earns his keep here. He’s a fine hand when it comes to working with leather. He’s made a goodly number of belts which we are now selling in New York.”

“New York? That’s where Molly is from,” Tad said.

“And, it is her father who sells our belts. He has a store in the city. Someday, we will go there to visit. They say it is a city nearly as big as London, though I doubt the truth of that.”

“Bigger than Boston?” Tad asked.

“So they say,” Mr. Riddle said with a smile.

Tad did not stay much longer. He was not eager to leave. The room was so warm, and there were still pieces of cake on the table. His new stockings were tucked up under his breeches. He could tell that the stockings were a little large for him, but they were the finest stockings he had ever worn.

Molly kept a close watch on him, and when his plate was empty, she hurried to bring another piece of cake.

Now, as Tad found his coat, muffler, and hat, Molly quickly joined him as he walked toward the door.

“Must you go now?” She asked.

Tad looked down at his shoes for a moment and then raised his eyes and looked into her large blue eyes. He could feel his face warming and knew he was blushing again.

“We were only supposed to be gone a couple of hours,” he mumbled. “There will be messages for me to deliver when I get back.”

Molly handed him a package wrapped in a cloth.

“Take this food with you,” she said, and Tad knew from the look on her face that any argument would be useless.

“Thank you, Molly,” Tad said.

“That’s the second time you’ve said that today,” Molly replied with a smile.

She reached up and pulled his muffler tighter around his cheeks.

“Be careful, Tad. Please come back soon.” She paused for a second and then said, “I like you!” She turned and hurried away.

Tad hesitated, and then reached for the door handle, but Mr. Riddle was there ahead of him. As he opened the door, Mr. Riddle said, “You are always welcome here, Tad.”

There was a stiff breeze blowing outside, and there were snowflakes falling from the gray sky. Evening was coming on soon, and it would be even colder, but Tad did not really mind the cold as he trudged back to the army’s headquarters. He had warm stockings and his stomach was filled with good food. If only David was doing better, this would be one of the best days he had known since becoming a part of the army, and

Molly had the bluest eyes he had ever seen.

CHAPTER 30 Cannons, Large and Small, Arrive

One morning before dawn, Ben came through the hallway shouting for everyone to turn out, there was to be much work done.

“The cannon will be here today,” Ben shouted.

Sure enough, the first of 47 large sleds pulled by oxen came into the headquarters area. Leading the way was Colonel Henry Knox who was in charge of the great journey.

Tad could see the shape of some of the cannon which were covered with sailcloth.

There were fifty-nine cannons, large and small, on the sleds. Some of the cannon were larger than anything Tad had seen, even those used by the British in Boston that he had seen before the start of the fighting.

At the same time the cannon arrived, there were wagon loads of cannon balls and gun powder that had been manufactured in the towns in Massachusetts and neighboring colonies. Supplies were coming through at last.

For the first time, the colonials would have a goodly supply of gun powder and artillery capable of matching the British.

The cannon came from Fort Ticonderoga, a British fort in New York that had been captured earlier in the fighting. The fort was a long way off from Boston, some 300 miles. There were few roads and the cannon were not mounted on carriages. Most people thought it was Colonel Knox’s idea to take advantage of the snow in order to bring the cannon to the siege of Boston. The cannon could be loaded on sleds pulled by oxen and men. The plan was workable only if the men had the determination to overcome the cold and many obstacles. The revolutionary army may have been short of many things, but the ability to preserve, to endure, and to succeed was not among the things lacking in this army.

Then on the night of March 2, 1776, Ben and Tad joined a regiment facing the British line on the narrow neck of land that was the only overland approach to the city of Boston.

Tad had been here before and knew the area very well.

There was one big difference now, however. Drawn up in a line were twelve cannons, mostly six pounders. They were called six pounders because they could fire a six-pound iron ball a long way. Several shots from such a cannon could knock a building to pieces. These guns were protected by piles of dirt on each side and the piles of dirt were reinforced by heavy timbers and logs.

“We need better protection for the gunners,” Ben said, “But, this will have to do.”

Drawn up behind the gun line was a Massachusetts’ regiment.

“Are we going to make a night attack,” Tad asked.

“No, but we want the British to think we are,” Ben said. “When the cannon begins firing, beat the assembly call. Keep it up during the cannonade. Then when the cannon stop, beat the call to advance.”

“Then the soldiers will come forward,” Tad said.

“Not this time,” Ben replied. “They will hold in place. The British will think they are advancing and call for reinforcements. General Washington wants them to spread out their soldiers.

Tad took his place in front of the regimental line. With him was the commander of the regiment and the regimental flag carrier.

“I’m glad to have a drummer,” said the commander. “Our drummer boy is down with the mumps, of all things.”

A group of officers rode up on horseback. Tad recognized Colonel Knox.

Colonel Knox asked the regimental commander if his soldiers were ready.

“We are ready, sir,” the commander replied. “But, I fear we are too close behind the artillery. When we open fire, the British will answer, sure as anything, and my men will receive some of the British balls that pass over our artillery.”

Colonel Knox replied in a stern voice. “That is true, but your regiment must hold fast and close to the artillery. The British might send their light infantry out in an attempt to capture our guns. That must not happen. We did not bring these guns some three hundred miles just to turn them over to a raid by the British. The guns must be defended at all costs.’

The regimental commander was taken aback by the stern rejoinder by the artillery colonel.

“Sir, my men will stand fast. You can depend upon it,” the regimental commander said in a loud voice so that many of the regiment’s officers and soldiers could hear.

“So they shall,” Colonel Knox said as he wheeled his horse about. He urged his horse forward, and the other mounted officers followed him.

The regimental colonel put his hand on Tad's shoulder and said, "Drummer boy, beat the call for officers to come forward, but do not play it so loud that the British come to see about it."

Tad shifted his drum into position and began beating the call for officers to come forward.

It did not take long for the regiment's officers to gather. They clustered around the commander, Tad, and the regimental flag bearer.

"Now, men, we are going to be in for it. When the artillery opens fire, the British will reply with their artillery, and some of their cannon balls are sure to overshoot our artillery and hit us. We have to stay close behind our gunners to keep the British from making an attack on our guns. We have to hold firm. Keep your men under control. If the British try to attack our guns with their light infantry, we will move forward and engage them. Now, back to your posts and hold firm."

The officers quickly returned to their posts with their companies, and no sooner did they do so when the first cannon roared out a loud blast.

Tad was caught by surprise and he ducked his head.

"Steady, lad. This is just the start," the commander said calmly.

One by one, the cannon fired, and by the time the last fired, the first was almost loaded and ready to fire again.

When each cannon had fired twice, the British were answering with their own cannon. At first, the British guns fired only two or three shots, and Tad was not certain of that because of the noise made by the American cannons. Then a ball whistled overhead and Tad was sure they were under fire by the British.

"Look, sir," Tad cried out, "Our guns have set fires on the British fortifications!"

"I think not," the commander replied in a loud voice so he could be heard over the roar of the cannons. "The British have set fires alight so they can see if our infantry is coming in an attack. They will keep their fires going until the battle is over. The fires would give them enough light to see us when we closed to musket range."

Tad remembered. The Marblehead regiment had used the same idea.

There was smoke that mixed in with the night, but the light from the flashes from the cannon muzzles did provide some brief moments of illumination. Tad could see that when the cannon were fired, they recoiled as much as ten or twelve feet. After each shot, the gun crew had to push the cannon forward again so it would be in firing position.

Once the cannon was pushed forward, members of the crew quickly went about their tasks of loading for the next shot.

Suddenly, the British responded with a strong volley fired from many cannon. Tad could not count the shots, but the cannon balls came smashing in on the artillery positions. Some of the shots flew over the artillery positions and landed in the ranks of the regiment. There were cries of pain as men were knocked down by the balls.

The firing of the American guns became ragged as wounded men were brought back close to where Tad and the commander and the flag bearer stood out in front of the regiment.

An officer came running up to where they stood. It was Ben.

“Colonel,” Ben said. “Can you order forward twenty men to help with the guns?”

“Will twenty be enough?” the commander asked.

“Yes, I think so,” Ben replied.

The commander turned to Tad and said, “Quick, now, lad. Slip out of your drum and carry a message back to Captain Boskins. Tell him to send twenty men from his first company and on the run. They are to help with the cannon.”

Tad slipped the drum strap over his head as he answered, “Yes, sir.”

He ran toward the line of soldiers behind and called out, “Captain Boskins, Captain Boskins! First Company!

A voice in the dark answered, “Here, lad. Over here.”

Tad ran toward the sound of the voice. Captain Boskins was closer than he thought, and he nearly ran into the captain.

“Ho up, there, young man,” the captain, an older man, said with a chuckle. “I’m in enough danger from the British balls flying by without being knocked over by a messenger.”

Tad steadied himself and delivered the message just as he had been taught to do.

“The colonel’s respects, Sir. The colonel wishes you to send forward twenty men to help the artillery crews.”

“Does he, now? Well, you wait here and you can guide them back to where they are needed.”

The captain turned and in a loud voice called for a lieutenant to bring forward his men.

The men were quick to respond. When the lieutenant came forward with the men, the captain explained what their new duty was to be, and Tad quickly led them back to the artillery line.

Ben stationed two or three men to each cannon, and he and Tad joined yet another cannon crew.

The sergeant in charge of the cannon was glad to have their help.

“I’ve lost two men wounded already,” the sergeant said as he wiped dark powder left by the smoke from his face. “When we fire, lend a shoulder to push the cannon back into position. That will be the best you can do for us. We can do the loading and firing.”

As the sergeant was speaking, the crew finished loading and the cannon was ready to fire.

The sergeant touched a slow burning match to the vent hole on the back top of the cannon and the six-pounder roared as an iron ball was sent hurtling at great speed toward the British fortifications some four hundred paces away.

Tad jumped out of the way as the cannon recoiled backward nearly ten feet. The smoke from the cannon's muzzle that came out with the explosion made it hard to breath and nearly impossible to see very far.

He and Ben and the rest of the crew jumped to the wheels and began pushing the heavy cannon back into firing position. The crew had well marked the firing position. Once on line, the cannon would be aimed in the general direction of the British positions.

It was hard work, but the cannon was quickly back in position, and the crew set about the work of reloading the cannon. A sponge was on the end of a long pole the gunners called a ramrod. The sponge was dipped in a bucket of water and then rammed down the barrel of the cannon to clean out any leftover powder that might not have exploded. A sack of gunpowder was then rammed to the back of the cannon barrel. Then one of the gunners lifted a six-pound ball to the muzzle and another ramrod was used to push the ball down the barrel until it rested against the sack of powder.

Another gunner stuck a needle type of knife down the vent hole and pierced the bag of powder. Then he put a fuse into the vent hole that went down into the powder.

The sergeant checked the aim and then yelled, "Fire!"

One of the crew touched the slow match to the fuse and the cannon again roared and bucked back. Tad and the others rushed to put their shoulders to the large wheels and push the cannon forward again.

Two more times the cannon fired. Following the second blast and as the cannon recoiled, a British iron ball came smashing in and caught the left wheel of the cannon's carriage. The blow shattered the wheel and bits of wood from the spokes whizzed about and one of the small pieces of wood struck Tad a glancing blow on the left side of his forehead.

Tad felt the blow. He thought he had been hit by a club, and for a second or two he blacked out, and when he came to his senses, he found himself sitting on the ground. He could feel something warm running down the side of his face. He put a hand up to his face and when he looked at his hand, he could see that he was bleeding.

Ben was kneeling down at his side in an instant, and he was joined there by the sergeant.

"How bad is it?" the sergeant asked.

"I'm all right," Tad said.

"Don't talk," Ben said. "Save your strength."

As he spoke, Ben peered closely at the bloody spot on Tad's head. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and gently dabbed at the spot.

"Can't tell for sure," Ben said. "It looks like it was just a glancing blow. Head wounds always look bad because they bleed a great deal."

"Better take him back to where the regiment behind us has a doctor," the sergeant said. "You go ahead and take him back. I can give you two men to help carry him. My gun's done for the night until we can put a new wheel on the carriage."

"I can walk," Tad protested. He tried to rise to his feet, but Ben pushed him back down.

"Maybe you can, but we'll try that later."

The sergeant called for two of his men to come to the aid of the fallen drummer boy.

They picked Tad up, but he squirmed free and stood. Tad felt a little shaky and unsteady at first, but he quickly regained his balance.

"Well, if that don't beat all," one of the two gunners said. "You're a plucky lad, I'll say."

"I'm all right," Tad said as he wiped his eye clear of blood with his sleeve.

"Very well," Ben said with a shake of his head. "Then we will just help you a little. How's that for a good idea."

Tad nodded and he took several steps and then stumbled, and the men were at his side and held him up as he walked.

"My drum! Where is my drum?" Tad cried.

They were joined by another man. It was the regimental colonel.

"What happened?" the colonel asked.

"One of our cannon got its wheel knocked off," Ben said. "Our drummer boy got hit by a piece of the wheel. I don't think it's too bad, but we want your doctor to have a look at him. He needs a bandage."

"My drum," Tad said. "Where is my drum?"

"It's safe and sound," the colonel said as he peered closely at Tad's wound. "I'll have a man bring it back to the surgeon's tent. It's not far."

Ben turned to the two men who had helped bring Tad to the regimental line.

"I've got to return to my station with the cannon. You two see to it that Tad gets back to the doctor's station farther back and then return to the cannon line."

"Yes, sir," one of the men replied. "We'll take good care of him. He'd surely make a good gunner. Maybe we can talk him into transferring into the artillery."

"I hope not," Ben replied. "We need him at headquarters." Ben then turned to Tad. "Are you going to be all right?"

"I think so," Tad replied. "My head hurts a little, but I'm feeling stronger now. I'm sure that by morning, I'll be fine."

"Take good care of him," Ben told the gunners as he turned and hurried away toward the sound of the cannons.

The regimental colonel looked at the cannon men, "It's best if you move now. Some of the British shots are coming in over our artillery and hitting us."

At that, the cannoneers nodded and with one on each side of Tad to support him, they made their way back to where they were safer from the British artillery.

It was easy to find the doctor's station. There were lanterns burning and a good-sized tent. There were men laying on the ground near the tent. Tad could see the doctor's assistants lifting a man up off the ground and carrying him into the tent.

Not far from the tent was a large bonfire and there was a kettle suspended over the fire by a large iron rod. A man came from the tent with a bucket. He used a dipper to fill the bucket with hot water from the kettle. Then he returned to the tent.

One of the assistants saw Tad and his two friends approaching.

"A head wound, I see," said the assistant. "Sit him down on the bench by the tent, and I'll have a look at him."

The two men moved Tad to the bench where he sat down. Tad had not realized that he was very tired. It had been a long day, and the excitement and the action of the night had worn him down.

"You'll be all right here," said one of the cannoneers. "We have to get back, now. You rest easy, and if you ever want to serve with us, we'd be more than happy to have you on our crew."

"I'll be fine," Tad said. "Thank you for helping me. Be careful."

"That we will, lad. You do likewise."

The two men faded away into the dark on their way back to the cannon line.

The assistant returned to Tad's side. He had a small bucket and clothe in his hand. He gently washed away the blood. The water was warm, but when the rag touched the wound, Tad flinched. The water caused a stinging sensation.

"Steady, there," the assistant said softly. "This won't take but a minute. I don't think you're hurt bad, but you can never be sure about head wounds."

The doctor came out of the tent. His sleeves were rolled up even though it was cold, and his apron looked wet, and Tad guessed that it was blood from wounded men.

"What do we have here?" the doctor asked. He was a tall man with gray hair, and he wore spectacles.

The assistant held up the lantern so the doctor could see.

"Ah, yes. Looks like something struck a hard blow here."

The doctor peered closer and then drew back, exclaiming, "Why, you are but a boy! What in the world were you doing in the firing line?"

"No," Tad said with a grimace as the assistant dabbed at the wound again. "I was in the artillery line, but I'm a drummer boy most of the time."

"Well, drummer boy. You got a nasty whack on the head, the doctor said, and then to his assistant, "Hold that lantern up close. I can't see any splinters or any metal. You are a lucky boy, that's for certain."

The doctor looked closely at Tad. "Open your eyes wide, boy." The doctor then moved his finger back and forth in front of Tad's face. "Follow my finger, yes, that's the way."

Tad moved his eyes back and forth following the finger. The doctor took one more long look at Tad's eyes.

The doctor backed away and said to the assistant. "Put a bandage on and get him on the wagon back to the hospital. Then he looked at Tad again. "You will be fine, young man. And a man you must be if you're in the artillery line. A day's rest and you'll be up and at them."

The doctor returned to the tent, and other assistants carried in a wounded man.

"I need my drum," Tad said as the assistant bandaged his head.

"Drum? What drum?" asked the assistant.

"The drum I use to beat calls for the army," Tad said. "Someone was supposed to bring it here from the regiment."

"Oh, yes, of course. You must mean that blue French drum. Is that your drum?"

"Yes, where is it please?"

"Why it's over on the other side of the tent safe and sound," said the assistant as he finished the bandage. "Now, we'll get you over to the wagon, and you and the French drum will be on your way back to the hospital."

The drum was where the assistant said it was, and Tad gratefully picked it up. The sticks were still in the holder on the strap. He started to slip the strap over his head, and the effort caused a quick twinge of pain in his head. He held the drum in his hands as the assistant led him some distance back where there was a wagon and a team of horses.

"This one should about make your load for you," the assistant said to the wagon driver.

The wagon driver held up a lantern to get a look at the last wounded soldier to be loaded into his wagon.

"Tad? Ye've been hurt? What happened?"

"I'm all right, Sergeant Grumley,"

Tad said as the medical assistant helped him up into the wagon and found him a place to sit with his back braced up on the side wall behind the driver's seat.

"You know each other?" the assistant asked as he checked the other wounded men in the wagon.

"We're old friends," Sergeant Grumley replied. "We been wet, cold, and hungry together for quite a while now. What happened to ye, lad?"

"A British cannon shot hit the wheel of one of our cannon, and I got hit by a piece of wood from the wheel," Tad said. "It wasn't much, but everyone makes a fuss about it."

"I'd reckon they do," Sergeant Grumley said. "And it's a good thing they do, I'd warrant."

“Don’t be talking so much,” the assistant told Tad. “Try to rest on the way back to the hospital.”

Sergeant Grumley climbed up on his seat and tapped the horses lightly with the reins. The wagon lurched forward, and one of the wounded men groaned.

Tad was grateful for the pile of straw that covered the floor of the wagon. The straw provided needed warmth and some cushion from the bumps in the road.

Sergeant Grumley kept his silence and Tad dozed off. His head ached a little, and if he moved his head too quick, there was a sharp pain around the wound.

Tad felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Sergeant Grumley’s hand. The old wagon master leaned back and said, “This is about as far as you go. Can you climb over the side? Be careful not to bump any of your wagon mates.”

Tad carefully rose to his knees and looked over the side of the wagon.

“Where are we?” Tad asked. “This doesn’t look like the hospital.”

Sergeant Grumley chuckled. “Take a good look; ye’ll recognize it quick enough.”

“Why, it’s Mr. Riddle’s house. Why are we stopping here?” Tad asked.

“Here, let me help ye down,” Sergeant Grumley said as he climbed down from the driver’s seat. Tad climbed over the side of the wagon, put a foot on the wheel hub and Sergeant Grumley steadied him with his hands.

As they walked toward the porch, Sergeant Grumley began shouting. “Ho, inside the house, awake. Come to your door.”

It only took a few moments for the door to spring open and reveal a man standing there holding a lantern up high. The man was dressed in a nightcap and had a blanket wrapped around his night shirt as a guard against the cold.

“Who’s summoning us out on a cold night?” The man in the doorway asked.

“I be Sergeant Grumley, and I’ve got a wounded soldier here that needs a warm place to rest his battered head.”

“Oh, no, not another one. I’ve got sick and hurt soldiers in about every nook and cranny I own.”

Another head peered around from behind Mr. Riddle. It was Mrs. Riddle, who, like her husband, was well blanketed from the cold.

“I figured ye’ll be wanting this soldier boy,” Sergeant Grumley said as he helped Tad up the stairs to the porch.

Mr. Riddle raised his lantern higher so it would cast more light.

Mrs. Riddle, peering out from behind him, shrieked, “Oh, no, it’s Tad! Oh, what have they done to the boy?”

Chapter 31 Recovery is Quicker When Friends Help

There was a brief silence that was broken by Mr. Riddle's reaction to his wife's outcry.

Mr. Riddle laughed as he said, "Well, that about settles that."

Sergeant Grumley nodded and said, "It does appear that way, now don't it? I've got to get back to the wagon. I've got a load of wounded soldier boys to take to the hospital."

Mrs. Riddle moved quickly. Keeping a firm grip on her blanket, she slipped around Mr. Riddle and was by Tad's side before Sergeant Grumley could step back.

She shouldered the sergeant aside and put a hand on Tad's shoulder and peered closely at his bandaged head.

"Quick, now, Mr. Riddle, help me get the boy inside out of the cold. Then you lay a fire in the fire place and mind you, do not be stingy with the wood. We will want a good fire to take the chill out of this poor boy's bones."

She guided Tad forward and as they entered the door, she called out in a loud voice, "Emily, Molly, wake up and present yourselves. Come dressed and ready for work. No dawdling now. Tad's been hurt something awful!"

As Mr. Riddle hurried to get a roaring fire going in the fireplace, he winked at Tad, and said, "If you aren't hurt something awful, you better pretend to be."

Mrs. Riddle guided Tad to the fireplace where sparks from the flint and steel rubbed together in Mr. Riddle's capable hands produced a flame.

She seated Tad in a chair and said, "Mr. Riddle, keep a close eye on the lad until I return, and mind you, make the fire a good and hot one."

Mr. Riddle coaxed the fire into a goodly blaze and put some large sticks on it to help it along. Then he turned to Tad and by the light of the fire and the lantern on a nearby table, he took a closer look at Tad's head.

"Looks like they did a good job with the bandage," he said. "Does it hurt much?"

"No, sir," Tad answered. "Well, maybe a little if I move too sudden."

"How did it happen?"

"A British cannon ball hit a wheel on one of our cannon carriages and a piece of the wheel flew off and hit my head," Tad replied.

"Well, now, that is something, I do declare," Mr. Riddle said.

"What were you doing that close to the cannon?"

"Oh, I was supposed to be back a-ways with the regimental line, but some of the cannoneers got hurt and we had to go forward to help."

“Well, there it is, again. This army seems to have nothing but old men and young boys doing the fighting. I do declare, I do not understand what it’s all about.”

Mrs. Riddle returned to the room just in time to hear her husband’s complaint, which was a familiar one.

“Makes no difference what it’s about. Tad’s been wounded, bad hurt, near as I can see. That’s what matters.”

She turned to shout for the girls to hurry along, but stopped as two sleepy girls, dressed for morning chores, came into the room.

When Molly saw Tad, she cried out and her hand flew to her mouth.

“What happened to you?” Molly asked as she recovered from her first shock.

“The British are shooting at little boys,” Mrs. Riddle said as she gathered together clothes and a basin of water and a yellow bar of soap.

“Now, you girls make tea and cut the cold porridge into strips and cut bacon. Fry the strips and the bacon together, and be generous with the bacon. And, you, Mr. Riddle, don’t just stand there. Tend to the fire, and fetch some clean clothes from David’s room. Oh, and we could use another blanket or two, I’m sure.”

Mr. Riddle laughed as he set about to follow his orders. “That tall general from Virginia couldn’t give orders as fast as you, my dear. Why, I almost believe I should probably salute like they do in the army.”

David entered the room. He finished buttoning his sweater as he yawned. Then he saw Tad.

“Tad, look at you. What happened?”

Dodging a vigorously applied wash cloth capably handled by Mrs. Riddle, Tad explained again how he got hurt.

“We could hear the cannon fire,” David said. “If we’d had that much gun powder out on Breed’s Hill, the British would never have taken it from us.”

Mrs. Riddle stood back and examined her handiwork. She was not pleased.

“This will never do. We need to get this boy out of those clothes; they are covered with black grime. Everything needs to be washed. And when we get him cleaned up, then you girls will have to set to work to clean this room. Such a mess! Where does all this black grime come from?”

“It’s the smoke from the cannon,” Tad said. “Every time the cannon fire, there’s smoke, and it has lots of black powder in it that settles over everything.”

Events moved quickly. The women left the room and David and Mr. Riddle helped Tad out of his clothes and into David’s extra clothes. The stockings had been placed by the fire and were warm. Then the women came back, and the table was set for a meal.

Molly sat beside Tad. She did not eat much, spending most of her time watching Tad quickly devour the meal that was set before him. She poured a mug of tea for him, and he smiled in return as he lifted

the mug to his mouth. The porridge had been sliced and fried with the bacon just as Mrs. Riddle had ordered.

"This is good food," Tad said as he cleaned his plate. "We don't often see any bacon."

"You'd think the least this army could do is feed its soldiers," Mrs. Riddle said.

"If hot air from that Continental Congress in Philadelphia was food, we'd have the fattest army in the world," Mr. Riddle nodded.

"We're a little short on food," Tad said, "But now we've got cannon and enough gun powder. We'll show the British a thing or two."

"What do you think we're going to do with all these cannon?" David asked.

"I don't know," Tad answered. "No doubt about it, though, there's going to be some big things coming and soon."

"Well, I think I'm about ready to return to duty," David said. "I've felt bad about being snug here while you are out in the field."

"You are not leaving here," Emily said firmly. "You are not as strong as you think. You need more rest."

"That's the truth of that," Mr. Riddle said. "I suspect that on the morrow we'll have a visit from one of the army doctors to check up on our drummer boy. When he comes, he can have a look at you, too, David."

After the meal, David took a candle holder and led Tad to his room.

"You can sleep in my bed," David said. "I'll help the girls clean up. It's not far off to dawn now, anyway."

It was cold in the room after being near the roaring fire in the fire place. Tad kept his clothes on and climbed into the narrow bed. It was almost a shock to his body. For weeks, he had slept on the floor of the hallway in the headquarters building. It was mostly unheated, and the floor was hard. Now he nestled down into a soft, feather mattress and pulled the covers up around his head. It had been a long day, and he had filled up with the good food. He never got much farther with his thoughts.

He awoke as if he had been surprised in his sleep. He suddenly sat up, his eyes open, but his mind not yet fully engaged, and doing so, got an instant reminder of his wound. The pain was sharp, but it went away quickly.

There was a window that was covered with a heavy drape, but he could see gray light outside where the drape did not quite come to the edge of the window.

It must be dawn, he guessed, and he must not have slept very long, but he knew he was wide awake.

Tad got out of the warm bed and put on his shoes. He could hear voices coming from the other part of the house. There would probably be a fire in the fireplace, and a warm room, so he hurried to join the family.

“Ho, now, look who’s up and about,” Mr. Riddle said. He was seated at the table. He rose from his chair and put another log on the fire.

Mrs. Riddle was bending over a kettle that was bubbling. It hung down over the fire from a long iron rod that could be moved so the kettle was not over the fire. She straightened and peered at Tad.

“How are you feeling,” she asked. “Are you hungry?”

“Of course he’s hungry,” Mr. Riddle said. “He’s a soldier and they are always half starved.”

“I’m fine,” Tad said. “My head’s a little sore, but it’s not bad. Where is everyone?”

“You mean the girls and David, I’d guess,” said Mr. Riddle with a wink at his wife. “The girls are taking a nap, and David is out in the shop working on some harness.”

“Sit down,” Mrs. Riddle ordered as she pulled out a chair from under the table. “I’ll fix you a snack which can hold you over till supper.”

“What time is it?” Tad asked as he sat down.

“Why, it must be nearly four o’clock,” Mr. Riddle said. “Be turning toward dark before long.”

“Four o’clock?” Tad asked. He was surprised. He must have slept nearly twelve hours.

Mrs. Riddle placed a biscuit and a piece of meat on a plate and a cup of tea before him, and Tad realized quickly that he had not eaten for nearly half a day, and he quickly ate the biscuit and meat.

There was a pounding at the door, and Mr. Riddle got up from his seat. “That sounds like a military man knocking at the door if ever I heard one.” He moved to the door and opened it, and said in a strong voice, “Come in, now, quick. We don’t want to use firewood to heat the outdoors.”

A man dressed in coat and hat and muffler entered.

Tad thought the man looked familiar. He had spectacles that rode low on his nose.

“I’m Doctor Norcross, a surgeon with the army. Just stopped by to check on the young drummer boy. I treated him last night.”

The doctor wasted no time moving to Tad’s side and setting his black bag down on the table. He took Tad’s chin in his hand and tilted Tad’s head so he could get a good look.

“How you feel, son?” the doctor asked.

As the doctor spoke, Mrs. Riddle stared at Mr. Riddle and made a motion with her head, and Mr. Riddle nodded and slipped from the room.

“I feel all right,” Tad answered. “I need to get back to headquarters. There will be action this night, I’m sure.”

“Oh, I don’t doubt that,” the doctor replied. “But, not for you. Another night’s rest and you will be good as new. The war won’t go away overnight. There will be plenty of it left for you.”

“Yes, sir,” Tad said softly. “But, what will my people at the headquarters think? Will they think I’m not doing my duty?”

The doctor laughed. “Now, don’t you lose any sleep over that. Your friend, the lieutenant, he’s checked with me twice today to see how you were doing. He must be a good friend of yours.”

“We’ve been together since the beginning of the fighting,” Tad replied.

Mr. Riddle entered the room with David following close behind.

“Here’s another soldier boy for you to poke at,” Mr. Riddle said. “David here was rescued from a British prison ship tied up at Boston harbor.”

“Oh, yes, I remember that business,” the doctor said. “That was quite a raid. I’m surprised the British didn’t spoil it.”

“Tad here was on that raid,” David said. “If he and his friends hadn’t rescued me, I’m afraid about what would have happened.”

The doctor glanced over at Tad, nodded, and said, “I’m not surprised that our drummer boy was on the raid. The lieutenant told me some interesting things about you, Tad. You are going to make a fine soldier.”

Tad blushed, and as he blushed, Molly and Emily entered the room.

“It’s about time you girls were up and working,” Mrs. Riddle said. “We’ve got supper to set on the table.”

As the girls set to work preparing the meal, the doctor opened his bag and took out a small metal funnel.

“Sit down and lean forward,” he told David.

When David was seated, and leaning forward, the doctor put the large mouth of the funnel to David’s back and his ear to the small part. He listened, and then thumped David’s back and listened again. Then he told David to take a deep breath and as David drew in a big breath, the doctor listened again.

After that, he checked David’s eyes and peered down his throat.

“Well,” said the doctor as he put the funnel back into the black bag, “You are doing fine, but return to duty is out of the question. You need more rest, and you surely do not need to be out in the storm that is coming.”

“That’s what I figure, too,” Mr. Riddle said. “I think we’ve got a heavy snow storm coming, maybe tonight, or the next, and by the day after for certain.”

The doctor nodded agreement and looked back at David. “Maybe in a few weeks when the weather turns better, we’ll see about you picking up a musket.”

“Not if I have my way,” murmured Emily as she moved to David’s side. “He’s already done his duty. He was in that redoubt out on Breed’s Hill.”

The doctor shook his head and his eyes looked sad. He paused for a moment and then said, "Now, then, it's late and I have to return. There will be work for me to do this night, I fear."

"Before you go, doctor, there's some more wounded men for you to look at," Mr. Riddle said. "We have them out in a storehouse, five of them in all."

"More? It sounds like you have a small hospital here," the doctor said. "Maybe tomorrow I can come by. It's late now."

"Tell you what, doctor," said Mr. Riddle. "You look at the boys, and we'll set you a plate at the supper table. Now, I'm sure you won't do as well if you depend on your army to feed you."

Doctor Norcross looked across the room where the girls were hard at work on supper. He could smell meat cooking over the fireplace, and he smiled. "You have made me the one offer that I must accept. You have an unfair advantage in this bargaining. There is nothing like the smell of meat cooking to set a man's mind."

Mr. Riddle led the way, followed by the doctor, David, and Tad.

The men were quartered in a small storehouse that had been converted into a room for the sick and wounded soldiers. There was a fireplace and a fire burning. Three of the men lay on straw pallets on the floor. Two of them were seated at a table. Their wounds were not serious, but needed time and care to heal.

The doctor examined each and every one of them. He took close note of the bandages.

The men were progressing very well, and on the walk back to the house, the doctor guessed that Mr. Riddle must have had some training as a doctor.

"The bandages are clean and tight. You have done a fine job."

"Oh, it wasn't me," said Mr. Riddle. "What you saw was the fine work of Mrs. Riddle. She takes good care of your army's sick and wounded. She also feeds stray cats and dogs just as well."

It was dark by the time they returned to the house, and supper was eaten by candle light and the illumination from the fire.

During the supper, the conversation again turned to the battle out on Breed's Hill.

"Some people are calling it the battle of Bunker Hill," said the doctor. "We should call it by its proper name."

"If we had the gun powder we used for last night's artillery fire, we would still be sitting in that redoubt," David said. "I can't get it out of my mind. Sometimes, in my mind, I can still see the British coming up the hill."

The doctor looked up sharply from his meal and stared at David for a moment.

"It was a terrible battle," the doctor said. "It's best if you try not to think on it too much. It can do you little good."

Molly, who like Emily, had been silent throughout the meal, suddenly spoke.

“Tad was on the hill, too.”

There was a silence in the room. Both Molly and Tad sat with red faces, and Tad wished very hard that he could somehow hide under the table.

The doctor smiled as he said, “Well, bless my soul; yes, indeed, our drummer boy here was out on Breed’s Hill with the New Hampshire boys. The lieutenant told me all about that, too. Said that Colonel Stark mentioned Tad in his dispatch.”

“Let us hope we do not have any more such battles, and certainly not fought by boys,” Mrs. Riddle said in a tone of voice that told everyone she did not much care for talk about war.

The meal was quickly finished without further discussion, and the doctor excused himself.

“I’ve got to return to duty,” he said. “It is nigh onto time for us to entertain the British, I think.”

“Another bombardment with the artillery?” Mr. Riddle asked.

“I think so,” the doctor answered as he put on his coat. “Maybe it will snow and make a short evening of it.”

Later, after the supper dishes had been done and the fire in the fireplace banked with a log that would keep a small fire alight for the balance of the night, or at least, until Mr. Riddle got up very early to stir the hot ashes into a good flame, the women left the room and made ready for bed.

Tad, David, and Mr. Riddle sat at the table. They were listening for the beginning of the shelling. When it started, they went outside on the porch. They could easily hear the booming of the guns.

“It sounds like they are firing from a ring around Boston,” Mr. Riddle said.

When David coughed, Mr. Riddle spoke again. “We’ve been out in the cold long enough.” He motioned with his arms toward the door, and they quickly moved into the warm room and stood in front of the fireplace to warm their hands.

David and Tad were to share his room where a feather mattress and blankets had been put on the floor. On the one chair in the small room, Tad’s clothes were neatly stacked. They had been washed and a few small rips in his shirt had been mended.

David offered to sleep on the mattress on the floor, but Tad would not have it.

“Why, with that warm feather mattress, I’ll be snug,” Tad said. “I wish I could take it back to headquarters with me.”

David laughed. “I think Molly would happily give it to you if she could. I think she’s sweet on you.”

“Don’t talk that way,” Tad warned. “She’s just being a good friend, that’s all.”

David smiled as he said, “Good night.”

Chapter 32 Hard Work and Cannon Make a Surprise

Tad waited until after the noon meal before taking his leave of the Riddles. He was eager to be on his way, and yet at the same time, he knew there was much that he would miss. There was food and the warmth of the fireplace and the feather beds. All that would be sorely missed. He tried hard not to think of Molly's blue eyes, but he had little success.

Even inside the stout walls of the house, they could hear much commotion outside. Wagons and men were constantly passing by on the road. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that something big was about to happen.

He took his leave of David and the Riddles, and it was a moment that brought a familiar lump to his throat.

Mrs. Riddle brushed some tears from her eyes and then hugged him. David clapped him on the shoulder and told him to be careful. Mr. Riddle shook his hand, and Molly announced that she would walk a-ways with him.

Mrs. Riddle frowned at that, and Mr. Riddle put his arm around her and said he thought it would be all right, but that Molly was not to go too far. Mr. Riddle whispered in his wife's ear.

"Let the young people be young as best they can, mother."

Mr. Riddle's whisper was almost as loud as a man's voice softly spoken, and so what he whispered was no secret.

Bundled up against the cold, Tad and Molly walked out the door and onto the porch. The road was crowded with wagons and marching men.

They walked along the side of the road, and passing soldiers, marching in formation took note of the young couple and smiled. They also took note of the fact that Tad was a soldier and wore a bandage around his head, and that bandage was indeed a badge of honor.

Molly's mittened hand brushed against Tad's bare hand.

"You have no gloves or mittens," she said in a worried voice. "Why didn't you say you have no gloves?"

Tad stuck his hands safely inside his coat pockets.

"I never did have any gloves," he replied. "It would be hard to use the drumsticks if I had gloves or mittens on. I just stick my hands in my pockets if it gets too cold."

They walked in silence until Molly said, "I've got something for you, Tad Wheeler."

"What's that?" Tad asked.

She handed him a small locket with a gold chain.

"I don't have a picture of me to give you for the locket, but I cut a part of a curl and put it in the locket. That way, you will remember me."

Tad looked at her, and she stared back at him. He was afraid he was going to blush, and was greatly relieved when he did not feel the blood rushing to his face.

“Thank you, Molly. I truly want to keep it, but I have nothing to give you in return.”

“Then I’ll just take what I want,” she said with a smile.

She suddenly leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek and then turned and hurried away, calling out to him as he stood dumbfounded, “Be careful, Tad Wheeler, and come back to me.”

As it so happened, a regiment of soldiers was passing by, and when Molly kissed Tad on the cheek, they cheered loudly, and then Tad did indeed blush fiercely.

He watched Molly walk away until she reached the path that led to the house. She saw him still standing where she had left him. She waved and then hurried on into the house.

As Tad turned to resume his walk back to the headquarters, he saw a familiar figure approaching.

“Now, that was a tender parting if ever I saw one,” Sergeant Grumley said.

Tad quickly stuffed the locket in his pocket as he said, “Did you see that?”

“Reckon I did. She was surely a pretty young lass. Now, if I thought I’d be as lucky as ye, I’d stand out there and let the British whang away at me all day. I figured dropping ye off at that house was a good idea. I didn’t know, though, for a fact, that there was a pretty young girl waiting to take care of ye.”

“She’s just a girl,” Tad said as he and the sergeant walked together back to the headquarters.

As Tad spoke, his hand was buried deep in his pocket and his fingers were wrapped tightly around the locket.

“I was just coming to check on ye,” Sergeant Grumley said. “Ben would have come, too, ‘cept he’s running his horse near to death what with taking orders out to regiments.”

“What’s going on?” Tad asked. “It seems like the whole army is on the move.”

“Right down to old sergeants and young drummer boys,” Sergeant Grumley laughed. “We appear to be getting ready for a big battle.”

“Another one like Breed’s Hill?” Tad asked.

“Oh, bigger than that. We’re moving up on Dorchester Heights tonight,” Sergeant Grumley said. “From the way I hear it, we will have about four regiments and about forty of those cannon that came over from Fort Ticonderoga.”

“That many men!” exclaimed Tad.

“About two thousand or so. Once we are set up on those heights, the British will have to come out and try to take the heights from us or high-tail it out of Boston.”

“I see it,” Tad said excitedly. “With those big cannon up on the heights, we could pound the British ships to pieces.”

“True enough,” Sergeant Grumley nodded. “The British will have to come out and chase us off the heights or find themselves unable to supply their soldiers ‘cause we will sink their ships.”

Tad thought about the prospects of no supplies at all getting through to Boston for the British. He knew just how hard life was now for the people held in Boston with the British.

“That will go hard for my father and mother,” Tad said.

“War’s a hard business,” Sergeant Grumley said. “There just doesn’t seem to be a good idea that doesn’t have a raw edge to it somewhere.”

The closer they got to headquarters, the more commotion there was what with men marching and the wagons and horses mixed in with each trying to find space on the road.

Two wagons came by loaded with what appeared to be huge baskets.

“What are the baskets for?” Tad asked.

“Those be what they call gabions,” replied Sergeant Grumley. “They are as tall as a man and a good two or three feet wide. We’ll haul them up onto the heights and then fill them with stones and dirt. They make a good protection for the cannons.”

“Will they stop a cannon ball?” Tad asked, remembering the logs and dirt that had not given much protection to the cannon during the exchange of cannon fire two nights ago.

“Oh, yes, for the most part,” Sergeant Grumley said. “For sure they will keep the British navy from doing much damage with their cannon.”

“Why’s that?” Tad asked.

“Cause, the cannon on the ships can’t aim high enough to get much of a bearing on the heights,” the old sergeant laughed. “That Virginian general we got is a smart one. He’s got this figured out. He’s not one for making a lot of talk, but he’s got a sly mind when it comes to the business of war.”

Just outside the headquarters, they saw a body of men in uniform and armed with muskets. They stood in formation, and Tad thought they looked like the British regulars except they were wearing the American uniform.

“Who are those men?” Tad asked.

“Oh, that’s a detachment from Maryland. They are going to be part of a new regiment of Continentals that are being formed up.”

“They look like regulars, like the British.” Tad said.

“They are a trained group. I’ll say that for them.”

Inside the headquarters, people were on the move. Ben came out of a door and bumped into them in the hallway.

“There you are,” Ben said. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m all right,” Tad said. “I’d have been back yesterday, but the doctor wouldn’t allow it. I’m sorry I wasn’t on hand for the barrage last night.”

“Don’t be sorry. We gave the British a good thumping, and tonight we are going to give them the surprise of their lives.”

“Sergeant Grumley has been telling me about the plan,” Tad said. “What am I to do?”

“First of all, we are going to keep you safe and sound,” Ben said. “There were some high-ranking people who were not happy about you getting hurt. I’ve been told to keep you back from the firing line. So you will stay with me.”

Sergeant Grumley laughed. “That’s not likely to keep the lad very safe. Better ye assign him to help me. I’m not the one who’s always in the front of everything. Ye won’t find me pushing cannons around with my shoulder to a wheel, and that’s for certain.”

“I’ll fetch my drum and be ready to go,” Tad said. He could feel a rise of excitement. He was beginning to understand that this was going to be the biggest thing the army had ever tried to do.

“No, no drum tonight,” Ben said with a shake of his head and a smile on his face. “We won’t be fighting tonight. We have to be very quiet. We don’t want the British to know we are up on Dorchester Heights until the morning comes. Tonight, we will be silent and hard work will take the place of fighting.”

“That was the way it happened out on Breed’s Hill,” Tad said with a hint of worry in his voice.

“This won’t be another Bunker Hill battle,” Ben assured him. “This time, we will be prepared.”

There was no time for rest even when night came. There was one message after another for Tad to deliver during the afternoon. Evening came, and it was an early evening because the skies were covered with heavy, gray clouds. There was a breeze that carried occasional snowflakes to the ground in gentle swirling motions.

A large part of the army was poised behind the Heights ready to make the climb to the top.

Tad saw that the road they would take to the top had been covered with hay.

“Why is there hay on the road?” he asked Ben.

“The hay will help keep down the sound of the wagon wheels,” Ben replied.

Tad was surprised to hear that. He smiled, but Ben could not see his smile.

“They will have a hard time keeping the horses and oxen from stopping to have a bite to eat,” he said. Even as he spoke, his mind was working on the fact that everything that could have been thought of had been thought by General Washington.

It was not a long climb to the top of the heights, but it was a steep one. The men in the regiments would not have too hard a time, but bringing up the cannon, the round iron balls, and the kegs of gunpowder was another matter.

There were nearly forty cannon to be pulled up the slope. There were wagon loads of shot and gunpowder.

Each cannon was pulled by either oxen or horses. To help the animals, long ropes were tied to the cannon carriages and men manned the ropes and pulled. If the horses or oxen missed a step or stopped pulling, the men on the ropes had to hold fast to keep the cannon from sliding back down to the bottom and possibly become damaged.

Ben was on foot, his horse back in the stable. They started up the steep road, walking beside a large cannon being pulled by two teams of big work horses more accustomed to pulling wagons. Two lines of ropes were being tugged on by ten men on each rope. The cannons pushed with shoulders against the wheels. All were silent except for occasional grunts of effort being put forth by the men.

Tad and Ben moved slowly, but even so, they soon outpaced the struggling men and animals pulling the cannon.

Tad could see that it would be a long night of hard work. When they got to the top, he saw that there were already men at work with shovels clearing level places for the cannon. A group of officers were nearby, and Ben reported to them. When he returned, he tapped Tad on the shoulder.

“Go along the heights until you come to a second road. Find a Colonel Whitcomb there. He has a Massachusetts regiment coming up with cannon on that road. Stay with the colonel until his regiment is in place on top and then come back here and report.”

“Colonel Whitcomb, I’ll remember,” Tad said quickly. He turned and made his way along the heights.

It was crowded on the level ground of the heights. Tad could look out and he thought he saw lights in the city of Boston not far away and down from where he stood. There was more snow now, and he was sure that if it kept up, there would be snow on the ground. That would make coming up the roads very difficult. The roads would be slippery and hard to climb.

There was a remarkable silence. Even though the men working with shovels made occasional clinking sounds as a shovel hit a rock, there were no shouts or singing or any of the many ways large numbers of men make noise. The plan was working.

When he reached the second road, Tad started to call out for Colonel Whitcomb, and then caught himself just in time. He asked nearby soldiers working with their shovels, “I’m looking for Colonel Whitcomb. Are you in his regiment?” He kept his voice low so only those very close by could hear him.

After several inquiries, Tad found the colonel and explained his orders.

“Glad to have you at hand,” the colonel said. “Stay close to me. I’ll be sending you back with a message.”

Tad stayed close to the colonel, and it was not long before the first cannon was delivered atop the heights. It was a large twelve-pounder, a cannon that could shoot an iron ball weighing twelve pounds, and nearly all the British ships in the harbor were within its range, as was much of the city of Boston. Tad hoped the gunners would keep their aim on the British ships.

A quarter of an hour passed, and Colonel Whitcomb was worried. He spoke in a low voice.

“We should have had another cannon coming up on the heels of the first. Something must be wrong. Go back down the hill and find out what is happening and then report back to me.”

“Yes, sir,” Tad said, and turned to walk back down the slope. He did not have to go very far before he found the next cannon stalled in place. The men on the lines of ropes were keeping the ropes taut and a team of oxen had their shoulders tight in the harness, but the cannon, a smaller six-pounder, was not moving.

“Who’s in charge?” Tad asked.

“I am, Sergeant Gilman,” came a voice from a man by a wheel of the cannon carriage.

“I’m a runner from Colonel Whitcomb. He wants to know what is holding up the cannon.”

“We’ve got a real problem,” the sergeant replied. “The wheels are froze up tight on the axle. There’s no way to fix it without taking off the wheels. That will take some considerable pounding and probably wake up half the British army.”

“What should I tell the colonel?” Tad asked.

“Well, if we had some skids, boards that we could put under the wheels, I’d think we could pull it up the rest of the way and get it in position. Then in the morning, when the British know we’re up there on the heights, we could set about fixing it so it could fire.”

“I’ll tell the colonel,” Tad said. He turned about and started back up the road. It was cold, but he soon realized that he had beads of sweat on his brow.

Once on top, he found Colonel Whitcomb and reported. The colonel put his hands on hips and shook his head. He thought for a moment and then gave Tad his orders.

“Go back down and tell whoever is in charge of the gun to move it off the road so the next cannon can get by and come on up. Tell them to send someone back down the hill to the bottom and find planks that can be used for skids. That is a good idea. When you finish there and the next cannon is on the move, come back and report to me.”

“Yes, sir,” Tad said, and turned to go back down again. By now he was as warm from his exertions as he had been when standing in front of the Riddles’ fireplace.

The sergeant listened closely as Tad passed on the colonel’s orders.

“It won’t work,” the sergeant said with a shake of his head. “We don’t have any room off that side of the road for the animals or the men to stand so’s they can pull the cannon to one side.”

The sergeant thought for a moment and then came to a decision.

“Here’s what we’ll do. We can push the cannon over to one side a little. Then we widen the road on the other side enough so the cannon coming up behind us can slip by and go on up. I’ll send some men back down to the bottom to find the planks. The worst of it is that we will be the last cannon up on the heights and it probably won’t be until late in the day before we can fire away at the Redcoats.”

Tad watched as the men pushed the cannon. Their efforts moved the gun carriage a few feet and that was all. Other men found large rocks on the nearby slope and tucked them in behind the wheels to keep the carriage from sliding back down the hill. The oxen eased up on their harness and the men relaxed their pull on the ropes. It was a moment of welcome respite for both men and oxen. The sergeant in charge of the cannon quickly put other men to work widening the road. In a few minutes, the men had done about all that could be done and the sergeant turned to Tad.

“You’d best get on down the road and tell the cannon crew behind us to come up. Tell them about slipping a little to the right so they can get past us.”

Tad said he understood and turned to begin his descent back down the slope. As he did so, he heard the sergeant give orders to two of his crew to go to the bottom and find planks that could be used as skids and also to find someone who knew how to fix the wheels on the axle.

The next cannon in line was not far behind, and it did not take Tad long to find the sergeant in charge of the cannon. He quickly reported to the sergeant.

“Figured something like that,” the sergeant said. “I hope they got enough space for us to pass them.”

This cannon was another six-pounder and was pulled by two oxen and men tugging on two ropes. Others braced their shoulders against the carriage wheels.

“Move it on up,” the sergeant said just barely loud enough for all to hear.

The sergeant and Tad stood to one side as the cannon lurched forward. Then the oxen slipped and the cannon rolled back. One of the men pushing against a wheel got his foot caught under the wheel and the wheel rolled over his leg. The oxen steadied and the cannon stopped.

The man screamed out in pain as he fell to the ground. Tad and the sergeant rushed to his side. The sergeant put his hand over the man’s mouth, saying as he did so, “Do not cry out. Bear your pain in silence. The British must not know what we are doing.”

The man grimaced in pain, but kept his mouth closed tight.

“That’s a brave man,” the sergeant murmured as he and Tad looked at the injured leg.

“Broken, for certain,” the sergeant said. “We’ve got to get him back to a doctor.”

Two men were detailed to take the injured cannoneer back down the slope.

“Get him to a doctor and see to it that he is taken care of,” the sergeant ordered, “Then hurry on back up. We need every man for this job.”

The next cannon in line was close behind and Tad was relieved to see them begin moving forward. He waited until they passed him and he could see the next cannon coming up. The line of cannon coming up the slope was moving again, and Tad began his climb back up to the top where he would report to Colonel Whitcomb.

He found the colonel close to the line where soldiers were filling the gabions with dirt and rocks. As dirt was poured from small baskets into the gabions, other soldiers tamped the dirt down so it would be well packed.

The colonel listened to Tad's report and then nodded.

"Well done. You are a good messenger," said Colonel Whitcomb.

"Oh, I'm not really a messenger," Tad replied. "I'm a drummer."

"Is that right?" the colonel said. "What regiment are you serving with?"

"None. I've been assigned to headquarters since I joined the army back in April past, but sometimes I get assigned temporary. I was with Colonel Stark out on Breed's Hill, and I was with the Marblehead regiment for a while. We were the ones who did the raid on the prison ship in Boston Harbor."

"Were you one of the boys who sneaked into Boston before the raid?" asked Colonel Whitcomb.

"Yes, sir.

"Stark and Glover are good men," Colonel Whitcomb said. "Stark's a little hot-headed, but a good leader."

"Will we be ready for the British come daylight?" Tad asked. He could see dark forms of men hard at work, but the task seemed to be more than could be done in one night.

"Oh, yes, there's no doubt about that," the colonel replied.

"These soldiers do not seem like militia," Tad said. "They remind me of the British soldiers I saw drilling in Boston back before the fighting started."

"You lived in Boston?"

"Yes, sir. My parents have a printing shop there."

"Well, young man, I think before this month grows much older, my regiment, the Massachusetts Sixth, will march into Boston and you will be with me in the lead. I have a great need for a drummer boy, and from this time on, General Washington willing, you will serve with us."

"You really think we will be in Boston that soon?" Tad asked. His mind turned quickly to thoughts of being home, the comfort of once again being in the shop and setting type.

"My honor upon it," the colonel said as he moved along the line with Tad following.

Cannon after cannon came up the road to the top and were put into place. The soldiers in the Sixth Massachusetts worked through the night and before dawn the cannon were in place and protected by a dirt embankment. If the British tried to come up the front slope of the heights, they would be out in the open, and the Americans would be behind the piled-up dirt and the gabions.

Chapter 33 Oh, What A Surprise to See So Many Cannon

A cold gray dawn came slowly over the eastern horizon. There were heavy, low clouds and sometimes gusts of wind. Occasional snowflakes fell, and no one doubted that a heavy spring snowstorm was about to begin.

The soldiers of the 6th Massachusetts stood in their positions and stared out at the scene below. There was a British warship riding at anchor out on the water between the heights and Boston harbor.

The soldiers could not yet see if the gun ports along the side of the ship facing them were open or closed.

Tad was weary, cold, and hungry. He made a face as he thought how often this had been the case since he joined this army.

Now, it looked like he was going to be serving with the 6th Massachusetts. He knew that this was not a militia outfit. This regiment was one of the first to reach a level of performance desired by General Washington in his quest to create the Continental Army. This regular army was to be the force that would in time be capable of standing up to the British.

As the dawn brought more light, Ben came down the line and waved when he saw Tad.

"It was a hard night," Ben said, "But we did it. Everyone is in place and ready."

Tad smiled. "And I'd guess that everyone is tired and hungry, too."

Ben replied, "What else is new?"

Colonel Whitcomb came up and Ben saluted.

"General Washington's compliments to Colonel Whitcomb, sir. I have a message from the general."

"My compliments to the general," Colonel Whitcomb replied as he returned Ben's salute.

"Sir, General Washington requests that the 6th awaken the British with a shot across the bow of that warship to your front. Do not hit the ship, but make it clear to the captain of the ship that he is in great jeopardy."

Colonel Whitcomb laughed. "The General wishes to stir up the hornet's nest, and that we shall happily do. Now, I have a request for the general. The 6th wishes to have its regimental kit and food brought up. Also, I am keeping your messenger here as my drummer boy. Please bring up his kit and drum."

Ben glanced over at Tad, and he nodded his approval.

"It could get very hot here if the British come," Ben said. "As you can see, he wears a bandage from being hurt during the cannonade two nights ago. I have been told by some of the ranking officers to keep him out of harm's way."

Colonel Whitcomb moved closer to Tad and reached out with his hand to lift Tad's hat.

"I see the bandage," the colonel said. "I also see that this young man is more a boy than a man, but he has served like a man, and that is for certain. How about it, drummer boy? Are you up to what may be a hot time here with the 6th?"

"Yes, sir," Tad replied quickly. "I am fine. It wasn't much of a wound the other night. Just a piece of wood that flew off a wagon wheel."

"The wheel was hit by a British solid shot," Ben said. "What about it, Tad? Are you sure?"

"I think this is where I should be," Tad said strongly. "I will need my drum, though."

"Then it's settled," Ben said. He saluted Colonel Whitcomb, and added, "Supplies will be up soon. We'll have a wagon on the way."

"Very good," Colonel Whitcomb said. Then he turned and caught the attention of the gunners of the nearby twelve-pounder.

A captain of the artillery saw the colonel beckon and hurried over.

"Captain, do you see that British warship at anchor to our front?" he asked.

The captain nodded and said, "Yes, sir."

"Put a shot from the twelve-pounder over the bow of that ship, but do not hit it, at least, not yet."

The captain stared at the colonel for a brief moment, then smiled, and in a very excited tone of voice, said, "Yes, sir!"

He saluted and turned and hurried back to the cannon.

"Come along boys," he shouted. "Load our gun and set your eyes on putting one over the bow of yonder ship!"

The gun crew jumped into action. The gun was quickly loaded and aimed.

The roar of the cannon was so loud that Tad jumped in surprise. Everyone watched, but the gray light prevented anyone from seeing where the shot hit the water on the other side of the warship.

Colonel Whitcomb reached for his telescope and put it to his eye.

"That got their attention!" he exclaimed. "They are running about on the deck of the ship."

Several other cannon along the heights roared out a salute to the British. The men of the 6th and other regiments in position along the heights jumped up on the piles of dirt to their front and waved their arms and cheered.

"No need for silence now," Ben said. "Now, we want the British to know we are here."

Colonel Whitcomb nodded agreement. "General Washington knows what he is doing. If we hadn't fired a few shots, the British might think we were playing a trick on them. They might think we painted some logs to look like cannon. Now, they know better."

A soldier came panting up the road leading down to the bottom.

“Colonel!” he shouted as he came to a stop and saluted. “They’re bringing trees up the road from the bottom. I swear it is true. They are bringing up whole trees!”

Colonel Whitcomb laughed. “So they are, and in good time, I must say. Like I said, the general knows what he is about.”

“What are we going to do with trees?” the soldier asked.

“We will put them down in front of our line,” the colonel replied. “That way, if the British come up, they will get tangled up with the tree branches. They will become disorganized and while they are thrashing about in the tree limbs, you boys will have a merry musket practice, I dare say.”

The soldier cocked his head to one side and thought for a moment, and then his face was creased with a broad smile.

“We will look forward to it, Colonel.” And then after a second, he added, “Sir!”

Tad soon saw that the soldier was right. Men were dragging good sized trees up the slope. The trees were about thirty feet long and full of limbs.

It took much work and not a few shouts before the trees were lifted over the piles of dirt and gabions and cannons and placed on the slope in front of the line.

Tad could see that there were not enough trees to cover the entire front. There were open spaces in front of parts of the line.

He followed the colonel as he walked along the line and made adjustments in the numbers of men at each part of the line.

It suddenly became clear to Tad what the colonel was about, and he blurted out, “I see it! I see it!”

The colonel turned and smiled. “Just what is it you see?”

Tad felt his face turning red. He quickly apologized, thinking he had spoken out of turn.

“No. No. Don’t apologize. You did nothing wrong,” the colonel said. “Now, tell me, what do you see?”

“Yes, sir,” Tad replied. “I see that where there are no trees, you’ve put what will be three lines of men to defend the open spaces. When the British come up, they will shy away from the trees and try to come up in the open spaces. Three rows of men means a steady fire from our men, one row firing and two reloading.”

The colonel looked surprised and said, “Upon my word! You do indeed see it. Maybe I should make you a lieutenant instead of a drummer boy. It’s true. When they come to the trees, or what is called abates in military terms, they will indeed move to the open ground. You’ve got a good head on you for this business.”

“I saw Colonel Stark use much the same idea when we were holding the beach down at the bottom of Breed’s Hill, sir,” Tad said.

“I don’t doubt that Stark’s boys cost the British dearly,” the colonel said.

A shout went up from soldiers keeping watch on the line.

“They’re making sail!” a nearby soldier shouted.

Colonel Whitcomb and Tad moved to the line and the colonel climbed up on a pile of dirt. He peered through his telescope.

“True enough,” he shouted as he put his telescope away and climbed down from the dirt pile. “They’ve raised anchor and are hightailing it out of range of our big guns.”

Loud cheers went up from the men on the line. With shovels and hard work, they had forced the mightiest navy in the world to back off and run for cover.

“They are running now, but they may return,” the colonel said. “Either they push us off this height or we will run them out of Boston. There is no other way around it.”

Tad was cold, hungry and tired, but the sight of the British backing away did wonders for his spirit, and he could see that he was not alone. The soldiers were excited, and there were occasional cheers just for good measure.

Spirits rose even higher when a wagon pulled by a weary team of horses and pushed from behind by several men came up the back slope.

Tad quickly recognized the driver. It was Sergeant Grumley, and he waved to his friend, the wagon master.

Sergeant Grumley stopped his team of horses and thanked the men who had helped get the wagon up the steep road.

“Good to see ye, drummer boy,” Sergeant Grumley said as he climbed down from the wagon. “I was told that ye were with the 6th Massachusetts. I told Ben he better keep that quiet. If those Riddle women learn of it, they’ll peck him to pieces. Why, there’s not a place in all Massachusetts that’s going to be as hot as this spot when the British try to run us off. Ben was supposed to find a quiet place, a safe place for ye.”

Tad shook his head. “We’ll keep it a secret from the Riddles.”

“Ha! Ye will have a hard time keeping a secret from that little blonde girl, the Dutch girl from New York.”

Colonel Whitcomb asked, “What have you got for us?”

“Why, I got beans, biscuits, and bacon, the three Bs’ of army life. I got a keg of water, but it’s not enough for all your men. We’ll have to make a couple more runs up this hill. There’s a spring not far off from where the road comes up the hill. It might be a good idea if ye could have some of the men take whatever canteens or water bottles ye have down to the spring and fill them up.”

“And cooking utensils?” asked the colonel.

“Got your regimental kitchen on board, too,” Sergeant Grumley said. “I also got one blue French drum, and one drummer boy’s blankets.”

Sergeant Grumley stood up on the wheel hub and reached down under the driver's seat and pulled out the drum and blanket roll.

Tad was happy to again have his drum at hand. He saw that it needed a good polishing.

"That looks like a French drum," the colonel said.

"It is," Tad answered. "My father found it on the battlefield up at Louisburg back in 1763."

"I was a soldier back in those days, and not much older than you are now," the colonel said.

The arrival of food supplies made the soldiers almost as happy as the sight of the British warship sailing away out of range of the cannon. It did not take long for the soldiers to climb over the piles of dirt and cut away some of the twigs and small branches to start cooking fires. Soon the welcome smell of bacon frying drifted along the heights.

The day quickly passed. Watches were set so men could sleep in relays. It only required a small number of men to keep watch.

Toward late afternoon, a light snow began to fall.

Just before dark, there was a commotion among the soldiers keeping watch. The colonel was summoned and Tad rolled out of his blankets and hurried forward with his drum.

The soldiers on watch had seen what they thought was the arrival on the British side of a large body of men. They cried out that it was at least a regiment in strength.

Colonel Whitcomb climbed up on a pile of dirt and studied the British with his telescope.

As he climbed down, he said to Tad, "Beat the call for officers to come."

Tad quickly slipped his drum strap over his shoulder and began beating the call.

The captains of the eight companies in the 6th Massachusetts quickly came to the sound of the drum.

Colonel Whitcomb wasted no time explaining the situation.

"Looks to me like the British are preparing for an attack."

One of the captains responded by saying, "I hope they do. We will give them a Breed's Hill they'll never forget."

"So we shall," Colonel Whitcomb answered. "My thinking is that they remember that hill, also. I believe they mean to come at us in a night attack. They will come up the slope under cover of night and be in on us with the bayonet if we do not keep good watch."

The colonel paused and looked up at the sky, and shook his head.

"We will have a heavy snow tonight. Make sure your men keep their powder dry. For the British, they will surely have to rely upon their bayonets because their powder will get wet. Now, First Company will send out a patrol of twenty men. These men are to go down to the water's edge and keep watch for British barges bringing soldiers. When they are sure that the British are coming, they are to fire their

muskets toward the British. They won't hit anything, but the noise will stir our blood, and we will be alert. After they fire, they are to retreat up the slope and rejoin First Company. Is that clear?"

The captains nodded and the First Company captain replied briskly that he would see to it.

"The next thing that needs to be done," the colonel said, "Is to take some firewood from the abatis, but be careful. Don't take so much we don't have any abatis left, and make the wood ready for bonfires. I want piles of wood that can be lighted off quickly with a touch of gunpowder. These bonfires are to be about fifty paces down the slope from our firing line. Put these bonfires in the open spaces where the abatis doesn't cover. If the British come, and when our scouts come back up the slope, I want a good man by each bonfire ready to set it afire and then run back up the slope."

"What about the snow?" asked one of the captains. "The wood will get wet from this snow and won't burn."

"I know," the Colonel replied. "You will have to take the sailcloth the men are using to keep the snow off them while they try to sleep. Cover the bonfire wood with the sailcloth. I hate to do it, but there's no other way around it."

Once the orders were given, the captains returned to their companies, and Tad knew that he was now in for a great amount of walking, and he was right. He followed the colonel as they slowly made their way along the front held by the 6th Massachusetts regiment.

Once the orders had been given, the colonel constantly checked to see that they were being carried out by the companies.

Not long after it was dark and the snowstorm had begun in earnest, Ben made his way along the line.

After exchanging formal greetings with the colonel, Ben delivered a warning to the colonel. There was good reason to believe that the British might try a night attack and the colonel was to make preparations to meet the attack.

The colonel explained what had been set in motion, and Ben said he would relay the information to General Washington.

Before moving on, Ben had a chance to speak to Tad.

"How are you holding up?" Ben asked. "Is your head giving you any trouble?"

"Not at all," Tad said. "I don't think I need this bandage, but I haven't taken it off because it helps keep some of the cold from my head."

Ben replied, "That's a good idea. Before this night is over, I think I will want a lot of bandages to keep the cold away. It does help a little, going up and down the back slope. The exercise warms me up a little."

Ben paused and then looked Tad in the eyes and said, "You be careful tonight. If the British break through, you run down the back slope as fast as you can."

Tad shook his head, "Is that what you would do?"

“No,” Ben replied. “But if you get hurt, I’ll surely run as fast as I can to get away from those Riddle women.”

Both Tad and Ben laughed at the thought, and they parted upon the laugh.

The night passed slowly. Tad thought it was the most miserable night he had endured since joining the army nearly a year ago. The snow kept falling, and by the middle of the night, there were several inches of snow on the ground.

During one of their tours of the line, the colonel muttered, “They surely will not come now. They can’t possibly make an attack up the front slope of these heights. Their men would never be able to form line and keep from slipping and sliding.”

That thought did not keep the colonel from prowling along the line, however.

The colonel and Tad stopped at the big cannon that had fired the warning shot at the British warship.

A young lieutenant of the artillery was visiting the cannon crew. He and the colonel exchanged compliments and the lieutenant echoed the colonel’s thought that the British would not come in the snowstorm.

The colonel agreed with the lieutenant, but warned, “Battles have been lost by assuming that the enemy cannot do something because of the weather. We must remain vigilant.”

Not long after that, Ben wearily trudged through the snow and joined them.

Ben’s message was that reinforcements were coming up.

“There will be a full regiment moving into position down at the bottom of the slope. They will be on call to come up and help if the British attack.”

“I’m happy to hear that,” Colonel Whitcomb replied. “What about food for the morrow?”

Ben shook his head, “That will be a problem. There is no way we can get a wagon up the slope now. There is too much snow. The horses would never be able to keep their footing. Worse yet, when the sun does come out after this storm, the snow will melt and the mud will be a bigger problem than the snow.”

“My men have to eat, at least sometimes,” the colonel said gruffly. “Why not use that regiment at the bottom as carriers. If they don’t try to carry too much, they could make it up the slope.”

“That’s a good idea,” Ben replied. “I’ll pass it along to headquarters.”

After Ben left, the colonel told Tad to come along. It was time to visit the First Company. Once there, the colonel informed the captain that he was to form up a group of twenty men to relieve the scouts down at the bottom of the front slope.

“By now, they should be about as miserable as men can be,” the colonel said. “They deserve a chance to at least huddle in their blankets and be a little less miserable.”

Slowly, the long night passed. Even with dawn, the sky was still dark and cloudy and snow continued to fall. By now, Tad was sure that there must be nearly six inches of snow on the ground.

Soldiers at rest huddled together in groups under sailcloth that was not needed to cover the bonfire wood.

There was no sign of the British, at least as far as could be seen.

That changed a little later when word was passed down the line that a British warship was seen coming back.

Colonel Whitcomb, followed by Tad, hurried to the big cannon.

“When the British ship comes in range,” the colonel told the artillery lieutenant, “Put a warning shot across her bow, but do not hit the ship.”

“And what if the British keep coming on?” the lieutenant asked.

Colonel Whitcomb smiled. “Put a shot through her rigging. Maybe a hole in their sails will give them pause.”

“And if they still keep coming?” the lieutenant asked with a sly look.

The colonel laughed. “We will take that into consideration. I’ll let you know where to put the next shot.”

The warship came into view. The cannon crew made ready. When the ship came closer, the lieutenant raised his arm and dropped it and at the same time yelled, “Fire!”

The big cannon roared. Tad was braced for the sound and did not flinch.

“Right across her bow,” the lieutenant sang out in a strong voice.

“A good shot,” the colonel told the lieutenant.

The cannon crew had already leaped into action, pushing the cannon back into firing position and reloading with another solid shot.

The lieutenant looked disappointed as the British warship slowly began a turn. It was clear that the British were not going to pursue the matter. They were once again retreating from the guns up on Dorchester Heights.

With daylight now full upon them, some of the soldiers made small raids on the abates to find wood for at least some small warming fires, but the wood was wet from the snow, and they had little luck in starting fires. Those who were able to strike flint and steel to make a fire got only smoky and smoldering fires for their reward.

The colonel looked at Tad.

“You have done a good night’s work, drummer boy. Now, it’s time you got some rest. Try to find some place to roll up in your blankets. Stay close to the big gun here so I will know where to find you.”

Tad was grateful for the chance to rest. He was cold, thirsty, hungry, and very sleepy. He brushed the snow away from the ground so he would not lie in the wet snow, and curled up in his blankets. He was not as warm as he could have been because he pulled the drum under the blankets and held it close to

him. He was very tired, but the cold kept him awake for a while. There was only one part of him that was warm. Molly's locket rested against his chest.

Chapter 34 Will the British Burn Boston?

When Tad awoke, he found himself lightly covered with snow. There was snow everywhere and the day was well advanced into afternoon, but the light was barely more than the first hour of dawn because of the clouds. Snow was still falling, but it was beginning to lighten up.

As Tad got to his feet, he discovered that someone had covered him with sailcloth after he had drifted off to sleep. He was dry. The snow had not melted and soaked his clothes.

Colonel Whitcomb was standing nearby talking to several of his captains. He saw Tad stir and came over to where he was slipping the drum strap over his shoulder.

"Get some sleep, did you?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes, sir," Tad said as he rubbed his eyes. "Someone put sailcloth over me for which I am thankful."

"Ah, yes, so I see," said the Colonel with a smile. "Well, be of good spirit. We have firewood, water, and food coming up."

"Food and a fire would be good," Tad said. He tried to smile, but the mention of food caused him to remember that he had not eaten for nearly a day. He tried to remember when they came up on the heights, and found that he had trouble with his calculations. He knew they had spent one night coming up and fortifying the heights. Then there was the day and then the night and now another day? Was that right?

It was not long after his confusion about time when he saw the first detail of men bringing up supplies. They carried bundles of firewood, sacks of food, and small kegs of water.

A cheer went up from the soldiers in the 6th, for they, like Tad, had gone a long time without food or water.

The food was the same, biscuits, beans, and bacon. The biscuits and beans were already cooked. The beans could be heated over the small fires used to cook the bacon. It was not long before there were small fires just behind the line. The smell of bacon frying filled the air, and when Tad got his chance to eat, he thought it was the most wonderful meal he had ever eaten. He smiled as he remembered a few other occasions when he had thought the same thing.

As the men ate, they crowded around the small fires. When they finished eating, they held their hands as close to the fires as possible in an effort to get warm.

One of the men at the fire where Tad was warming his hands, looked at him and said, "I think I know you."

Tad looked at him, but did not recognize him.

"You're from Boston, aren't you?" the man asked.

"Yes," Tad replied. "My father has a print shop in Boston."

"Of course," the man said. "I was in the print shop several times. I was one of the Sons of Liberty who came to have pamphlets printed."

"We did printing for the Sons of Liberty," Tad said. "The British almost caught us once, but I spilled the type and they could prove nothing."

"That was good thinking," the man said. "You were fortunate that the British did not find the paper we wrote the pamphlet on for you to use."

Tad laughed. "We were very careful about that. I memorized the words and then we burned the paper. That way, there was nothing to be found."

"I remember seeing you putting those little pieces of metal together," the soldier said. "I was surprised to find a boy your age who could do that work. You had nimble fingers."

"I miss working in the print shop," Tad said.

"How did you come to join the army?" the soldier asked.

"We had to escape from Boston," Tad said. "My friend, David, and I got caught the night the British left for Lexington. We got away, but we had to run for it. In truth, we paddled for it. We got away in a small boat."

The soldier laughed. "I was out in the country looking to buy a wagonload of food for my parents' food shop. I never got back into Boston, and ended up in the army. I worry about my parents. They relied on the farmers around Boston, but since the siege, they have no way to get food to sell to people in Boston."

Tad understood the soldier's concern.

"Maybe this idea about putting cannon up on these heights will work," Tad said. "Maybe we will be marching into Boston soon."

"I hope so, I truly do," the soldier replied.

When dusk came, Colonel Whitcomb had Tad beat the call for the officers to assemble.

Once again, the colonel gave instructions for the night.

"I don't believe the British are foolish enough to try an assault, but we must keep vigilant. The parties carrying food up our rear slope had a hard time making it up, and the conditions on the front slope are no better."

The night passed quietly, and some of the soldiers claimed that it was not quite as cold as the night before.

The next day, there was sunlight, and while it was not really warm, the sun greatly raised the spirits of the soldiers.

More food and firewood came up, and the fires were a little larger than the day before.

More sailcloth brought up by the carrying parties also helped raise spirits. The soldiers wasted no time making small tents into which men crowded in order to sleep under cover instead of out in the open.

By now, Tad had lost track of days and nights. It seemed to him that they had been up on the heights forever.

Two more days passed. The weather was warmer and the snow melted.

Colonel Whitcomb kept after his officers to maintain vigilance even though he was convinced by now that the British would not attempt an attack.

"We were very fortunate," the colonel said to Tad as they strolled along the line, the colonel's sharp eyes looking for any small detail that might need correcting.

"If we had not come up when we did, we would never have been able to pull the cannon up that back slope. We got up before the snow, and the British had no choice in the matter."

When they were returning from the inspection trip, they met Ben. He had a worried look on his face.

After exchanging the formal compliments, Ben delivered his message.

"Do not fire upon the British ships. Do not undertake any kind of offensive action against the British."

"What's this all about?" asked the colonel. "The British may test our resolve by sending in a warship."

Ben shook his head. "General's orders. There is to be no action against the British until further orders."

Ben paused and glanced out toward Boston city which he could see from where he stood. When he spoke, his voice was lowered so that only Colonel Whitcomb and Tad could hear him.

"General Washington received a letter from the British. It said they are going to withdraw from Boston and sail away, but if we interfere or try to stop them, they will burn Boston to the ground."

"That is an outrage," Colonel Whitcomb growled. "Which British general signed such a letter?"

"There was no signature on the letter," Ben said.

"I'm not surprised," Colonel Whitcomb said. "I would not want my name on such a letter. It is a shameful act!"

Ben looked at Tad as he spoke, "It is probably a good idea if the soldiers do not learn of this matter until we see just what the British do."

Tad started to reply, but Colonel Whitcomb spoke first.

"There is good reason to be concerned. My men are good Massachusetts men. Many of them have relatives in Boston. If the British burn the city they will pay with their lives for it."

“I agree, sir,” answered Ben, “But for now, we must be patient. If the British do really leave Boston, then we can march in and the people there will be free. General Washington does not desire to put the people of Boston to great risk.”

Colonel Whitcomb nodded. “It makes sense, but I still would very much appreciate the chance to give the Redcoats a good thrashing. We will be able to tell from here what the British are up to, I believe. We can see whether or not they are making preparations to leave.”

Ben hurried on his way to inform the other regiments of this new order.

Colonel Whitcomb glanced at the cannoneers standing by the big twelve pounder cannon. “It won’t take long for the soldiers to get wind of what this new order means. When we tell them not to shoot, they will bend their minds to figuring out why.”

Tad trailed along behind the colonel as they made another tour of the 6th Massachusetts line. Each of the captains was given the order not to open fire.

Tad was very upset. He had been worried about how the Stelles were doing in Boston. What he had seen during his brief visit while on the mission to save David had unsettled him. He thought both Mr. and Mrs. Stelle had aged since he escaped from Boston. Life had been hard during the months of the siege, and now, the threat of the city being burned to the ground was almost more than he could bear. As he walked, tears formed in his eyes, and he quickly brushed them away.

He did not see that the colonel had stopped, turned around and was staring at him.

“What’s wrong, lad?” the colonel asked.

“I’m all right, sir,” Tad replied. “It’s my parents I’m worried about. They are in Boston. What will happen to them if the British burn the city?”

The colonel stepped forward and put his arm around Tad’s shoulders.

“Most of the men in this regiment have family in Boston,” the colonel said softly. “We are all worried about them. All we can do is hope and pray that everything will work out the way General Washington hopes. Keep your courage up, lad.”

Another two days passed, and by this time there was no doubt. The British were clearly making preparations to leave. The British ships sailed into the harbor and were loaded with soldiers and then away they sailed.

The soldiers up on the heights overlooking the city were in high spirits. By now, everyone knew of the British threat to burn Boston if anyone interfered with their withdrawal. There was anger over the threat, but the prospects of the year-long siege coming to an end were of grater interest. It had been a long siege and now it appeared that the siege would soon be over. The British, with their fine army and the world’s greatest navy, had been run out of Boston by the colonials.

Then came even more welcome news. The 6th Massachusetts was relieved!

The soldiers packed up their bedrolls. Company by company, the regiment came down the slope while another regiment climbed toward the top. There was not much concern about the British. By now, the British army had been so reduced in size, it would be impossible for them to stage an attack.

The 6th Massachusetts formed up in marching formation at the bottom of the heights and began marching to its new quarters.

Colonel Whitcomb led the way, marching on foot instead of riding a horse because of a lack of horses.

Behind the colonel, Tad marched and played a lively marching beat on his drum.

Behind them came the eight companies. There were over seven hundred men in the regiment, and they made a long column.

The sun was out and there was a hint of spring in the air. The march was a long one, but the soldiers were in good spirit, and they stepped along at a good pace.

Tad quickly saw that they were going to take the road that ran past the Riddles' house.

Along the way, people came out of their houses to watch the regiment pass by. Word had spread that this regiment, along with others, had performed a great deed.

When they passed the Riddle house, Tad saw the Riddles and David standing close to the road. At first, he did not see Molly. Then she slipped from behind Mr. Riddle and ran out on the road.

She cried out, "Tad! Tad!" and only the quick arrival of Mrs. Riddle kept Molly from rushing to Tad's side. Mr. Riddle was nearly bent in half from laughing so hard.

A great cheer went up from the soldiers marching behind Tad. They were able to see what had happened.

It took a few minutes for Tad's face to return to its normal color.

Colonel Whitcomb heard the cheers and turned around just in time to see Molly being urged back off the road by Mrs. Riddle who had a firm grasp on the girl's arm. He saw Tad's red face and guessed what had occurred. He smiled at Tad.

"You are playing a lively beat, drummer boy."

Tad slowed the beat, but not by much. He had a good idea where they were headed, even if the colonel had not yet told the soldiers.

Chapter 35 Are the Redcoats Gone from Boston?

Tad had been on this road several times over the past year. He was sure the regiment was going to what they called the neck, the narrow piece of land that connected Boston to the rest of Massachusetts. It was where the British and the colonials had faced each other at close range for almost a year.

Tad guessed right. After being on the march for nearly the whole day, the regiment filed off the road and into camp grounds left behind by another regiment that had already moved to a different site.

Behind the long column of men there were several wagons drawn by teams of horses. As the companies took possession of their new quarters, the wagons came up.

The lead wagon was driven by Sergeant Grumley. Tad was glad to see the old sergeant.

“Ho, there, boy,” said Sergeant Grumley. “Ye set a merry pace for us today. I thought I was going to have to gallop my horses just to keep up.”

A nearby soldier shouted, “Our drummer boy was in a great hurry, and I’d have hurried too if I thought a pretty girl was going to march alongside me.”

Sergeant Grumley nodded. “I thought something like that might happen when we passed the Riddle house.”

It was a comfortable camp. There were huts made of logs, ample firewood, and a nearby stream that furnished good water for drinking.

Best of all, the wagons were loaded with food supplies, and it did not take long for the soldiers to make good use of the firewood.

There was no need to post very many sentries. The regiment was quartered well back of the fortifications which ensured that the British could not advance out of Boston.

The wagons held more than food. Colonel Whitcomb took a long look at Tad and said,

“Go over to the wagons. We’ve got nearly enough new uniforms to outfit the men in the regiment who do not have them. Find a uniform that fits and get rid of those old clothes you are wearing. I can’t have a regimental drummer boy who looks like a ragamuffin.”

Tad looked down at his clothes. They were in better condition than usual, he thought. Mrs. Riddle, Molly, and Emily had put them in as good a repair as possible, and it had only been a week or so since.

Sergeant Grumley helped Tad sort through the uniforms, and they found one that fit reasonably well. Best of all, there was a tri-corner hat. Tad put the hat on his head, but it did not fit well over the bandage.

Sergeant Grumley looked at the old bandage that Tad still wore around his head.

“Don’t think ye need that rag anymore,” he said. “Ye not being dead by now means ye must be healed, I’d warrant.”

The bandage came off easily enough. Sergeant Grumley peered at the wound and pronounced it healed.

“There’ll be a bit of a scar there for a few years, but it won’t be something to scare off the girls.”

Tad was relieved to find that he did not blush when he heard the sergeant’s comment about girls. Maybe he was going to stop blushing, and that would be good.

Sergeant Grumley had a present for Tad. He handed him a small bar of yellow soap and a large washrag.

“Ye would do us a favor if ye went over to yonder stream and did a bit of washing. Why, the place where the bandage was is the only clean place ye got.”

Tad took the sergeant’s advice and strolled over to the stream. The air was still tinged with the last breezes of winter, but the sun felt good. The water, however, was cold, and Tad was sure that washing his face and hands was enough, at least until the weather turned a good deal warmer.

The stay in the comfortable quarters was all too brief for the men. The next day, the regiment was ordered to relieve the soldiers manning the fortifications facing the British.

Once in position, Colonel Whitcomb and Tad moved out in front of the fortifications. The Colonel took out his telescope and studied the British fortifications which were just over four hundred paces away.

“It is very strange,” the colonel said. “I do not see any British sentries.”

Tad remembered being at this post when he was assigned to the Marblehead regiment.

The night passed quietly. The sentries on guard reported nothing unusual.

The next morning, a fine day with the sun lending a welcome touch of warmth, there were shouts from the men on guard.

Colonel Whitcomb, followed by Tad, hurried to the most forward point in the fortifications. The colonel quickly pulled out his telescope and put it to his eye.

“There are several white flags waving. Men are standing atop the British walls of dirt and waving flags,” the colonel said. “They do not seem to be in uniform.”

Colonel Whitcomb stared at Tad for a second. The colonel had a strange look on his face. It was a look that mixed hope with disbelief. Tad sensed that something important was about to happen.

“Beat the call for officers,” the Colonel ordered.

Tad quickly began a strong beat on the drum. He kept it up as officers came running toward the colonel.

When they assembled, the colonel stared at them for a second and then tersely delivered his orders.

“First company is to parade in front of the barricades. Form line there and wait for my command. The other seven companies are to form up in line behind the barricades. Be ready to advance.

No one is to load their muskets. Those who have bayonets are to fix them to their muskets. First Company will make a large white flag and a sergeant is to carry the flag.”

The officers hurried away to carry out their orders.

“Come now, drummer boy, you and I shall advance to the front and await the formation of First Company behind us.”

When First Company was formed up, Colonel Whitcomb, Tad, and a sergeant carrying a pole with a large white piece of sailcloth tied to it, advanced out to the front of the company.

“Now, lad, beat a call to parley, and beat it loud and strong for all the world to hear.”

Tad began the beat. Once before he had beaten the call in this same place. Then, the British had sent an officer out who refused to parley. That had been an effort to exchange prisoners which the British had insolently refused.

At first, there was no response from the Boston side. Then, slowly, several men appeared. One of them held a white flag. Several more men appeared. They hesitated and then advanced slowly. Behind them, several more men came out into the open.

“Upon my soul, I do believe they are our people!” Colonel Whitcomb exclaimed. He turned and shouted an order to the captain following behind. “Hold your company in place and keep alert.” Then he turned to Tad, “Are you ready for a little walk?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Tad.

The colonel boldly stepped forward with Tad and the flag bearer following.

The people from the other side continued to move toward the American line, but cautiously.

Soon, they came to less than ten paces apart, and the man in the lead of the group coming out from Boston shouted, “The British are gone! The city is ours!”

“Thank God!” Colonel Whitcomb said. He then turned to the flag bearer and said, “Return to First Company and give the captain the message, the British are gone. Have the captain send the message on back to the rest of the regiment. I shall expect to hear some loud cheering.”

The people coming out from Boston closed around Colonel Whitcomb and Tad. They were relieved of their anxiety and now took turns shaking hands with the colonel and Tad.

“We wanted to run across the neck and scream the glorious news, but we were afraid you might think it was a British trick. We were afraid your soldiers would open fire upon us,” the man said.

“You were right to be cautious,” Colonel Whitcomb replied. “When did the British finally leave?”

“We think the last ship out of Boston left during the night, but we were not sure. When we got up this morning, we did not see any Redcoats, but even then we could not be sure. We thought maybe they had gone to a different part of the city. We had to send people out to all parts of the city to be sure.”

“So, it is finally over,” Colonel Whitcomb said. “The British are off to England where they belong.”

“Oh, no, I don’t think so,” the man replied. “Talk we heard was that the British loaded their ships and sailed to Halifax up in Canada. The British said there were soldiers coming out from England and maybe Germany. They are going to Halifax, also.”

Colonel Whitcomb frowned. “That is not good news. General Washington must know of this matter as soon as possible.” He turned to Tad. “Hurry back to our regimental headquarters. Find someone who

has a horse and have them ride to General Washington's headquarters as soon as possible. The message is, 'the British are gone. Boston is once again ours. The British have sailed to Halifax'."

Tad was surprised. He thought that the Colonel was excited about the end of the siege and had meant to send an officer back with the message.

When Tad hesitated, the colonel looked at him and shouted, "On your way, lad. There is no time to waste."

Tad nodded and said, "Yes, sir," as he saluted. He turned and began running. He held the drum in both arms to keep it from bumping his legs.

When he got behind the barricades, an officer stopped him.

"Where are you running so fast, drummer boy? There's nothing for you to be running from."

Tad realized that the officer thought he was running away from danger.

A moment of anger flashed through his mind. The anger showed in his face as he shouted at the officer.

"I am not running from danger. There is no danger. Boston is ours! Colonel Whitcomb has a message for General Washington. He sent me back to find someone with a horse to carry the message."

"I see," the officer said. "I apologize for suggesting that you were running away from danger. Now, the message must be gotten to headquarters. We have no horses here, and it would take hours for someone to walk that far."

As the lieutenant was speaking, Tad saw an answer to their problem. Coming up on the nearby road was Sergeant Grumley with his wagon and team of horses.

"There's our answer," Tad said happily.

It took but a minute or two for Tad to explain what was needed.

"I can ride," the lieutenant said. "Unhitch your horses, and I'll ride one of them back to headquarters and deliver the message," the lieutenant said.

"Ride one of my horses, will ye?" Sergeant Grumley said. "My old boys don't take to being ridden. They've never been broke to saddle. And, where would that leave me, a wagon that needs two horses, and I would only have one. No, I've got a better idea."

"What's that," the officer asked.

"The drummer boy has the message in his mind. We get the wagon unloaded, and the drummer boy and I will go as fast as we can back to headquarters. It won't be as fast as a galloping horse, but it will be faster than walking, and it will be better than you being thrown from the back of one of my horses and break your neck."

The lieutenant rubbed his neck and then nodded. "That's a good idea," the lieutenant said. "I don't know if I could ride one of those workhorses without a decent saddle."

Within a few minutes, the lieutenant had men unloading the wagon, and Tad climbed up on the driver seat with Sergeant Grumley.

The sergeant slapped the reins on the backs of the horses and they started forward. He slapped again and the horses began a gentle trot.

"It'll take us a while, but we'll get there," Sergeant Grumley said.

While they hurried as fast as they could, Tad explained to Sergeant Grumley what had happened.

"Sometimes, it seemed to me we would never get back into Boston again," Sergeant Grumley said. "This all seemed to have come with a suddenness. Guess this means the war is over."

"You think the British are gone for good?" Tad asked.

"Hard to tell," Sergeant Grumley said as he eased the horse back into a walk. "We'll give the horses a slower pace for a while. They're not used to being race horses."

"If the British don't come back, then I 'spect I'm out of a job," Sergeant Grumley said.

"What do you mean?" Tad asked.

"Back before the trouble began, I had a small farm," Sergeant Grumley said. "T'wasn't much, I can tell ye. Sometimes I thought the ground had more rocks than dirt. I kept the horses and wagon and made a living doing hauling for people. Then when the fighting started, I joined the army."

Sergeant Grumley paused for a moment, shook his head slowly, and said, "Didn't make any money there. Haven't been paid for nigh onto a year now. Mind ye, I'm not complaining. Got fed sometimes, and I've got clothes on my back. Don't know about tomorrow, though."

Tad smiled, but did not answer. Both he and Ben had decided long ago that Sergeant Grumley was a reliable man and a good soldier, but he did have a way of seeing a cup being half empty instead of half full.

Tad's smile disappeared as he began thinking about what Sergeant Grumley had said.

If the fighting was truly over, then he would return to the Stelles and the print shop in Boston. The thought of returning to the only home he had ever known almost brought tears to his eyes, and yet, he found himself strangely divided on the matter. It had been a long year, but he had met so many good people. His hand drifted up to his chest where the locket lay under his clothes. The locket still felt very warm against his chest.

Sergeant Grumley urged the horses back into a trot again, and the wagon bumped along the road. They passed soldiers who looked up in surprise to see a supply wagon going along at such a fast clip.

Tad suddenly half rose from the seat and pointed ahead, "There's Ben. We are in luck!"

Sergeant Grumley pulled hard on the reins and brought his team to a stop.

Ben rode up and shouted, "What's the hurry about? I never saw your horses move so fast before."

"Our drummer boy's got a message for General Washington," Sergeant Grumley said.

“The British are gone from Boston!” Tad said. “Colonel Whitcomb sent me with the message for General Washington.”

Ben’s horse danced around and the young lieutenant gentled him down.

“We thought the British were about gone, but we were not sure,” Ben said.

“Now, you can deliver my message,” Tad said, “And I can return to the regiment.”

“Oh, no!” Ben said. “The colonel gave you the task, and you shall complete it. Climb down from the wagon. You can ride behind me. We will be there in quick time.”

Sergeant Grumley laughed. “Ye will be there quicker, providing ye don’t fall off.”

Tad quickly climbed down from the wagon, saying as he did so to Sergeant Grumley, “Please take care of my drum for me.”

The sergeant glanced over his shoulder at the drum in the back of the wagon. Part of the drum was wedged in under the driver seat.

“Don’t worry,” Sergeant Grumley said, “I’ll look after the French drum all right, but ye be careful riding up on that horse. Our young lieutenant friend rides a way too fast for my liking.”

Ben reached down and helped Tad climb up on the horse. This was only the second time Tad had been on a horse. He had briefly ridden behind General Putnam after he escaped from Boston. He remembered that horse as being much smaller than Ben’s horse. He knew Ben was a fast rider. When he was seated behind Ben, he was unpleasantly surprised to look down and see how high up he was on the horse’s back.

Tad gripped both sides of the saddle as Ben wheeled the horse around and set off at a gallop. Tad held on for dear life.

Chapter 36 A Triumphant March into Boston

Tad was more than happy when Ben brought the horse to a stop in front of the headquarters. It had been a wild ride, and more than once, he feared he was going to fall from the horse.

Ben gave his arm so that Tad could swing down from his place on the back of the horse. As he tried to swing down, he lost his balance and sat down hard on the ground.

An officer standing by the door of the headquarters watched and laughed as Tad made his awkward dismount.

“Now I can see why General Washington has been reluctant to form a cavalry regiment,” the officer said as he helped Tad to his feet.

Ben dismounted and tied his horse to a hitching rail. He hurried to present himself to the officer.

As he saluted, Ben said, “Colonel Knox, this young man is a messenger from Colonel Whitcomb. He has great news for General Washington. The British are completely gone from Boston.”

“That does not surprise me,” Colonel Knox said, “But it is good to get confirmation. We must get the lad to the general immediately. Follow me.”

As they walked through the door and down a hall, Ben whispered to Tad.

“When you go in to see the general, take off your hat and hold it in your left hand. Salute with your right hand and then give the message. Don’t be scared.”

Colonel Knox tapped on a door and a voice from inside was heard. The colonel opened the door and went in. Tad and Ben waited outside.

After a few moments, Colonel Knox opened the door. “Come in,” he said.

Tad entered and Ben followed, but stayed back near the door. Colonel Knox stood by the table in the office that served as a desk.

Behind the table sat General Washington. This was the second time Tad had talked to the general. The first time had led to the rescue of David.

Tad removed his hat, stood at attention, and saluted.

The General returned the salute and smiled at Tad. “You have a message for me?”

“Yes, sir,” Tad said. He stammered, but then spoke with a strong voice.

“Colonel Whitcomb presents his compliments to the general. The British are gone from Boston. People from Boston came out through the British line and reported this to us. The people say the British talked about sailing to Halifax and not back to England. The colonel wishes to know your orders.”

General Washington nodded. “I have had several other reports, but none so definite. This is indeed the confirmation we needed. I shall write out an order for you to carry back to Colonel Whitcomb.”

The General paused and looked closely at Tad. “We have talked before, you and I, and you performed quite well on the raid to rescue our prisoners. You have performed very well, indeed.”

Tad could feel his face begin to turn red, and he hoped that he would not embarrass himself. Thus far, he had carried out his messenger duty in good form. It would not be seemly to lose his nerve when facing this tall Virginian.

The meeting was over and as Tad turned to leave the room, General Washington spoke.

“Lieutenant Morrison, take this young soldier to my cook’s quarters and see to it that he is fed before he returns. My written instructions for Colonel Whitcomb will be ready by the time he finishes his refreshment.”

Both Ben and Tad saluted and then quickly left the room.

“You did very well,” Ben said when they were out in the hall. “That was a good report. Now, let’s get you something to eat. Mind you, do not expect a British officer’s fare. The general is not much better fed than the rest of the army.”

Tad found that Ben was right. His food consisted of some meat and a biscuit. The cook said he was sorry he could not offer them a cup of tea, but he was saving the tea for the general’s evening meal.

Tad was not surprised to hear that the general’s cook was short of tea, but then, it was true that the army was usually short of just about everything.

It did not take long for Tad and Ben to finish their meal. They returned to the headquarters and found Colonel Knox waiting for them.

“Take this message to Colonel Whitcomb,” he said. “Make haste because there is much to be done.”

“Yes, sir,” Ben replied as he saluted. “My horse can stand another run. We will be on our way.”

Tad grimaced when he heard Ben speak. He did not look forward to another wild ride. He would have much preferred riding in a wagon pulled by two horses.

The ride back was as bad as the ride to the headquarters. Ben pushed the horse to go faster, and Tad was not sure that he was even on the horse’s back for much of the trip. He had always thought that someday, he would learn how to ride a horse, but that was mostly a boy’s daydreaming.

When they arrived at the ground held by the 6th Massachusetts, Tad was able to dismount without falling down, and he was grateful because Colonel Whitcomb and several of his officers were watching as he and Ben galloped into the camp.

Tad saluted and Colonel Whitcomb returned his salute.

“General Washington’s compliments to Colonel Whitcomb.”

“I have a written message for Colonel Whitcomb,” Tad said as he reached inside his coat to pull out the folded piece of paper with a seal holding it shut. The seal was made from red wax.

Colonel Whitcomb took the letter without comment, opened it, and quickly scanned the brief message written there.

“This is a great honor,” the colonel said. He looked at his officers and smiled.

“Gentlemen, tomorrow at noon, this regiment will lead the march into Boston. We have much to do. I want every man in this regiment to be clean, clothes to be as clean as possible, and above all else, our muskets must be absolutely clean. I want this regiment to shine!”

The officers saluted and hurried back to their companies to begin the preparations.

Ben looked at Tad. “That wasn’t so bad, was it? Maybe one day you will trade your French drum for a horse.”

“I don’t think so,” Tad said. “I never fell off a drum.”

Ben laughed and led his horse away. He headed for the small stream near the camp so he could water the animal.

Colonel Whitcomb looked at Tad and said,

“You did your duty, lad, and very well indeed. I should have sent an officer, but I thought I would need all my officers to keep the men from rushing into Boston. It was a grand moment.”

“Yes, sir,” Tad replied.

“Now, go polish up that blue French drum of yours, and look to your clothes. You and your drum will be up in front with me. We shall march into Boston.”

Tad suddenly realized that his drum was in the back of Sergeant Grumley’s wagon, and that he had no idea where Sergeant Grumley had gone after they met Ben on the road.

“Sir?” Tad asked as the colonel started to walk away.

“Yes, lad. What is it?”

“Sir, my drum is on a wagon that was on its way back to headquarters. The only horse I could find when I came back to carry your message was a team pulling a wagon. We met Ben, uh, Lieutenant Morrison, on our way.”

Colonel Whitcomb frowned, and then he smiled.

“Your friend, the lieutenant, left us to water his horse over at the stream. Run quick. You might be able to catch him. We will surely be receiving another wagon load of supplies for the regiment by tomorrow noon. Now, run.”

“Yes, sir,” Tad replied. He turned and ran as fast as he could toward the stream. As he ran, he realized that he had forgotten to salute. It was too late for that now, he told himself.

He was in luck. Ben was walking his horse back from the stream. Tad knew that his friend was a good horseman. He would take time to walk the horse and allow him to recover from the ride back to the regiment.

“What’s happening? Why are you in such a hurry?” Ben asked.

“It’s my drum,” Tad panted as he spoke. “It’s on Sergeant Grumley’s wagon. I will need it tomorrow when we march into Boston.”

“I see,” Ben said. “Well, that should not be a problem. When I return to headquarters, I’ll find Sergeant Grumley. I’m sure we can arrange for him to bring up another load of supplies. It may not be until tomorrow morning, though.”

“That’s what Colonel Whitcomb thought,” Tad replied.

Ben swung up into the saddle and leaned over.

“Don’t worry; we will get your drum back to you in time. Take care.”

Ben turned the horse’s head and started a slow trot back to the army’s headquarters.

Tad waved and started back to the camp. He looked down at his uniform and saw that it was in great need of a good brushing. His uniform was dusty from the ride back to headquarters and then back to the camp. The white stockings given to him by Molly were also in even greater need of a good washing. His shoes were nearly hopeless, but maybe he could make them look better.

Tad joined the other soldiers in the regiment at the stream. He had the small bar of yellow soap and he used it on his stockings and his face and hands. The day was comfortable, though a coat still felt good. He borrowed a brush and did as good as he could with his uniform and hat.

The soldiers were in good spirits, but curious about what was to come. Some claimed that the militia was already being sent back to their homes. Only the recently formed regiments of the Continental Army would remain on duty. Others claimed that the war was over and that even the regiments were going to be disbanded. Men in the Massachusetts 6th had enlisted for one year. Their term of enlistment would not be over until January of next year.

Still others claimed that the fight with the British was not over. The British would come back and the fighting would begin again.

For Tad, the only question that really mattered to him was the return of the French drum. He knew he should not worry. Ben would see to it.

The day passed quickly, but the night dawdled. Tad lay snug in his blankets under a sailcloth tent. He waited for sleep to come, but his mind kept him awake.

He wondered what his life was going to be like now. If the fighting was truly over, then he would return home to the Stelles.

His life with the Stelles had been comfortable, and they were kind people. He had wondered why his last name was Wheeler. Mr. Stelle explained it to him once. The name, Wheeler, was his family name, and it was the name he should carry through life out of respect for his dead father and mother. The Stelles clearly thought highly of family names. Tad thought it strange that the Stelles always referred to each other as Mr. Stelle and Mrs. Stelle. He had noticed that the Riddles did the same thing.

When he thought of the Riddles, his mind turned very quickly to Molly. He reached under his shirt and touched the locket. It always seemed to be warm. With the pretty face and the blue eyes in his mind, he finally drifted off to sleep.

This was the day! That was Tad's first thought as he rolled out of his blankets. It was not quite dawn yet, but the camp was astir. Food was cooking over fires, and men were packing up their belongings. They would march with packs on their backs, the packs containing their personal items, which were few enough. Not many men had as much as a spare pair of stockings to their names. Few had clothes other than the uniforms they wore. Blankets were rolled and bent around the top of the packs. Men who did not have packs, made their blankets into shorter rolls that contained their few belongings.

Not long after dawn, Tad saw a welcome sight. Ben came riding into the camp and strapped to his saddle was the French drum.

"Thought you might be needing this drum today," Ben said. "And, I do have a message for Colonel Whitcomb."

Tad gratefully took the drum as the colonel came hurrying up.

Ben quickly went through the formalities and delivered his message. It was a short one. The time for the march into Boston had been moved back. Instead of going in at noon, now the regiment was to go in at ten o'clock. There were to be no wild celebrations. The regiment is to be quarters in the British army barracks. General Washington will arrive later to attend a church service. The liberation of Boston was to be marked with prayers.

"The general is a deeply religious man," Colonel Whitcomb said. "I was surprised when he first arrived back in July to find him to be so religious. I would have expected as much if he had been from Massachusetts, but not so from Virginia."

Ben nodded. "Heaven help the unlucky soldier this day if he's caught cussing. Well, I must be on my way. The general was surely up most of the night preparing orders for today."

"We do not have much time for preparations," Colonel Whitcomb said. "It is such an honor to be the first soldiers to go into Boston."

Ben shook his head, "I fear you are not the first. There were rumors that smallpox was a danger in Boston. General Washington sent in men who already had the pox and survived to check on the reports. There are some people who have the pox, but they are kept apart. There does not appear to be much danger."

"Well, if not the first, then we shall be the most to come in at one time," the colonel said. He looked to the rear and could see that numerous people and horses and wagons were gathering. "And, we won't be the only ones who will be welcomed by the people in Boston."

"Word has spread quickly," Ben said. "A great many people out in the countryside have relatives in Boston who they have not seen for nearly a year. They know how hard life in Boston has been for their friends and relatives. The gifts of food they are carrying in those wagons will be welcome, indeed."

As Ben rode away, Colonel Whitcomb looked at Tad. "You are from Boston. You will be helpful as a guide. I know the city well enough, but most of my officers do not. I hope the British left the barracks in good repair."

"I know where the barracks are," Tad said. "I spent much time watching them drill on the commons nearby."

By nine o'clock, the regiment was formed up for inspection. Colonel Whitcomb inspected each man in each company. He was going to bring a fine-looking regiment into the liberated city.

The regiment then moved from its long line into a column of fours, four men in each rank and extending for quite a distance to the rear. Out in front was Colonel Whitcomb. Behind him was a flag bearer carrying a makeshift flag that proclaimed the regiment as the Massachusetts 6th. There was a soldier on each side of the flag-bearer. They were a guard of honor for the flag.

Behind the honor guard and the flag came Tad and two other men from the regiment. Each one had a fife and they stood on either side of Tad.

Commands were shouted and passed down the line.

The column began moving, and Tad played a lively marching beat, and the fifers played a merry tune.

It was not much more than four hundred paces, across the fields that had seen so much skirmishing and raids during the past year.

As the column marched toward the city, church bells in Boston began ringing.

Tad was excited. It was hard to keep his hands from speeding up the marching beat. Had it really been a year since he and David escaped from Boston to join the army? That all seemed so long ago.

Tad could see crowds of people lining the street as they marched past the British barricade, now deserted and undefended.

Then they were on the street and the people standing close by on both sides were cheering.

Tad kept his eyes straight ahead as he was supposed to do, but he tried to look out the side of his eyes at the crowds lining the street. At one point, he thought he saw the Stelles and, a great surprise! He thought he saw his British friend, the drummer named Packie. How could that be? Surely Packie was on a ship with the rest of the British army and sailing for Halifax.

Soon the column was on the commons where Tad had watched the British soldiers practicing their drills. Once again, the column was reformed into a line of companies with Colonel Whitcomb in front.

He spoke in a loud and clear voice which all could hear.

“Company officers, you will assign your men to their barracks. Once that is done, establish sentry posts, but not too many. We are here as guests, not an occupying army. Treat these people in Boston with respect. In their own way, they have been soldiers just as we have, and their suffering under the British very harsh. Now, company officers, you are in charge.”

The formation quickly broke up into company groups and the officers began assigning barracks to their soldiers.

Colonel Whitcomb came over to Tad and said,

“You will be quartered with my staff, and when you finish putting your belongings safely away, I see no reason why you should not have a week’s leave to visit your folks. Be back here seven days from today, and early that day, if you please.”

“Yes, sir,” Tad replied. He saluted and hurried off to catch up with the flag bearer.

“I’ve got a week’s leave,” Tad said. “It’s the first time in almost a year that I’ll be away from the army.”

“Good for you,” the flag bearer said. “I haven’t been with the army as long as you, but I surely would like to have a leave. It’s been over six months now since I’ve been home. My wife and little boy have had a hard time without me. If it wasn’t for her parents’ help, I don’t know how we would manage. Heaven knows the army surely does not pay any money.”

“The colonel’s a good man,” Tad said. “I’m sure he will find a way to give everyone a leave.”

“Well, it’s easy enough for him to give you a leave,” said the flag bearer. “You are right here in Boston, and if he needs you, he can have you back in an hour. For me, it would take me two days just to walk home.”

The quarters for the staff were in the headquarters barracks. The quarters were small and sparsely furnished. There were bunk beds, a small place to hang spare clothes, a table and several chairs. The room did not have a fireplace, but there was a fireplace in the colonel’s quarters, and some of the heat from that fireplace might come down the short hall. For now, it made no difference because the weather was warming.

Tad was going to put his bedroll and the drum on one of the bunks, but then changed his mind. He did not feel comfortable about being away from the drum for a whole week. For the past year, he had very nearly lived with the drum. He knew that soldiers scarcely allowed their muskets to be out of their sight for even a few minutes. The drum was the same to him as the muskets were to the other soldiers. The matter was settled in his mind when he thought about Mr. Stelle. His father had given him the French drum. He had also given him a gold coin worth considerable money and a fine leather bag with a strap so it could be worn over the shoulder. It was an old bag, but in good condition. Mr. Stelle had carried it when he served in the militia during the French and Indian War back in 1763. Sadly, the gold coin and leather bag had been stolen not long after Tad joined the army. At least, he still had the French drum, and he knew Mr. Stelle would be happy to see it again.

As Tad left the headquarters, he saw Colonel Whitcomb, who noticed that Tad was taking his drum and kit with him on his leave.

“Remember, lad, seven days and then back to duty,” the colonel said.

“Yes, sir,” Tad replied. “I’ll be back and on time.”

It did not occur to Tad at first that the colonel might have wondered if he would return. Then he realized that the colonel was aware the drum was Tad’s prized possession, and if he had the drum, he might not return.

He hurried around a corner where a building came close to the street and bumped into a Boston man. The man, an older man, stepped back, and saw Tad’s drum and uniform.

He doffed his hat and said, “Bless you, lad, and the army for standing by us all these past months.” Then he turned and went about his business.

Tad suddenly remembered that it had been at this very corner where he had bumped into the British soldier, Packie, just before the fighting began.

CHAPTER 37 A Young Soldier Comes Home

When Tad reached the door of the print shop, he hesitated. He wanted to rush in and declare that he was home, but something made him hesitate. Something had changed. He was no longer a little boy returning after running errands for his father. Instead of opening the door and entering, he knocked. He

waited, but there was no response. He knocked again. This time the door creaked open a few inches, but no more.

“Who be knocking at the door?” came a voice from inside.

“Packie?” Tad was sure he recognized the voice.

The door swung wide open, and Tad saw that it was indeed Packie. He was surprised to see the British soldier. He thought he had seen him earlier during the march into Boston, and had guessed that he was mistaken for Packie should be with the British army on the way to Halifax.

“Tad! Oh, you are a sight to bless sore eyes,” Packie said. “Come in, come in, lad!”

Packie then turned and yelled, “Come quick, Mr. and Mrs. Stelle, it’s Tad! He’s come home, and bless me, he has the French drum with him.”

Tad stepped into the print shop. Mr. and Mrs. Stelle came hurrying from the kitchen.

Mrs. Stelle threw her arms around Tad and hugged him. Tears were streaming down her cheeks.

Mr. Stelle smiled and as soon as Mrs. Stelle released Tad and stepped back, Mr. Stelle offered his hand and Tad took it in his hand. They shook hands and then Mr. Stelle put his arm around Tad and pulled him close.

“We missed you so much,” said Mr. Stelle.

“It’s good to be home again,” Tad said, and as he spoke, his voice choked, and he had to fight hard to hold back tears. He started to say that he was on a seven day leave and would have to report back, but he stopped his words. He told himself that it wasn’t the time to tell them.

“Come now,” said Mrs. Stelle. “You look even thinner now than you did back in, what was it, September? Come to the kitchen. We will have an afternoon meal to celebrate.”

As they headed for the kitchen, Tad heard a thumping noise with each step they took. He quickly realized that the noise was coming from Packie. He stared at Packie for a moment, and he saw that Packie was walking on one foot and a peg where the other foot had been.

“What happened to you?” Tad asked Packie.

“That’s a long story,” Packie replied. “The short version is that my foot got in the way of one of your rebel cannon balls.”

“Are you all right?” Tad asked.

“Yes, but I do thump a bit when I walk.”

Once in the kitchen, Tad put his drum and blanket roll aside and sat at the table where he was joined by Mr. Stelle and Packie.

“We have tea,” Mrs. Stelle said. “Thanks to Packie’s army friends, we have fared better than most during the past months.”

“When did you get wounded?” Tad asked.

“It was not long after you and your friends rescued David and some others from the old hulk. We sallied out on the neck for a skirmish. I was beating my drum, and a lively beat it was, too. Then all of a sudden, I saw a puff of white smoke out in front and the next thing I knew a cannon ball came bouncing along the ground and took my foot and ankle away before I knew what happened. That put an end to my life in the army quick enough.”

“I thought you would have gone to Halifax with the British army,” Tad said.

“I could have done so,” Packie answered. “Once there, I would have been sent back to England as an invalid and kicked out of the army. Then it would have been a choice of which corner I could stand on to beg.” Packie paused for a moment and then added softly, “There wasn’t much of a life waiting for me there.”

Mrs. Stelle came by the table with a mixing bowl in her hand and a wooden spoon. She worked the batter in the bowl with the spoon.

“That’s an awful way to repay a soldier for service to his country,” she said.

Packie nodded, “True, but that’s the way it has always been.”

Mr. Stelle cocked his head to one side and said thoughtfully, “People have a bad habit of cheering the soldier as long as he’s useful, but have no time for him when he can no longer serve. It is a cruel business.”

“It’s a little better in our army, I think, but only because there are people like the Riddles who take in injured or wounded soldiers.”

Before Tad could explain about David and the Riddles, Mr. Stelle leaned forward and peered at Tad’s head.

“What is this?” Mr. Stelle asked. “That’s a scar that came from a hard knock on the head, I’d warrant.”

Mrs. Stelle put down her mixing bowl and hurried to Tad’s side and bent her head down close to Tad’s so she could inspect the scar.

“Oh, Tad, what happened?” she asked. “It does look to be a fresh scar.”

Tad was embarrassed, and he could feel a blush starting to spread across his face.

“It wasn’t much,” he muttered. “I got hit by a piece of wood from a wagon wheel.”

Packie chuckled as he asked, “And where be that wagon wheel when it all of a sudden threw a piece of its wood at you?”

“It happened the other night when we opened a bombardment out on the neck leading into Boston,” Tad said.

This time, Packie did not chuckle. He laughed. “What were you doing up in the cannon line? For I am sure that is where it happened. The wagon wheel was on a gun carriage, now, wasn’t it?”

Tad nodded. “I was helping push the cannon back into position after it was fired. The British sent over a cannon ball that hit the wheel.”

“We both have our times with cannon balls,” Packie said as he thumped his peg leg on the floor.

“Well, it’s a terrible thing, this war.” Mrs. Stelle said. “I’m glad that its finally over.”

“Well, now, Ma’am,” said Packie. “I wish it were over, but I don’t think so. Me friends in the army say they will be back. They say there’s a mighty army gathering up at Halifax. I’d guess that by summer, they’ll be back.”

“I hope that is not the case,” Mr. Stelle said. “Sadly, I fear you are right.”

“If they come back,” Tad said, “We will be ready for them. We have a fine army, now. We are no longer just a gathering of militia companies. We have regular regiments. There’s over thirty of them, the Continental Army.”

“That many?” Mr. Stelle asked. He appeared to be quite surprised to learn that there were that many regiments.

Again, Packie laughed. “My army friends have watched this building going on, and they are not impressed, at least by the bayonets. No, sir, what troubles them is the rebels’ fine work with pick and shovel. We got hurt out on Breed’s Hill, even though we took it. It wasn’t the rebels shooting that was the problem. It was the digging of that redoubt in a night’s time. Then again, on Dorchester Heights. One night, the British army went to bed and there was nothing up on the heights. When they got up the next morning, why looky there! A great fort with cannon was staring right down at them.”

Tad laughed. “There were about 2,000 of us up on the heights that night. We worked all night, I can tell you. Pulling those cannon up the back of the heights was hard work.”

“I was happy to see that snowstorm,” Packie said. “I lost too many friends going up on Breed’s Hill. Going up on Dorchester would have been much worse.”

“Yes, and if we had started a day later than we did, the snowstorm would have kept us from pulling the cannon up on top of the heights,” Tad said.

Mrs. Stelle soon had an early dinner ready, and talk ceased while they paid attention to the food.

After the meal, Tad helped his mother with the dishes just as he always did before running away to join the army.

Tad saw that he was now taller than his mother, and even taller than Packie. Mr. Stelle also saw that Tad had grown.

“I do believe, young man,” Mr. Stelle said, “That you are the same height as I am. You must have grown nearly two inches since joining the army.”

“Yes, indeed, our son is taller, Mr. Stelle, but look at how thin he is,” Mrs. Stelle said. “They must not feed him very well.”

Later that night when it was near time to go to bed, Mr. Stelle examined the French drum by the light of the fireplace. The flames in the fireplace were dwindling down and soon there would only be coals that glowed and then turn into ashes.

Packie had gone to his pallet which was behind the printing press, and Mrs. Stelle had gone to the small bedroom off the kitchen.

Tad sat at the table and watched Mr. Stelle examine the drum.

“You took good care of the drum,” Mr. Stelle said. “You have been campaigning for almost a year. There are some marks here and there, and I see a dent or two, but that is to be expected. During the French and Indian War, I only served with the militia for about forty-five days. You have had a long and hard campaign.”

“There is something that I have to tell you, sir,” Tad said softly.

“What is that?” Mr. Stelle asked.

“When I left to go join the army, you gave me three things,” Tad answered. “You gave me the drum, a fine leather bag with a good strap, and a gold piece.”

“Ah, yes, yes indeed. I had forgotten about the bag and the gold piece. I hope you got good service out of both.”

“No, I did not,” Tad said. “I am sorry, but I did not take good care of the leather bag or the gold piece. Both were stolen from me during my first couple of days in the army. I tried to find them, but I failed. I am very sorry.”

Mr. Stelle put the drum down and joined Tad at the table. He looked at Tad and said, “Do not be sorry. Such things happen to everyone. Do not blame yourself for what you probably could not have prevented. I worried so much about you going off alone and at your age. I was older when I served. It was different. I was with friends. You were thrust into the company of strangers.”

“There were many people who were kind to me,” Tad said. “I have made many good friends.”

Mr. Stelle smiled, “You are the kind of person who makes friends. It is not something Mrs. Stelle or I taught you. It is a gift you were born with, I think.”

Tad felt much better about everything as he climbed the ladder to his pallet in the loft. Losing the gold coin and the leather bag had bothered him off and on during the past year. It was true that the items were stolen, but maybe they would not have been taken if he had been more careful about where he left them.

The pallet in the loft was comfortable, and his blankets kept him warm. It did not take long for sleep to close his eyes. Just before he was asleep, he told himself that tomorrow, he would tell them that he would have to return to duty in seven days.

Morning came too soon for Tad. He remembered the last time he had slept in a comfortable bed. It had been when he stayed at the Riddles. He found himself drifting back to sleep with thoughts of the Riddles, David, and Molly in his mind, but he could hear Mrs. Stelle preparing breakfast below, and the smell of the porridge cooking soon brought him to a full awakening.

He climbed down the ladder into the kitchen, and Mrs. Stelle greeted him with a cheery good morning followed by a quick suggestion that he go outside on the back porch where the wash pan and soap awaited.

It was cold on the back porch, and he made quick work of washing his hands and face.

Just as they gathered for breakfast, there was the sound of a bell ringing from the front door of the shop.

“A customer, I do believe,” Mr. Stelle said as he rose from the table. “They have been rare enough during these troubles.”

“Now, not everyone needs to go to take care of business,” Mrs. Stelle ordered. “Mr. Stelle, you go and I’ll keep your porridge warm. Tad, you and Packie start eating.”

Mr. Stelle hurried through the door to the print shop. He returned a short time later when both Tad and Packie had finished their porridge.

“Good news,” Mr. Stelle said. “We have an order for a hundred posters. Now that the occupation is over, I think business will surely pick up.”

“What be the posters about?” Packie asked.

“There’s to be a big sale of cattle that are being driven into Boston,” Mr. Stelle said. “That will mean the people in Boston will once again have a plentiful supply of meat, I trust.”

“The bell is ringing again,” Tad said. “When Jed and I were here, the bell did not ring.”

“We kept the door barred back then,” Mr. Stelle said. “We disconnected the bell. When Packie came to live with us, we felt safer and stopped barring the door.”

Mr. Stelle quickly ate his porridge and he, Tad, and Packie moved into the print shop.

“I know I have enough ink for the job,” Mr. Stelle said, “But, I am not so sure about paper. We may have to search about town for paper.”

Mr. Stelle handed Tad a sheet of paper on which was printed the wording that was to be one the poster.

“This is a lot of words for a poster,” Tad said.

Mr. Stelle nodded agreement, and then said, “We could use your help on this job.”

Tad smiled. “I hope I haven’t forgotten how to set type.”

Tad glanced around the shop and asked, “Where is the composing stick?”

“Ha!” Packie exclaimed. “There’s that word again. When I first started working here, Mr. Stelle asked me to find a composing stick, and I looked high and low and could not find a stick to save my life. It’s not a stick at all. It’s a tray with a moveable wedge in it. Why not call it a tray? Least ways, I’d know to look for a tray and not a stick.”

Mr. Stelle and Tad laughed. Tad found his composing stick and moved over to a large window. Below the window there was a stand on which there were two shallow boxes. In each box there were compartments, and each compartment held small pieces of type. The compartments were not of equal size. The compartment holding *I* and *A* and *E* were much larger than compartments for *Z* and *X*. Tad had

memorized the location of each letter in the alphabet. He did not have to study the compartments when he picked out a letter.

“It’s a bright day today, but I think we still need some help from the lamps,” Mr. Stelle said. Packie set to work lighting two lamps, one for either side of the work bench where the bottoms of the type boxes rested.

Mr. Stelle found a composing stick and joined Tad at the bench. Tad worked on the words that were to be in smaller type and Mr. Stelle worked on the words that were to be in larger type.

Packie watched while Mr. Stelle and Tad set the type.

“I’m not much good at this part of the business,” Packie said. “Me fingers are too big and I don’t exactly read too good.”

Mr. Stelle laughed. “That is true enough, but you are as good a press man as I’ve ever seen. You do a good job of getting the right amount of ink on the type and you pull the handle on the press just right to get a good impression on the paper.”

At first, Tad’s fingers on his right hand seemed reluctant to resume an old skill. Several times, he had to look at the compartments to make sure he was taking the right piece of metal.

By noon, Tad and Mr. Stelle finished with the type setting. The type was carefully carried on a larger tray to the press where Packie quickly arranged the type in the way it was to print. Then he inked the type with the two ink pads, large mounds of leather covered rags. The leather covered pads were dipped into ink and the ink spread carefully on the type.

Once that was done, a sheet of scrap paper was pinned to the back of a canvas lid which was then lowered down gently upon the type.

Packie’s strong arms then pulled on a large lever and a heavy weight descended upon the canvas lid. Packie released the lever and the weight was raised. Then he lifted the canvas, being very careful to gently pull the canvas from the type. He took the printed sheet from the canvas and gave it to Mr. Stelle.

Tad was surprised to see how much Packie had learned since he came to live with the Stelles. Operating the press was hard word, and yet it required a certain patience and gentleness.

Mr. Stelle took a sharpened piece of charcoal from his pocket and adjusted his spectacles. He read the words on the page and made an occasional mark.

Tad winced at how many times Mr. Stelle put his marker to the paper. It had been a long time since Tad had set type, and he could see that Mr. Stelle was marking mistakes. Before Packie began printing the job, the mistakes would have to be corrected.

“It’s not as bad as I expected,” Mr. Stelle said as he handed the paper to Tad. “You have been away from type setting for a long time.”

Tad took the sheet of paper, tucked it in his pocket and then carefully lifted the form from the press and carried it to the work bench. He made the necessary corrections. Tad remembered when he was only nine years old and just beginning to set type. There were lots of corrections to be made then.

Another scrap piece of paper was printed, and this time, Mr. Stelle pronounced the job ready to print.

Mr. Stelle watched as Packie worked the lever. Tad pinned each sheet to the canvas and removed the printed sheet from the canvas. When a sheet of paper was printed, Tad hung it on a clothes line strung near the press. This way, the ink would dry and not become smeared.

Tad enjoyed the work. He took pride in the sheets of paper hanging like laundry on an outdoors clothes line. He was very good at removing the paper from the canvas. He did not smear even one sheet.

Once the job was printed, there was still work to be done. The little pieces of type had to be taken from the form and put back in the type cases. Tad thought it took as much skill to put the type in the correct compartments as it did to set it for the printing job.

Tad distributed the type, but Mr. Stelle looked at the light coming in from the window.

“We are about out of daylight,” Mr. Stelle said. “We can finish up tomorrow.”

As they walked back to the kitchen where Mrs. Stelle had a snack of cookies and tea waiting for them, Mr. Stelle said, “It’s good to have printing to do. Business will surely increase now, and I’ve got Tad back to help us.”

Packie quickly glanced at Tad. There was a question in his eyes, and Tad knew what the question was, but for now, he had no answer. This was the second day of his leave. Tad would have to make a decision. He wished now he had told the Stelles he was home on a leave. For him, the war was not over.

Chapter 38 Days Pass Quickly When Decision Is Delayed

Mr. Stelle was right. Business did pick up. The next day, a man came to the shop with a proclamation to be printed. A committee of citizens was in charge of running the city now that the British were gone. The committee would serve until a city government could be voted on by the people.

The proclamation was a long one, and Tad knew that it would take him all day and maybe part of the next to finish the typesetting.

Tad completed the distribution of type from the poster job. He saw ink smudges on his shirt, and was glad that he was not wearing his uniform. Mrs. Stelle had taken care of the uniform, and had laid out his work clothes that he had worn before escaping from Boston. The clothes were a little snug.

Before starting to set type for the proclamation, Tad knew that he had to clear his mind of other matters. He had to decide what he was going to do, and the time for decision was not but a few days away.

Clearly, Mr. and Mrs. Stelle expected him to stay with them. As far as they were concerned, the fighting was over.

Tad knew that the leaders in the army believed there was more fighting to come. Packie was sure the British would return and try to put down the rebellion. Tad felt comfortable putting the type away. He could do it easily and without the mental concentration needed for setting the type.

This was the third day of his leave. Time seemed to be passing quickly. He knew that he made a mistake when he came home. He knew he should have told the Stelles that he had a leave of absence for only seven days, and that he would have to return to duty. When he saw their faces the day he returned, he did not have the heart to tell them.

The bell over the door rang and a man entered. He was a large man and instead of the tri-corner hat, he wore a hat whose brim turned downward. He had a hard face and eyes that were narrow, and he appeared to be angry.

"Who's the printer here?" he demanded to know, his loud voice carrying far enough so that Mrs. Stelle came to the kitchen door and peered into the shop.

"I am," Mr. Stelle said calmly as he rubbed ink from his hands with a towel.

"I see," the man said. "Well, my name is George Mullens, and I've got a job here for you. I need a wanted poster printed. My apprentice has run away! I don't mind telling you that when he's caught, I'll take the reward money I have to pay out of his hide. I've got a good whip for the job, and one that he has felt before, I can tell you."

Mr. Stelle stepped back and peered over his spectacles at the man.

"In the past, sir, I would have printed your poster. Apprentices are bound by law, and there is some good in it, I suppose, but it also comes close to being a law that permits slavery just as exists in our southern colonies..."

"What are you trying to say?" The man asked angrily.

"What I am saying," Mr. Stelle continued in a calm manner, "Is that maybe it is time for a change. I do not believe in beating apprentices. And, now that the British have been chased away, maybe we should give some attention to our words about liberty and what those words mean."

"Well, I'll take no such talk from you," the man blustered. "I was a member of the Sons of Liberty. But, none of that means my apprentice has a right to run away."

"Maybe he ran away to join the army," Tad said.

Mr. Mullins turned and stared at Tad. "What's this, another apprentice who needs a touch of the whip? I'll be more than happy to take care of this. My whip's good enough for two beatings, I'd say."

Mr. Mullens took a step toward Tad, but before he could take a second step, Packie moved with surprising quickness to place himself between Mr. Mullens and Tad. As he moved, his peg leg made a drum-like sound on the floor.

"There'll be no beating of this young man," Packie said sharply. "I've seen a flogging or two in my time. I've seen more than one man get a hundred lashes laid on his bloody back. It is a hateful thing to do to a man, but I have to say, I do, that I'd take pleasure in putting a lash or two to your back, and if you take another step toward the boy, that's what you'll get from me."

Mr. Mullens was taken aback. He looked around at Mr. Stelle, who said nothing but there was a look of determination on his face that left no doubt in Mr. Mullens' mind about how the owner of the print shop felt about the matter.

"There's other print shops in Boston," Mr. Mullens said angrily. "I can take my custom to a print shop that is not run by radicals."

Mr. Mullens turned and stormed out of the shop, taking care to give the door a good slamming as he left. The bell over the door made a loud jingling sound from the force of the slamming shut of the door.

Mrs. Stelle's voice followed the jingling of the bell.

"I think it's time for a work break," she said. "Come to the kitchen for tea and cookies."

They turned and looked at Mrs. Stelle. She stood in the doorway with her broom. She held the broom like a soldier would hold a musket as he prepared to go into battle.

Mr. Stelle laughed. "Now I can see why our friend beat such a hasty retreat. My dear Mrs. Stelle, what were you going to do with that broom?"

"Why, Mr. Stelle, I was going to sweep the dirt out of the print shop."

Mr. Stelle, Tad, and Packie all laughed as they marched to the kitchen for what Mr. Stelle said was a well-deserved reward.

They sat at the kitchen table and Mrs. Stelle served tea and cookies.

"We cannot take too long over the tea," Mr. Stelle said. "We have work to do. Sadly, not as much as we would have had if we took Mr. Mullens' job. But, that's done, and I am happy about my decision."

"Life for some apprentices, like David, can be very hard," Tad said.

"I hadn't thought of it before," Packie said. "I was never an apprentice myself. I joined the army when I was Tad's age."

"There is much that is good about the system," Mr. Stelle said. "Young boys become apprenticed to a master craftsman or tradesman, and they can learn a craft or a trade that will always provide them with a living. If young boys are not trained, what are they to do when they are grown up?"

"That seems fair enough," Packie said.

"It doesn't always work that way," Tad said. He had talked to many young boys his age and a little older. Some of them had sad tales to tell about their treatment.

"I know," Mr. Stelle said. "There are too many cases of boys being mistreated by their masters. Sometimes they are simply used as the cheapest of labor, almost like slaves, and they are not really taught either a craft or a trade."

The break for tea and cookies was brief. Mr. Stelle and Tad worked at the type setting bench. The proclamation was lengthy and required the use of smaller type. Mr. Stelle had his spectacles on, but he still squinted as he tried to make out the small metal letters.

Tad started slowly, but his nimble fingers and young eyes soon gave him greater confidence, and he moved quickly to add letter after letter to his composing stick.

There was one interruption. The bell over the door made a jangling noise as the door opened and a well-dressed gentleman entered. There was to be an auction of goods and furnishings left behind by the loyalists in Boston who fled with the British. A poster advertising the auction was needed. Mr. Stelle quickly accepted the job.

When Mr. Stelle returned to the work bench, he frowned and said, "It is a sad business, but something needs to be done with what the loyalists could not take with them. We don't want people just looting those goods."

"Were there very many loyalists?" Tad asked.

"Some people who claimed to know said there were more than a thousand of them who left with the British," Mr. Stelle replied.

Tad was surprised to hear there were that many people in Boston who supported the British king and parliament.

"What will become of them," Tad asked.

"Well, I suppose they will either have to start all over up in Canada or go to England," Mr. Stelle said. "They certainly gave up almost everything for their belief."

"It seems that people on both sides, those fighting for liberty and those loyal to the king, have both suffered," Tad said as his fingers flew back and forth from the type case to the composing stick.

When late afternoon came and Mr. Stelle said there was not enough light, work stopped.

"We've had a good day," Mr. Stelle said. "We have jobs to print, and we had some excitement as well. It is good to have Packie, and you, Tad, here to help me. I do believe that we shall soon have a very flourishing business. The future looks good, indeed."

Tad and Packie went outside in the covered area where there was the bench and the wash basin. Packie ladled water out of a rain barrel that caught the rain coming off the roof. He poured the water in the basin and motioned for Tad to get started on washing up.

Tad reached for the soap and a rag and scrubbed smudges of ink off his hands. The sun had touched upon the rain water barrel during the day, and the water was not as cold as it had been even a day ago.

"So, now lad, what are you going to do?" Packie asked as he waited his turn at the wash basin.

"What do you mean?" Tad replied as he ran the wet rag over his face to remove the soap.

"You know what I mean," Packie said. "You must still be in the army, and I'd guess your army's going to be on the road soon. Before my friends left, they said they'd be back. This matter is not finished."

Tad dried his face with a towel and stepped aside so Packie could have his turn at the basin.

"I don't know," Tad said. "I'm supposed to report back on the third day from this day."

“That will come as hard news for your parents,” Packie said. Mr. Stelle is counting on you to help him in the print shop.”

“I know,” Tad said. “And I do want to stay home. Well, part of me wants to stay home, but I have friends in the army, and they say the same thing your friends say. The British will be back. Some say they think the British will come at New York or Philadelphia instead of Boston.”

Packie worked hard on his ink-stained hands as he spoke.

“The army is a serious business. Once you have taken the king’s shilling and signed the papers, there’s no walking away from that, I can tell you. It’s a hanging offence in the British army if you run away from service.”

Tad laughed. “I think I am safe from the hangman. I’ve signed no papers, and I haven’t seen a penny in pay let alone a shilling.”

“You signed nothing?” Packie asked. “Are you sure about that?”

“Oh, yes.” Tad said. “When David and I joined the army, there really wasn’t an army as such. There were militia companies, but we were not members. We just walked in and became part of the people who came from all over Massachusetts and some of the other colonies.”

“I didn’t know it was that bad,” Packie said as he shook his head in disbelief. “How could such a mob as that have run us all the way back from Concord to Boston?”

“Well, it is not the same now. We have continental regiments filled with men who have enlisted for one year.”

“They’ll be needing more than a year, I’d warrant,” Packie said as he dried his hands and face. “Oh, did you sign papers for this continental business?”

“No, no papers signed,” Tad said.

“Then it appears to me that you are under no obligation to return to the army,” Packie said.

Tad paused and thought for a moment. What Packie said was true, but he looked at Packie and said, “There’s some obligations that do not need the backing of a signature on a piece of paper.”

“There’s truth to that, lad. You will have to make a painful decision.”

CHAPTER 39 The Army Is on the March!

Tad could not put Packie’s words out of his mind. After supper was finished and the dishes washed, Packie said good night to all and headed for his pallet out in the work shop behind the press. Mr. and

Mrs. Stelle retired to their bedroom. The fire in the fireplace was down to red coals that flickered up an occasional flame. There was a candle on the table that cast a soft dim light.

Tad sat at the table. He was tired from the day's work, and he knew he should climb up into the loft and go to sleep, but Packie's words would not leave his mind.

He got up from his chair and walked over to the ladder leading up to the loft. There was the French drum by the ladder. On the floor by the drum was a rag and the small container of polish that Packie had given him back before the troubles started. He brought the drum, the rag, and the polish over to the table where the candle was brightest and began working on the drum. There had been times during the past year when he wished he had taken the polish with him when he fled from Boston.

Tad was happy to see that the polish was working. The blue drum began to pick up light from the candle and gave off glints of reflected candle light.

Mr. Stelle walked out of the bedroom. He was dressed in a long flannel nightshirt that came down to his knees. He had a knitted cap on his head. The cap had a small red tassel on top.

"Staying up late to polish your drum?"

Mr. Stelle asked.

"Yes," replied Tad. "Packie's polish does good work. The drum looks much better. We did not have any polish like this."

Mr. Stelle sat down across from Tad.

"When you were much younger, there were times when you polished your drum."

"I tried to take good care of it," Tad said.

"True enough, but I thought it meant more than that," Mr. Stelle said. "I thought you worked on the drum when you had something very serious on your mind. Is that why you are polishing the drum now?"

Tad put the drum down on the floor. He looked at Mr. Stelle. He could feel a lump in his throat, and he could feel tears forming in his eyes.

"What is wrong, Tad?"

"I don't know what to do. Part of me wants to stay here with you and Mrs. Stelle. This is my home, but I'm supposed to return to duty in a couple of days. Part of me wants to do that, too."

Mr. Stelle looked down at the floor and then raised his head and peered at Tad.

"There is no easy answer here. I knew you would have to return to duty, but only for a while, and here in Boston. When the army moved on, if it isn't disbanded and sent home like the militia, well, then you would be out of it."

"My friends in the army, and Packie, too, they all think the British will be back and soon. The fight is not over."

"I fear you are right about that, but you have done more than your fair share. There are others who have not yet taken up arms. If the British come back, they will have to carry the burden of the fighting."

Tad nodded in agreement. "That is true, and they are already beginning to do that. I saw men from Maryland in camp. They are coming in from the other colonies. There's men from Pennsylvania and New York."

"Yes, I have heard that," Mr. Stelle said. "I had hoped that we would end this fighting with a reconciliation with the king and parliament, and with a full recognition of our rights, but I fear things have gone too far for that. I think our only two choices may be independence or utter defeat."

"That's the way most of the men in the army see it, too," Tad agreed.

"Well, there is no way we can solve this problem tonight," Mr. Stelle said. "We should get some sleep. We have a great deal of work to do when the sun rises again. Up the ladder with you! I'll wait until you are safely aloft before I snuff out the candle."

Tad got up. He felt better now after talking to Mr. Stelle even though the problem was still a long way from being solved.

"Good night, sir," Tad said as he climbed the ladder.

"Good night, Tad," Mr. Stelle replied.

As Tad climbed to the loft, Mr. Stelle wet his fingers and pinched out the small flame atop the candle.

There was much bustling about the kitchen early the next morning, and Tad awoke when he heard Mr. Stelle striking flint against steel to make sparks to set the small pieces of wood in the fireplace to blazing. He could hear Mrs. Stelle's big wooden spoon working against the sides of the cooking pot as she stirred the porridge. He knew that if he lay abed much longer, he would hear the tea kettle singing when the flames in the fireplace brought the water to a boil. Before that happened, he was climbing down the ladder to begin the new day.

Mrs. Stelle's cheery greeting met him as he climbed down into the kitchen.

"The porridge will be ready by the time you get washed up for breakfast," she said. "I hope you got enough sleep. Judging by the candle, you must have set up awhile last night."

"Yes, Ma'am," Tad replied. "I wanted to use the polish Packie gave me to make the drum look better."

Packie entered from the work shop, his hair tousled and his eyes in need of a good rubbing to remove the last bits of sleep from them. Mr. Stelle came in from the back porch with an armload of firewood for the fireplace.

Mr. Stelle was impatient to begin the day's work. There was the proclamation to print. He and Packie would do the press work while Tad set type for the auction poster.

"I hope there is a shipment of paper coming soon," Mr. Stelle said. "We will be nearly out of paper when we finish these two jobs."

Packie saw the French drum and how it shined.

"I see you put me polish to good use," he said to Tad. "I haven't seen your uniform since you came home. You need to keep it brushed and cleaned, too."

Mrs. Stelle looked at Packie. There was a flash of anger in her eyes that quickly went away as she said, "I have taken care of the uniform. It is put away deep in a cupboard. It is his clothes for printing that are of concern now. He is going to need some new clothes, I think. He has grown an inch at least."

Tad laughed. "My clothes that I had before going off to the army do seem a little tight."

Mrs. Stelle moved to ladle the last of the porridge in the cooking pot into Tad's bowl.

"I do not understand how you could have grown," Mrs. Stelle said. "I think your army tried to starve you half to death."

The light in the work shop was good. The sun was shining, and Tad found that his fingers were able to easily handle the small pieces of type. Mr. Stelle and Packie worked at the press, and sheets of paper were soon hanging so the ink could dry.

They looked up from their work when the front door opened and the bell jangled.

In came an officer in the American army. He was dressed in uniform and wore a sword in a scabbard attached to his belt.

"Ben!" Tad cried out. "Come in."

Tad hurried over to where Ben was standing just inside the door. Mr. Stelle and Packie followed Tad.

Tad introduced his father and Packie to Ben.

"Tad has told us much about you," Mr. Stelle said. "We owe you many thanks for your looking after our boy."

Ben smiled. "I think sometimes that it is just the other way around. Tad is the one who looks after me."

"Come, let us take a break from work. I am sure that Mrs. Stelle can find some tea and cookies for us," Mr. Stelle said.

"I cannot stay but a minute or two," Ben said. "I've got a lot of work to do. The army is on the march!"

Mrs. Stelle was watching from the kitchen door, and she wasted no time in bringing the water to boil for the tea and putting out cookies on a tray.

As Ben sat down at the table, he saw the French drum over by the ladder leading up to the loft.

"I see you have your drum polished and ready to go." Ben said.

"I think I've got two more days before I have to report back to Colonel Whitcomb," Tad said.

Ben shook his head. "There's been a change in plans, I'm afraid. You are no longer assigned to the 6th Massachusetts regiment. You are back in headquarters again."

"I don't understand," Tad said.

“You are a very popular drummer boy,” Ben said. “Several colonels have requested that you be transferred to their regiments. And, you made quite an impression on Colonel Knox that night when we gave the British lines a good cannonading.”

“Was that the night Tad was hurt?” Mr. Stelle asked.

“So it was,” Ben replied. “Tad was helping push the cannon back into firing position. A cannon ball came in from the British and struck the wheel. A piece of the wheel hit Tad. Happily, he recovered quickly.”

Mrs. Stelle looked sternly at Ben. “Tad is too young to be put into such a dangerous place.”

“I agree with you, Ma’am, but in our army there are many young boys like Tad.”

“And very young officers, too,” Mr. Stelle said with a smile. “How old are you, lieutenant?”

“I turned nineteen in April,” replied Ben.

“And you are on the staff of General Washington, right?” Mr. Stelle asked. “What a young army this is. It seems like it is a children’s army.”

Tad laughed. “There are plenty of old men, too. My good friend Jed, the boy who spent the night here when we sneaked into Boston before the raid, his father and his grandfather are both in the army. And then, there is Sergeant Grumley. I couldn’t guess how old he is.”

Ben agreed. “Sergeant Grumley has been around a long time. He may have a few years on him, but he’s one of the most reliable men we have.”

“A strange lot for an army,” Packie said. “You will never be able to face the British army in the field, though. But, I am not so sure the British army can face you people when it comes to shovels and picks. The rebels are like no other armies I have faced.”

Ben took a quick look at Packie. “You were in the British army?” he asked.

“I was a soldier in his Majesty’s army for twelve years, but no more, sadly enough,” Packie replied.

Tad could see that Ben was alert and saw his friend’s hand drift down to his sword hilt.

“Packie is the British drummer I told you about,” Tad said quickly. “He’s the one who taught me how to play the various calls.”

“How is it that you did not go back to Halifax with the army?” Ben asked.

“Why, I would have, except the British army and I separated, we did,” Packie said with a smile. He thumped his peg leg on the floor to help make his point.

“Are you a deserter?” Ben asked.

Packie rose angrily from his chair. “Deserter? Oh, my, I should say not. I never missed a hard duty in all my years with the army. No, it is to one of your cannonneers that I owe my present state.”

Packie moved away from the table and waved his peg leg in the air so Ben could see it.

“That’s why I am no longer in the British army, and if it weren’t for the Stelles here, I’d be sitting on some street corner with a tin cup in me hand and begging for a living.”

Ben quickly rose from his chair and bowed slightly as he said, “I do apologize, sir. I did not take notice of your leg. You do get around very well, I am happy to see.”

“Gentlemen, gentlemen, please sit down. Your tea will get cold,” Mr. Stelle said.

Mrs. Stelle nodded. “There will be no using of my kitchen as a battlefield.”

Both Packie and Ben were pulled up short by Mrs. Stelle’s firm declaration of peace at the kitchen table. Tad smiled, and Mr. Stelle chuckled.

“Yes, of course,” Ben said. “Mr. Packie is now a former British soldier, and Tad has told me about how Mr. Packie here risked his life to help Tad escape from Boston.”

Tad quickly agreed, “That is true, and Packie also helped David, too.”

“There’s the truth of it,” Packie added. “And that David was a Sons of Liberty boy, and then we faced each other on Breed’s Hill.”

Ben stood up. He bowed to Mrs. Stelle and said, “Time is growing short. I must be on my way.” He turned to Tad and said, “Remember, you must report tomorrow, first of all to Colonel Whitcomb’s headquarters, and there you will be able to catch a wagon ride back to army headquarters. We are marching to New York.”

Mrs. Stelle raised her hand to object, but before she could speak, Ben snapped his fingers.

“I almost forgot. I have a letter for you, Tad. The pretty Dutch girl from New York who is staying at the Riddles came by army headquarters and demanded to see General Washington. She wanted him to make sure you got this letter.”

Ben laughed as he handed Tad the letter, and then added, “She is surely a determined young lady. She had everyone, including a few colonels, hopping around headquarters.”

Tad felt a blush coming on, and he hoped it wouldn’t be as bad as he knew it would be.

He took the letter from Ben and mumbled, “I’ll read it later.”

“What’s this about a Dutch girl from New York,” Mrs. Stelle asked. “How old is she? Who is her family?”

Packie laughed, and Mr. Stelle had a twinkle in his eyes.

“When you told us about David staying with the Riddle family, you seem to have forgotten to mention a certain young girl. What is her name?”

“Molly, Molly Van Zandt,” Tad replied. At this point, he wished he was facing ten British cannon by himself if he could just get out of this situation.

“Oh, there is one other matter of interest,” Ben said as he put on his tri-cornered hat.

“There’s more?” Tad asked in a low voice.

“Yes,” replied Ben. “I stopped by the Riddles yesterday and talked to Mr. Riddle. He said that he believed there would be a wedding in June.”

“A wedding?” Mrs. Stelle asked, her voice betraying a certain anxiety.

Ben nodded. “Mr. Riddle said David and Emily were talking about a June wedding.

“David? He’s just a boy?” Mrs. Stelle protested.

“David is seventeen now, I believe,” Ben said. “And Emily is sixteen. They will do well. David will take over the family leather business someday, I’d expect. Of course, it means that David will never shoulder a musket again, but I doubt that he was ever going to be strong enough for duty in the field, anyway. He has never really recovered from being in the prison ship.”

“Well, if it means he is safe from fighting, then it is indeed a blessing,” Mrs. Stelle said firmly, and then she added, “And the Riddles sound like a good family.”

“I must be off now,” Ben said, and then turning to Mrs. Stelle, he doffed his hat, “Ma’am, I thank you for your hospitality.” He then put his hat back on his head and turned to Packie. “I wish you good fortune in your new life here.”

Packie stood and saluted. “I think I’ll make a good American, once I get the hang of it, sir.”

Ben turned to Mr. Stelle and bowed slightly. “My respects to you, sir,” Ben said.

“And to you, lieutenant, and our thanks to you for looking after Tad for us.”

And then Ben was gone and behind him, he left a very silent room. The news that he brought was disquieting to all and especially for Tad. The letter from Molly had been embarrassing, but that had passed. Tad could not feel any of the blush on his face. There could be no putting off the problem he had thought about for days. Now he must make a decision, and he really did not know what to do, how to decide. Should he stay with the Stelles, or should he march off with Washington’s army to face a possible British invasion?

Mr. Stelle finally broke the silence. “Tell me, son, what do you think is the right thing to do?”

“I do not know,” Tad replied, and as he spoke, he felt tears forming in his eyes, and he brushed them away with his sleeve.

“He is too young to go marching off to war!” Mrs. Stelle said sharply.

Mr. Stelle shook his head. “Tad has been a soldier for almost a year now. He has been a good soldier, of that I have no doubt.”

Mr. Stelle paused for a moment, took off his spectacles, held them up to the light and peered at them as if looking for smudges on the glasses. Tad had seen Mr. Stelle do that on occasions when he was collecting his thoughts, or trying to find the right words in his mind.

Mr. Stelle put his spectacles on and stared at Tad.

“We will be all right here. I’ve got Packie to help. You must consider the future as well as the past. Moreover, the British might come to their senses and not return. Or, if they do return, the matter may be settled soon. Either way, you can then return here with honor.”

Mrs. Stelle started to speak, but Mr. Stelle held up his hand and she remained silent.

“I have no doubt,” Mr. Stelle continued, “Whatever the future of this land, it must be determined by young men like Ben and yourself, and David, too. I understand this, but I am old enough to weep in the night because I know there is often a great price to be paid, and it always seems to fall upon the young to pay that price.”

Tad did not know what to say in reply to Mr. Stelle. He could feel the spirit in his father’s words, but he really did not understand them. He did not understand, and yet, he somehow felt their meaning.

There was silence and again, it was Mr. Stelle who broke the quiet moment by turning to his wife and saying, “Mrs. Stelle, I believe you should see to Tad’s uniform and kit. He will be needing it tomorrow.”

Tad felt a sense of great relief. Mr. Stelle’s words made the issue clear enough. Tad knew that he wanted to go with the army, but leaving the Stelles again was very painful. They were his parents even though he and they had different last names. He knew he owed them more than he could ever repay.

It was not easy for him to explain just why he felt it right to go off with the army to New York. He had close friends in the army. He had heard much talk about liberty and what it meant. And, lately, there was a growing desire to see some of this country. He had learned that Massachusetts was much larger than he had ever imagined. There was talk among the soldiers about faraway places. He had not realized that the thirteen colonies were part of a great continent. He was curious about these lands and in the army he might get to see some of them.

“Tad? Tad?”

He looked up. Mr. and Mrs. Stelle and Packie were closely watching him.

“Are you all right?” Mrs. Stelle asked.

“Yes, Ma’am. I was just thinking. Part of me wants to stay here, but I believe that I should march with the army.”

“We calls it campaign fever,” said Packie. “Once spring comes, there’s always a campaign.”

“Are you really sure, Tad?” asked Mrs. Stelle as she dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

“Yes, Ma’am, I think I am.”

“The matter is settled,” said Mr. Stelle firmly. “We had better look to preparations for tomorrow. Besides, the day has all but slipped away, and the light will not be good for printing, anyway.”

Mr. Stelle and Packie put tools away and cleaned ink from type on the press. Mrs. Stelle set to work making cookies which Tad could take with him. That gave Tad a chance to slip out to the back porch.

Once he was alone, he pulled Molly’s letter from his pocket and opened it.

It was a brief letter. She wrote that her uncle was coming to take her back to her family in New York. She hoped that they could meet once more before she set out for her home. She signed the letter, "Your very, very best friend in all the world, Molly."

Tad carefully folded the letter until he had it down to the smallest he could make it. Then he took a piece of string and tied it to the locket he wore on the gold chain around his neck. There, it would stay along with the little snip of yellow hair in the locket.

Tad did not sleep well that night. He woke up several times, thinking it was time to arise and begin the day.

Finally, after breakfast, Tad stood at the front door of the print shop. He was in his uniform with his blanket roll across his back and his drum strap across his other shoulder. His tri-corner hat was firmly set on his head, but with a little tilt so that it favored one side of his head more than the other, which had become a fashionable way of wearing the hat.

Mrs. Stelle hugged him as best she could what with all his equipment and drum.

"Oh, be careful, Tad. Come back to us." She had tears in her eyes, and Tad had to fight hard to keep his own eyes from forming tears.

"Yes, Ma'am. I promise to come back," Tad said.

Packie stepped forward and adjusted the drum strap for Tad.

"You'll be marching on this campaign," Packie said. "Mind your feet. Take care of your feet, and they will take care of you. If you get a chance, wash them good now that the weather's not so cold. And, don't end up like me. I need sandpaper to clean one of me feet."

Mr. Stelle shook Tad's hand. "The last time you left us to go join the army, I was able to give you a gold coin to take with you. Now, I have no gold coin to give. What we have to give is our love for you and our prayers that you return safely."

"Yes, sir," Tad replied. "And, now, goodbye to all. Don't worry. I'll be back soon, I'm sure."

Finally, it was over, but Tad still felt dampness in his eyes and a lump in his throat for several blocks as he walked to the barracks.

Colonel Whitcomb was coming out the door of his small office as Tad approached.

"They have taken you away from the 6th," said the colonel. "I tried hard to keep you, but it was of no use. There's a supply wagon over by the warehouse. You can catch a ride back to headquarters. Take care of yourself, young man."

"Yes, sir," Tad answered. He saluted and Colonel Whitcomb smiled as he returned the salute.

It was a short walk over to the supply depot. There was the wagon, just as Colonel Whitcomb had said, and sitting up on the driver's seat was Sergeant Grumley.

"They said I was to have a passenger riding back with me," Sergeant Grumley said. "I might have guessed that it would be ye. Stow the drum and kit in the back and climb on up."

Tad stowed his drum and gear in the back of the wagon and climbed up and sat down on the driver's bench beside the old sergeant.

"Well, ye do look like a soldier boy," the sergeant said. "I thought ye might decide to stay home and be a printer."

"I thought about it," Tad replied. "When this is over, I guess that's what I'll do. Sometimes, though, I think I'd like to see some of this land we are fighting for."

"I know what ye mean," Sergeant Grumley nodded. "Been hankering to go off to see that land they call Ohio or maybe Kentucky."

They rode in silence, the old man and the boy lost in their thoughts about the future.

Soon they would be part of the army marching down to New York. It would be a long march for New York was over two hundred miles away. They thought they might meet the British again on the field of battle and both were confident that the American cause would prevail.

What they did not know was that the British were gathering a mighty force to come against the Americans. The British were gathering the largest army and with more cannons and warships than the new world had ever seen. And, not only were the British coming, they had soldiers from a German state called Hesse. The Hessians would be in great numbers, also. This combined force would seek to crush the American Revolution, and they would strike a terrible blow at New York.