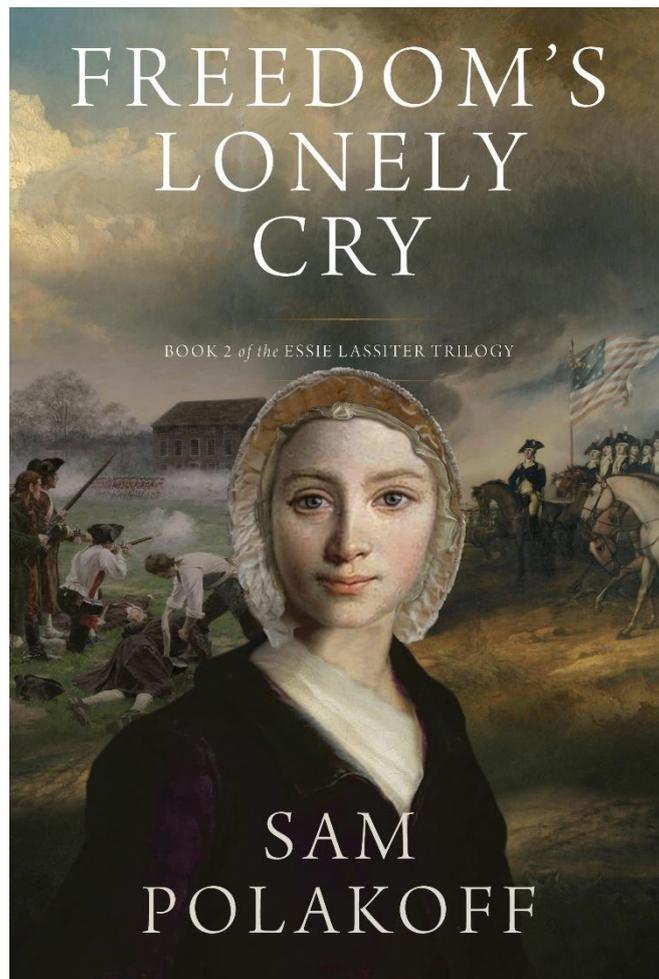


**PRE-PUBLICATION
SNEAK PEAK**

This excerpt has not been copyedited
July 1, 2025



Proclamation

This book is a work of historical fiction meant for entertainment only. The author did not write this novel with the goal or intention of historical accuracy. The story employs a combination of real and imagined characters. The author based some events on actual occurrences, while creating others from his imagination to enhance the reader's enjoyment.

8 July 1776

On a humid summer's morn in New York, General George Washington gathered his troops. Sitting high atop a magnificent white steed, he unfurled the parchment from his blue coat and read the Declaration of Independence for all to hear. His men responded with cheers. The loyal Patriots who listened on the periphery joined in. Following the recitation, a dozen Patriots in Battery Park lassoed the towering statue of King George III with chains and brought it to the ground. Later, the Continental Army melted down the British symbol of monarchist rule and produced 42,000 musket balls.

1776

Chapter 1

Cromwell, Maryland

It was so quiet you could hear a spider climbing the pulpit. Essie sat on a couch in a room off the sanctuary and she penned the latest entry in her diary. A year had passed since the Battle of Cromwell. General Washington and regiments led by her husband, Colonel Aquila Wright and his closest friend, Colonel Charles Greene, drove the Redcoats from the town. The vain attempt to seize the hospital for militaristic strategy failed. King George III now doubled down on England's attempt to quell the American revolution, and British soldiers once again dotted the streets of the town.

New music by Handel acquired by Pastor Vinson was Essie's real reason for being at church on a Thursday. As the church's lone harpist, Essie willingly fulfilled the pastor's request to play the music at Sunday morning's service. Having perfected the music, she sat with Penny, who was deep into a Fielding novel. The clock struck twelve bells. Her stomach rumbled aloud. Penny, eager to have a little brother or sister, lovingly chastised her.

"You are with child and mustn't ignore the needs of the womb. You should always carry an apple or crumpet."

Essie, being a midwife and a nurse, didn't need to be reminded of such fundamental advice. Despite her awareness, amidst the busyness of her days, she often disregarded her stomach's rumblings. Guilt befell Essie as she looked down at her belly. The developing bulge amazed her. The town seamstress had been most gracious in expediting the delivery of larger clothes to accommodate a figure changing as fast as the town itself.

Everyone took a side. British loyalists or Tories were the people who supported England's monarchy and the attempt to rule over the newly established United States of

America. The Tories decided not to attend the Cromwell Church founded by Aquila's grandfather. Patriots dominated the church. The Tories ventured to the Anglican Church in Baltimore, a carriage ride of two to three hours. While The Declaration of Independence brought the colonies together into a formal union, it also drew a sharp divide among its citizens. There was little common ground and neighbors who were formerly congenial turned surly and withdrawn.

Pastor Vinson emerged with cornbread baked by a parishioner. He was a bachelor, and the ladies of Cromwell adored the elderly clergyman. Essie gracefully accepted the cornbread and applied a thin layer of strawberry preserves that Pastor Vinson kept in the church's small cupboard. The food was delectable.

"I hadn't realized how hungry I was until I began eating," Essie declared to the beaming clergyman who reveled in helping others.

Famished, Essie consumed the pastor's cornbread like a hungry wolf attacking a rodent in the woods.

"When will Aquila return home?" Pastor Vinson inquired.

Essie wiped a crumb from her mouth. The pastor pointed to her chin with a sheepish expression. Essie blushed as she dabbed a handkerchief to her face, removing the residue of strawberry jam.

"Forgive my rudeness. The way I am eating, one would think I hadn't done so in days." Essie replied. Then she recalled the question he'd put forth. Essie was prone to prattle on, forgetting the subject at hand. "The last I heard; Aquila was in Brooklyn with General Washington. I have had no word of his return."

"I do hope Father is alright," Penny said.

Being without her father was challenging for a girl nearing fifteen. Penny and Essie had formed an even tighter bond since the hospital room wedding a few short months ago. Essie was a mere thirteen years older than her stepdaughter and only six years younger than her husband. The relationship between Essie and her stepdaughter felt more sisterly than parental. They told each other everything.

Essie took one last bite of the cornbread and gripped her stomach. Doubling over in pain, she crumpled to the floor.

“My God, Essie, are you alright? Did the cornbread make you ill?” Pastor Vinson asked. The older man kneeled beside Essie, unsure of what to do. Finally, he yelled, “Penny, quickly, run to the hospital and bring Dr. Clarke or Dr. Van der Beek at once!”

The young girl fled the church and Pastor Vinson held Essie’s hand, tenderly patting it. “Stay put. I may have some sarsaparilla in the cabinet.”

She lay still, doubled over in pain. Before the pastor returned, Essie reached down between her legs and was horrified to find her hand awash in crimson.

Chapter 2

The Battle of Long Island

A bayonet rifled through his innards and left him gutted. The fallen soldier resembled a hog in the slaughterhouse. Colonel Wright observed the death of Jeremiah Barnes with disdain. He had lost the most prized infantryman in his regiment. The damn British, he thought. What will it take to see them pack up and leave America to flourish? Barnes had been fighting on the front line. These were the men who were the bravest, the ones Aquila assessed, would afford the American side the best chance to prevail. From a distance, atop his horse, Aquila noted Barnes writhing in pain on the ground. He blanched at the sight of the man's intestines and the volume of spilled blood from the open wound. Barnes was from Aquila's hometown of Cromwell. Aquila knew the family well. He vowed to personally write a letter of condolence to Barnes' parents. But first, Aquila faced a decision he detested. One borne of war that forced men to perform acts of treachery in the name of mercy. He would need to ride toward Barnes and place a bullet in his skull. The wounded were too many to count. Once the battle subsided, the field medic would assess who he could save. For Jeremiah Barnes, no hope of recovery remained. Even if the battle ended forthwith, the wound was too severe.

Aquila waved his right arm to the second regiment, ordering them to attack with fervor. Once he could determine a proper path, he would make his way toward Barnes and perform his act of mercy. Aquila watched as the second wave made their way forward with muskets and pistols at the ready. A cannon blast diverted his attention. He cocked his head hard left and observed six men in the second regiment falling backward. The British cannonball struck its target! Aquila shook his head in despair. They were taking heavy losses. Patriots had their own cannon, but the enemy outnumbered them by a ratio of four to one.

The prospect of victory was bleak. Aquila turned back to see if he could make his way to Barnes but was aghast to see a British officer charging forward with his men to command the battlefield. Aquila sighed heavily as the front hooves of the British officer's horse trampled the remains of Jeremiah Barnes.

Chapter 3

Cromwell, Maryland

Through bleary eyes, Essie saw the lanky figure of Dr. Timothy Clarke duck under the door frame leading to the church's back room. His baby face peered down upon her as she fought the weight of her heavy eyelids. Timothy sounded like he was speaking from the rear of a cave. His words echoed through her brain, making comprehension difficult.

"Pastor, I need you to pick up Essie's feet while I support her head and shoulders. We will move her to the cart outside."

Essie floated through the sanctuary like a gull by the seashore. The church's wooden rafters were but a blur as her body danced effortlessly on a cloud of air.

"Be careful down these stairs," Timothy instructed as Pastor Vinson moved backward down the steps leading to the street. "I've got a mattress in the cart. We shall place her upon it for the ride to the hospital."

After she was in the cart and the wooden tailgate secured, Essie gazed at the billowy clouds and lavished the cool breeze of the northern wind.

"I shall gather Penny and we will meet you there," proclaimed the distressed voice of the old clergyman. Pastor Vinson had become her surrogate father since she arrived in Cromwell from England three years prior. He had saved her time and again.

Timothy mounted the carriage and Essie soon heard the familiar clip clop sound of hooves pounding a path down Main Street to the hospital. Essie could hear Timothy's baritone voice call out to passersby, "Clear the way! Medical emergency."

Dr. Henrik Van der Beek was waiting for them outside the hospital entrance. Essie could hear Henrik's frantic steps rushing toward the back of the cart.

"How is she?" Henrik asked frantically.

Timothy wiped his arm across his forehead. He was drenched in sweat. "She has lost a lot of blood. The baby . . ." And he stopped speaking for fear of further upset.

The tailgate lowered, and Henrik climbed in. He placed his hand on her head, displaying the love they all felt for Essie. With great care, he hoisted her shoulders and helped Timothy move her from the cart to the street. As they carried her toward the hospital entrance, Essie could make out the big, bold lettering on the sign that bore her name.

The Esther Wright Hospital

"Let's bring her into the main operating theater," Timothy said.

Essie grabbed hold of Henrik's hand as they lay her on the surgical table. "Save my baby," she pleaded.

Henrik's face betrayed his words. He replied in his Dutch-accented voice, "We will do all we can."

Essie again fought the urge to sleep. As a midwife, she wanted to help the doctors as best she could. Her voice was stilted. Her thoughts remained unspoken. Still, she heard pieces of the doctors' conversation as they worked to save her.

"We could cauterize the area," Henrik suggested. "I could heat a metal rod in the fire pit behind the hospital."

Timothy shook his head. "No, if we do that, Essie will never bear children. I know she wouldn't want that."

“It may be out of her hands,” Henrik replied. “Her life is in danger.”

Timothy again relieved his face of perspiration. “Once the placental fluids have passed, we can elevate her lower half to quell the blood loss, and then apply a botanical solution. This will give Essie her best chance to live while saving her reproductive abilities.”

Henrik remained unconvinced. “Till sunset. If your treatment does not yield results by then, we will have to cauterize to save her life.”

“Agreed,” replied Timothy.

No longer able to fight the urge to sleep, Essie drifted away on a turbulent sea reminiscent of her long journey from England. The currents took her up, then down, and caused a wave of nausea. Essie wanted to have Aquila’s child and to be by his side until they both grew old. Now, these desires were in peril. She gripped the sides of the table with both hands, praying she would live to see tomorrow.

Chapter 4

New York, New York

As ordered, Aquila appeared promptly at 7:00 am. General Washington used the top floor of the Madison Hotel as his temporary quarters. Once Fort Lee was complete, they would move there or to Harlem Heights. Aquila saluted, stood at attention, and awaited permission to ease his posture. General Washington rose from behind a weathered pine desk and extended his hand. Aquila took it and, his grip unwavering, George Washington locked eyes with Aquila. His steely eyed determination softened, Aquila thought as the leader of the Continental Army spoke.

“I received a dispatch during the night. It was from Mrs. Greene in Cromwell. It’s addressed to you. Believing it to be a military report, I opened it and read it. You have my sincere apologies.”

Washington handed him the dispatch. The apology shocked Aquila. Why should Washington feel compelled to offer regret for opening a simple dispatch? Responsible leadership demanded that he do so.

Aquila unfurled the rolled parchment and read the letter from his dear friend, Celia Greene.

Dear Aquila,

I pray this letter finds you safe and in good health. Essie has lost her baby. This, I assure you, was an act of nature, unforeseen and unpreventable. Melancholy has reared its ugly head, but fear not. Between Penny, Hazel, and me, we are tending to her body and spirit. Essie requested I do not inform you of this unfortunate occurrence, but, as your friend, I believe you should know.

Celia

P.S. If you see Charles, please extend my undying love.

Distraught, Aquila wished to conceal his emotions from General Washington. Try as he might, his hand trembled, and the dispatch fell to the floor. General Washington approached and placed his right hand on Aquila's shoulder.

"Martha had four children from her first marriage. We have none of our own. I cannot imagine how you must feel."

Aquila gathered himself and embraced his commanding officer. "Thank you, Your Excellency. It is hard news to bear. I appreciate your support."

"A leave would certainly be in order," replied the General.

Aquila hesitated, unsure whether he should accept Washington's gracious offer or stay the course. Finally, he stated, "Essie is in good hands. She has her friends Celia and Hazel, and of course, our daughter Penny, to look after her."

"Very well. I am not at liberty to discuss the matter, but soon I may require you to take on a new post, one that could result in returning home to Maryland and points further south.

"Yes Sir. Whatever you require of me, I shall do."

Aquila was ready to retreat from Washington's headquarters. He exhaled and thanked God his beloved was alright. The melancholy would fade. Treasured friends like Hazel and Celia knew how to pull Essie through the dark. He turned to leave.

"Aquila, before you go, I understand you are intending to resign from the Congress."

“Yes, General. It has been the greatest honor of my life, and I hopefully will serve again one day in the future but, one must choose how to allocate time. I have concluded I can serve our country more effectively by assisting you in the field.”

“And Charles Greene feels the same way?”

“Yes, that is accurate.”

“I commend yours and Colonel Greene’s courage to make the difficult decision. Doing the right thing is not always the easiest path.”

Aquila was about to reply when his nose twitched.

“Sir, do you smell that?”

“I do,” Washington replied as he hurried to the open window of The Madison.

Aquila joined the general by the window. Immediately, the consequences of war were beating down on the Continental Army. Across the street, four buildings were ablaze. A strong wind gathered, rapidly spreading flames. People streamed into the street, screaming, choking, and clutching their loved ones and prized possessions.

Springing into action, Aquila declared, “Your Excellency, I will alert the troops at once!”

“Save the armaments. Let’s rendezvous at dusk across the river at Fort Lee.”

Barreling down the hotel stairwell, Aquila burst onto the street, aghast to witness every building on the opposite side of the street on fire. He shielded his eyes to quell the smoke’s evil fingered touch. The strong wind would make the fire uncontrollable. Finding a lieutenant from his regiment choking, he draped his arm around the young man and pulled him to safety behind The Madison. They sat on the ground. Aquila took the measure of the

distressed man. His face had blackened from smoke and falling debris. Aquila observed no overt burns.

“Catch your breath, Lieutenant. I need you to alert the men. Get everyone to the armament storehouse. I need you to move everything across the river to Fort Lee before we lose everything.”

Coughing, the young soldier found his strength and rose, replying, “Yes, sir.”

“I shall meet you at the armament storehouse forthwith. There we will round up every boat and barge we can to move men and materials.”

On the street, orange embers flittered downward, landing on other buildings of wooden construct. Aquila observed in horror as the embers settled and burned, giving birth to new flames and more destruction. A woman fled a burning structure, running toward him. He heard her plea. “My boy. My boy is still inside.”

“Where?”

“In the manager’s quarters at the rear of the first floor. My husband runs the hotel. He left early this morning to run an errand. My boy is still inside. The smoke was so thick. I tried but . . .” She choked on inhaled smoke. “I couldn’t find him. Please help!”

Aquila noted the hotel across from The Madison. Fire consumed the building. Aquila raised his right arm to shield his eyes from the smoke while trying to find an opening. Not seeing one, he measured the odds of success, judging them slim and none.

“Is there a door in the building’s rear?”

“No, just a window.”

“Wait here.”

Aquila ran through the narrow passageway between the burning hotel and its neighboring building, which had just caught fire. He found his way to the hotel's rear face and saw the window to the manager's residence. A young boy, perhaps four or five years old, was trying to raise the window from a smoke-filled room.

"Stand back and cover your eyes," Aquila commanded of the boy.

Then he took his elbow, protected by the blue coat he wore, and thrust it into the window. Removing the coat, he used it to brush aside the broken glass from the ledge.

"Come to the window. Stand on anything you can and raise your arms toward me."

The boy did as he was told. Aquila placed his muscular hands under the boy's outstretched arms and pulled him to safety. He shook off his coat to release any remaining shards of glass and wrapped the boy underneath the heavy blue cloth. Clutching the bundle to his breast, Aquila ran through the alley onto the main street and delivered the child to his mother.

"Make your way to the river. Catch a ferry to safety," Aquila instructed. Then he turned northward and jogged through the frantic crowd to the armament storage area.

Who could have started this? He wondered.

New York City was burning. There was no hope of saving it. Aquila came to a sudden halt. Running through the inferno, his uniform clung to his body. Beads of sweat stung his eyes and plumes of dark smoke whipped up by the wind made it difficult to breathe. He clutched his chest and felt his knees buckle as he dropped to one knee and gazed at the firestorm enveloping the stronghold the Continental Army needed to hold if independence was to be secured. He rose to continue his journey to help save the armaments, and a drop of perspiration ran down his cheek. The tiny bead of moisture escaping his eye was a tear, one

that reduced his tenor to the same rubble as New York City. Was he crying for the lost city and the people who would lose so much? No, Aquila reasoned. He was grieving for his unborn child, who would never live to see the new nation so many sacrificed so much for. Aquila had saved a young boy but regretted being denied the opportunity to rescue his own child. Had he not been away, perhaps Essie would not have endured the loss. Had he been there, he could have picked her up and carried her all the way to the hospital she founded. There, Dr. Clarke or Dr. Van der Beek might have reversed the fatal course of events. Exhaling, Aquila shed a tear for his beloved Essie. What she must have endured!

Alone amongst a sea of displaced people, Aquila ran to his destination. Saving the republic was a step toward returning to Cromwell. Once home, he vowed he would wrap his arms around Essie and Penny and never let go.

Chapter 5

London, England

Lord George Germain hoisted the ale, reveling in each sympathetic sip. His secretary and chief aide, Bartlett Connington, sat across the table with his quill, waiting on the next instruction. The pub catered to soldiers, mainly the military crème de la crème of London. Germain wasn't sure why he continued to frequent the establishment. He asserted his right, disregarding customer animosity. It had been seventeen years since the Battle of Minden, but he feared he might never live down his transgression.

Germain ran his index finger the length of his long-pointed nose, a feature he was reticent to embrace. People had mocked him since he was a mere lad playing on the streets of London. His so-called friends at Trinity College were unmerciful. Yet, it was Germain who now turned his nose to those who disrespected his authority. They resented his success.

His head itched. He resisted the urge to scratch. The damned wigs. So uncomfortable. Germain took another swig of ale and addressed Connington.

“These fools sneer at me, but it is I who shall have the last laugh. They revere Howe, Clinton, and Cornwallis.” He pounded the oak table with his fist, causing the ale to splash over the side of the stein. “I will set the fools straight. These field generals in America will rue the day they mocked the strategic instincts of Lord George Germain.”

Connington quivered in fear, unsure of whether to respond. Finally, in a shaky voice, he said, “You are the Secretary of State for America. It seems the decisions are yours to make.”

Germain smirked. “That’s what Lord North said when he appointed me to this position. And let us not forget that Lord North, as the Prime Minister, answers only to King George, who has restored my good name to the rolls of the Privy Council.”

A drunken officer sneered at Germain from the next table. “Hey Sackville, you sack of dung, you have no right to drink in a military pub. Refusing orders in the field is an unpardonable sin. Leave, you insubordinate leach.”

Germain turned his head toward the drunken man. Far less inebriated than his antagonist, Germain had control over his mind, body, and actions. He would do nothing rash. He expected such garish behavior from uninformed louts. Before he could respond, Connington took up his defense. “What is your name, sir? You are speaking to Lord George Germain, the Secretary of State for America.”

“I know who the bugger is. Changing your name and assuming a hereditary title doesn’t change what he did at The Battle of Minden.”

“I will see to your court martial,” Germain scolded.

“Well, you ought to be familiar with that,” the drunken officer mocked.

Germain did a slow burn. After refusing the order to charge the French in the Battle of Minden, his superiors discharged him and sent him home to England. Later, he was court martialed upon his own request. Seeking to clear his good name. While found guilty and removed from King George II Privy Council, he was later quietly reinstated when King George III came to power.

Germain drew in a deep breath. “Have your drink and sleep it off. You are of no consequence to me, or the Kingdom you profess to serve.”

Germain rose, turned his back on the drunkard, and left the pub, more determined than ever to halt the American Revolution.

Chapter 6

Fort Lee, New Jersey

Aquila huddled with his men in the nascent fort in the northernmost part of New Jersey. They were safe, for now. General Washington had ordered them to stay put until he returned from New York. With the loss of New York City, holding their positions at Fort Washington, White Plains, and Harlem Heights was essential to the Continental Army's odds of success. Aquila instructed his men to help those who worked to complete the fort, uncertain of their stay's duration at Fort Lee. While construction continued, Aquila took stock of the armaments General Washington ordered him to save. Aquila lamented that three cannons and a cache of **Pennsylvania rifles** were left behind in the haste to flee the burning city. Still, they salvaged what they could.

Aquila was restless. Eight days was a long time to remain idle when a war was ongoing. Perhaps the patriots needed his help to hold the remaining forts in New York City. Should he send a dispatch to General Washington offering his assistance? No, he concluded. Aquila wished to be seen as obedient in all matters regarding military strategy. As the senior officer stationed at Fort Lee, Aquila recognized the importance of maintaining a foothold in north New Jersey. This was especially prudent should they lose the battles in Fort Washington, and Harlem Heights. The patriots suffered heavy losses in the New York City fire and the battle of Long Island. British warship brought more men and armament down river from Canada. Aquila worried that America's lonely cry for freedom was falling upon the Lord's deaf ears. How, he questioned, could a merciful God allow so much death and destruction in the fight for what is just?

Bracing himself for a prolonged pause from battle, Aquila left the armament storage shed and went to check on the construction progress.

“Colonel Wright,” called a young infantryman on horseback. “I have an urgent dispatch from General Washington.”

His senses heightened, he grabbed the rolled parchment from the soldier and began to read:

Aquila,

I have recommended and Congress has agreed, that to win this war, we will need a navy. The ability of the British to inflict damage by sea is daunting, to say the least. This advantage must be met with the greatest effort possible. General Benedict Arnold has been assigned the task of building our sea force and I am ordering you and your men to the camp at the southern end of Lake Champlain. You are to assist General Arnold in procuring materials and overseeing construction. Your men will assist boat builders and craftsmen in felling trees and patrolling the shores in reconnaissance.

This is a critical mission. As you know, the British have a stout navy. Ours contains the sole captured ship from the failed invasion of Montreal, a 12-gun schooner named the Royal Savage. The rest must be constructed with haste. I entrust in you this task of strategic importance and I thank you for your dedication to your country.

Yours truly,

General George Washington

Washington was entrusting him with an important task serving under the leadership of the heroic General Arnold. For sure, Washington was relying on Aquila’s vast construction experience in Cromwell having built grist mills and Maryland’s first hospital. His enthusiasm sparked to new heights, Aquila sent his chief aide to round up the troops. They were off to Lake Champlain.

Chapter 7

London, England

The dank musky odor in his Whitehall office bothered Lord Germain's nose. Nicer working quarters were reserved for Cabinet members held in higher esteem. Upon registering his displeasure with the office to his boss, Prime Minister North, he was informed that Whitehall's temperate conditions were similarly present in all of the building and that he was not the victim of a conspiracy. Germain sneezed and blew his elongated nose with the ever-present white handkerchief. He deserved better. He was, in his own humble opinion, misunderstood. His intellect was superior to most of the imbeciles Britain called leaders and heroes. Still, the Battle of Minden continued to haunt him. The recent mockery in the pub was not an isolated occurrence. Thank God, Lord North saw enough in him to provide domain over the feckless generals he had in the field. Clinton, Burgoyne, Howe, and Cornwallis were good enough as field generals but strategists they were not. Carleton was more interested in being governor of Quebec. The only one he truly trusted was Preston G. Willard. He was older, more experienced and had the battle scars to prove it. Willard had seen it all. No one knew how to tamp down the enemy like Willard. France knew all too well having succumbed to numerous defeats in the Seven Years War. The only man to offer a sympathetic ear after the debacle in Minden was Willard. He was anything but the prototypical British military leader. He could think for himself and expressed his opinions freely even when it flew in the face of conventional wisdom. Knowing he needed to suppress the rebellion once and for all, Germain could think of no one else to lead the effort.

"It's freezing in here," complained Lord Germain to his meek assistant. Undismayed, Connington threw another log on the fire. The cold, dank office in the far reaches of Whitehall always disappointed. Too cold in the winter. Hot and muggy in the summer. Once

the American campaign was complete and the rebels were quietly back in the fold, he would petition Lord North for better quarters.

“Where is Willard?” Germain bellowed.

“The general should be here any moment, Sir.”

Germain huffed and blew his nose. Then he heard the thunderous footsteps of an extremely large man. When he looked up from the interminable pile of documents on his desk, he observed the menacing figure of the man many regarded as the greatest military mind in recent British history. General Preston G. Willard towered in the doorway. His head was only a few feet from the top of the doorframe and the man’s girth nearly filled the entry. As Germain wiped the tip of his nose, he peered into Willard’s steely brown eyes and wondered if there was a soul within. Germain chuckled to himself. When Willard finally spoke, it was the first time his mouth could be observed. The bushy gray mustache and beard covered it completely.

“You summoned me, Lord Germain,” the giant man stated in a voice marred by the pains of war and decades of grog.

“Yes General. I wish to review the current state of the American affair and then deploy you to New York.”

“In what capacity, Lord?”

“Why, as Commander-in-Chief, naturally.”

“As you know, I am willing to serve in whatever capacity required in service of the Crown, but you already have many able bodied generals in the colonies. Howe, Clinton and even Cornwallis and Carleton could assume the mantle.”

“True enough,” Germain sneered. “None of them has your record of military acclaim nor the ability to adjust strategy on the fly.” Germain stood and began pacing back and forth, a lifelong habit he embraced when needing to articulate a plan or ponder in times of strife. “We control New York City and recently ousted the rebels from their camp in Fort Lee, New Jersey.”

Willard looked down at Germain. The Secretary of State for the American Department understood why subordinates and enemies alike feared this imposing figure. Without saying a word, he instilled command. When he did speak, no one dared question his word. Not even Germain.

“We are not engaged in a prizefight. This is war. Class and decorum have nothing to do with it. In my view, it has already dragged on too long,” Willard stated.

Germain gathered his courage. He did not wish to demonstrate timidity in front of General Willard. He was sure Willard could sense his anxiety. Despite the cold air in his dungeon of an office, Germain broke out into a sweat and wiped it with the same handkerchief he had used to blow his nose.

“Needless to say, the colonial rebellion must cease forthwith. The sacrifice of New York City proved to be a viable strategy to clear the city and its waterways of the rebel forces. The city, under British control, can be rebuilt to serve as a stronghold with which to separate the northern colonies from their southern brethren thus rendering a divide and conquer strategy.” Germain stopped and blew his nose. The air in his office never failed to aggravate him. “You are to rendezvous with Generals Burgoyne and Carleton and move troops south from Montreal. Battalions led by Generals Clinton, Howe and Cornwallis are to isolate the American forces from joining in or around New York City. I believe it prudent to simultaneously attack the Massachusetts colony. Securing Massachusetts and New York City

will cripple the rebels and enable a swift conclusion to the war. Your leadership is of particular import.” Germain sneezed. Again removing the linen handkerchief, he wiped the tip of his nose and continued. “Many have advised that the Richelieu River terminating at Lake Champlain negates our naval strength. I beg to differ. You must act accordingly to preserve the integrity of our naval advantage in the Hudson. I trust you will employ the shipbuilding strategy we spoke of when we last met.

“You needn’t worry. I know exactly how to proceed,” Willard said confidently.

“Your bravery and leadership in the Seven Years War is unparalleled. The capture of Canada established what should have been a stronghold for our forces to prevail in America. The current leadership on the ground does not have the military prowess to end this infernal conflict.” Handing Willard a sheath of documents, he continued. “These are your orders. You leave on the next ship out. End this war in good time, General Willard and you shall be handsomely rewarded, I assure you.”

Willard departed and Germain paced in contemplation. This was the only logical move to make. The field general currently in command posts held Germain in low regard. Germain could not condone leaders for whom there was no mutual respect. Willard was a brute, but he would honor authority. He could be trusted to bring victory home and make Germain look like a genius.

Germain shuffled through the sheath of documents enveloping his worn and weathered desk. He placed a small leather pouch to his nose and sniffed the fine tobacco imported from the Maryland colony. Taking a pinch, he placed it inside his pipe and tamped it down before using his burning candle to light a small piece of rolled parchment to light the pipe. Germain treasured the sweet smell of the tobacco. He waved his hand back and forth to clear the smoke from his eyes. In an odd way, the pipe afforded Germain a sense of scholarly

intellect. Sitting alone in his musty office in Whitehall, he imagined himself at the London Gentlemen's Club, the most private of such establishments, being heralded in a collegial manner for squashing the American revolution with nothing more than his brain and his thumb. Satisfied, he sat back in his creaky wooden chair and watched the smoke spiral toward the ceiling.

Chapter 8

Cromwell, Maryland

“Both legs, saw below the knees . . . now! Before it’s too late.” Essie heard Timothy’s directive to his colleague, Henrik and their young charge, Dr. John Robinson. Despite her experience as a midwife and less-than-eager surgical nurse in the throes of war, Essie detested the horror of poking through men’s insides. It was all so needless. War. Amputations. Death. Political disdain was the root of it all. As long as men had egos and their associated pigheaded pride, the prospect of war was safe. Women were much more reasonable. And smarter. Essie sat in a rocker in the hospital lobby and wondered how she could make a difference. In America, people yearned for the freedoms spelled out in the newly authored Bill of Rights. The freedom to live, love and pray as one saw fit while honoring the choices of one’s neighbor, even if those choices differed greatly. England, on the other hand, espoused none of these principles. In Essie’s opinion, the proximate cause of the American revolution was ego, pride, and greed. The King wanted to rule the world, and his subjects would comply with the monarchy’s preservation of historical norms and even it’s whimsical view of the future.

A light sweat broke out across the bridge of Essie’s nose. Her stomach cramped. She had advised many a woman on the aftermath of losing a child during pregnancy. This was the first time she experienced it herself. She rolled her hand gently over her abdomen and closed her eyes, willing the discomfort to pass. Her legs felt as if she had fallen and landed on a sea of sharp-edged pinecones. Suddenly, a cool cloth pressed against her forehead and dabbed at her nose.

“Hazel, the hospital is so busy. I thought you might be pressed into nursing duties.”

Hazel had assumed most of Essie’s responsibilities as the hospital administrator.

Her best friend threw her a warm smile. “I am nursing someone in need right now.”

Since befriending Hazel on the treacherous journey across the sea to America, they had become inseparable. “Can I get you some peppermint tea to calm your stomach and your mind?”

“Yes, but only if you shall join me?”

“Of course, I’ll return shortly, and we can talk. You appear troubled.”

Essie closed her eyes and rocked gently. The doors to the hospital swung open every few minutes with another emergency. She wanted to rise and help ease the pain of the sick and wounded but she had nary the strength. She was reduced to calling for nurses or doctors and attempting to ease the frayed newcomers. The clip-clop of approaching horses thundered through her brain, a constant reminder that theirs was the only hospital within a hundred miles. In many cases, by the time injured soldiers reached Cromwell, they were nearly expired from travel and lack of proper medical care in route. There had to be a better way.

Hazel returned with a small tray, the kind we used for patient meals. On top sat two bone colored clay mugs filled with steaming tea. The scent of peppermint relaxed Essie as Hazel sat down beside her in a hardback chair and they both inhaled the pleasing aroma.

Essie ceased rocking and sat up straight. Her sweat had given way to chills and the hot tea warmed her immediately.

“Now, tell me what’s on your mind?” Hazel inquired.

Essie sighed. “It’s a jumbled mess if you must know. My mind races from losing the baby to reuniting with Aquila to trying to be a mother to a teenaged girl. And all the while, I sit helpless here in the lobby while you and others are furiously moving about in attempts to aid the sick.”

Hazel put her tea on the small oak table between them. Placing her hand on Essie's arm, she lovingly squeezed. "You've been through so much. It's no wonder your mind is aloft."

Essie's face relaxed. She sipped her tea and swallowed slowly, savoring the taste and its pleasing scent. "And if that's not enough, with Aquila gone indefinitely, I am running Cromwell's Passage. It is not easy to keep up with the needs of such a large estate especially for a woman of my station."

"Your former station," Hazel gently corrected. "You have a new life here. You have climbed the social strata ladder, and you have risen to the occasion. Do not doubt yourself. You are a true wonder!"

Blushing, Essie waved her hand as if to say Hazel showered her with undeserved accolades. "I am still finding my way through this new life. I mean, can you imagine? The house I shared with my first husband in Wickhamshire would not have filled the stable at Cromwell's Passage."

Laughing, Hazel replied, "You mean to say the horses in Maryland live better than the people in quaint English villages?"

"I know ours do," answered Essie. Hazel was such a dear friend and always knew how to make Essie laugh when the moment was called for.

"What else is troubling you?"

"Laid up as I am, I sit here in the lobby and watch men stream through those doors. As long as the war continues, it will never stop. Many are beyond assistance due to the lengthy distance they must travel over rough terrain. There must be a way to bring medical treatment closer to the battlefield."

“Isn’t that what field medics are for?”

“Of course, but they have limited resources and can only do so much. Often, they must choose who to save and who to let go.” Essie waved an exasperated arm in a circle to emphasize her point. “Can you imagine the plight of the field medic? One poor sod per battlefield, trying to treat dozens of wounded amid battle. It’s preposterous.”

Hazel blanched at the notion, her face crinkling as she responded. “How dreadful.”

They sat in silence for a spell and then Essie brightened.

“I know that look,” Hazel proclaimed. “Your mind is conjuring some sort of scheme, isn’t it?”

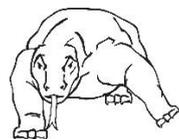
Essie merely grinned. She sipped the last of the tea and said, “I’m feeling much better. I think I shall write a letter.”

“To who?”

“My dear friend, Benjamin Franklin.”

No publication date has been set for this novel.

Check back often at <https://komododragonbooks.com>



KOMODO DRAGON BOOKS