

SACRED HONOR

by Lillian Cauldwell

Chapter One In the Beginning

On 2 September, 1776, the Second Continental Congress, including Delegates Dr. Franklin and John Adams, listened to General Sullivan's message from General Howe.

“Since I now hold all of Long Island, I am empowered by King George III to offer you a peace settlement. However, since I don't recognize your assembly as official, I respectfully submit that you elect a committee comprised of private citizens, and then I will discuss the King's terms.”

Congress deliberated for four days. On 6 September, 1776, the assembly elected Dr. Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and John Rutledge to represent them and confer with General Howe about the King's terms.

“Took their damn time in deciding,” Adams, frustrated with Congress' inability to deliberate faster, said to a rather placid Franklin.

“What's the fuss? Good decisions require lengthy sessions. Keep that in mind and you'll sleep sounder at night.”

“A pleasant thought. Here's one more thought for you. Printer Dunlop approached me earlier this morning, agitated and remorseful.”

“Dunlop? What has his apprentice done?”

“The original copy of the Declaration of Independence is missing. His assistant insists that it wasn't him. Now, Doctor, what kind of decision does this action call for?”

Dr. Franklin continued sucking on his long stemmed pipe as he returned his attention back to the *Pennsylvania Evening Post*.

“Did you hear me? Printer Dunlop told me where he stored that original, and it's gone.” Adams paced the chamber, hands clasped behind his back. The other delegates talking amongst themselves ignored him, considering him a troublemaker.

Dr. Franklin withdrew his pipe from wrinkled lips. “Are you sure? His apprentices deny any involvement with it?” He shrugged. “No matter, we have other original copies.”

“It doesn't make sense,” Adams insisted, stopping and standing right in front of Dr. Franklin. Unperturbed, he removed his pipe a second time.

“General Washington passed along to the Safety Committee a report from one of his spies on the movements of that Woburn man who escaped the Sons of Liberty in New Hampshire last May.”

Dr. Franklin took another puff, blew out several rings, staring Adams down as if quieting and patting him on the shoulder like a favorite dog. He buried himself in the newspaper. Adams resumed his pacing, lips puckered, as he pursued his dark, stark thoughts and imagined wrongs.

1792 Carpenter's Hall Same Day of the Month

Impressive building, Benjamin Thompson, late of Woburn, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and London, England, thought as he mounted the wooden stairwell that led into Carpenter's Hall. He noticed numerous men with some escorted ladies milling in the main chamber. An opened door, off to the left, seemed to attract a lot of people, so Thompson followed faithfully behind them.

In the room's center, a wooden and glass case stood. Several people crowded around it as if studying or even examining it. Thompson ambled up to the cabinet and peered down into the case. A document rested flat against a velvet cushion. It's title read “The Constitution of the United States of America.” Though interested in what the document implied, Thompson didn't believe a single word of it. Like the Magna Carta, it was a novelty and yet, even he recognized, that most Americans would set great store by it, some day.

“Want a better look?” Thompson pushed himself away from the cabinet and looked up. A plain, mousy woman held a stack of parchment in her hands.

“We're giving free copies away so that all citizens can read this historical document and understand how a great nation is conceived and nurtured.”

He accepted a copy, and unimpressed, scanned it's contents. Word for word it reminded him of some of John Locke's outlandish principles, but he knew that a natural order existed and that everything had its place. This Constitution obstructed that order. He rolled it up and placed it into his pocket. Leaving the Hall, he took out his watch fob and checked it against the Hall's tower clock. Both chimed the hour, and he left, hurrying to his carriage.

Once inside, he removed the rolled document and stuffed it in between the seat cushions. And with that, it was no longer of any concern. Thompson concentrated on his ultimate victory, his theft of the Declaration of Independence.

**2176 Carpenter's Hall,
Philadelphia
The Assembly Room**

The trip from 1792 to 2176 didn't take long. He was annoyed that the original Declaration carried only a few of the delegates' signatures on it and his disappointment forced him to travel further into the future to acquire a more complete version.

Inside the building that he had so recently left in 1792, Thompson noticed that not too many things had changed. The building's structure was the same, but the wood was now splintered and its white paint peeling.

Thompson climbed the same stairs, although, they were now firmer to his legs and didn't buckle from his weight. At the door, a young girl met him, dressed in colonial style clothes and her hair tied back with a big, fat red bow. As he followed her directions, he entered the main assembly room where the old wooden case still stood, except there were guards standing in all the corners of the room.

Annoyed, he banged his silver handled cane on the floor. One guard glanced over at him, but left him alone. A few young children stared, pointed or even giggled at him, but their mothers restrained them from going up to him and asking silly questions.

He looked away and saw that the other guards yawned behind their fists, their bored eyes briefly making contact with him as they scanned his colonial- style powder blue frock coat, white ruffled shirt, blue satin breeches and his black patent leather, silver buckled shoes. One of them, more intrigued than the others, allowed Thompson the courtesy of coming up and asking him a question.

“The Declaration of Independence, where is it?”

The guard pointed with a bony finger. “If you follow the double red and blue lines, it will take you directly into the inner chamber where it's on permanent display. The brochures are on a stool by the door.”

“Bro-chures?” Thompson's flat, faintly British accent startled the guard. “Help yourself. If you have any questions, feel free to ask. We're here to accommodate you.”

“You are most kind,” Thompson said and strode out to the hallway following the double red and blue lines exactly. In the hallway, an alarm shrieked as he and all the other visitors froze in their viewing positions. The guards ran out into the hall and checked each room connected with it. Thompson watched them as they hurried by, pistols half cocked in their hands, their faces anxious. As each room was declared safe, they raised their thumbs up. One guard herded him back into the main room.

Amused, he waited. The children whispered and were instantly hushed by their mothers. All the children held hands. Eventually, the guards drifted back into their corner's position.

“A false alarm. Someone tripped the motion detector. No harm done.” The mothers gathered their children and moved towards the other exhibits in the room. Curious, he followed one determined mother who read all the wall plaques to her children so that they would understand the significance of the building and its documents. Idly, Thompson flowed with them, sitting on benches when they did, rising and examining the exhibits one by one. Somehow, they all landed in a small octagonal room dominated by a large, wooden pedestal with a multi-layered glass cabinet. Behind the glass walls was the Declaration of Independence. He studied the engrossed signature: Charles Thomson, Secretary of State, John Hancock's outrageous Presidential signature and 56 Delegates names. Thompson counted them, satisfied that he had found a completed original of the Declaration.

He waited as the children, with mouths wide open, fidgeted and wriggled as their mother read aloud that The Declaration of Independence birthed a new nation, conceived in liberty, and that all men were created equal. Bored, they scampered off while their mother, teary eyed, leaned over the exhibit. The guard caught her just in time.

“No, ma'am, that will set off the alarm. Here, take the brochure.” He shoved it into her hands and pointed her towards the gift shop.

“You can buy a framed copy and take it home for the kiddies.” Embarrassed, she mumbled her thanks and stumbled away. Thompson sniffed, but the guard ignored him. Another seeker of the American way, the guard thought, and left him in his adoration of the Republic. Each crazier than the last. He snickered. The guard left the room, leaving the seeming pop-in-jay by himself.

Thompson set his cane against the pedestal, removed two jewelers' tools from his pocket and laid them on the marble floor.

Remembering his last conversation with Lord George Germain in London before he sailed to the colonies, Thompson reviewed the words and actions that finally convinced Lord Germain that he was serious. Appointed by his Majesty, King George, III, as Officer in Charge of the American colonies, Lord Germain received him with a summer's cold; coughing and sneezing into an immaculate white monogrammed handkerchief. After Thompson declared his suit, Lord Germain was unimpressed.

“I don't believe it. I've read nothing in the trade journals about it.” “It's something that I recently built after many experiments with electricity. It works. Let me show you.”

Thompson removed from his pocket a large leather wallet. Opening it, he withdrew a miniature carriage with two carved horses.

Lord Germain bent over his desk, steepled his fingers and peered at the contraption that Thompson placed on his desk. He saw that carriage's inside was decked out in green satin upholstered seats and tiny glass paneled doors. The two horses held dainty metal bits in their mouths and tiny leather reins were attached to the carriage. The toy caught his attention immediately.

Examining it, Lord Germain removed a knotted rope from his desk and measured the carriage. It was roughly ten by three by four inches. He shrugged his shoulders.

Thompson ignored him and saw that a pedestal was attached to the desk. He placed the carriage with the horses on it.

“Let me set it ... ten minutes into the future.” He pushed several levers. A low humming sound invaded the chamber. Bluish white light exploded around them as the carriage and part of the pedestal disappeared from sight with a pop. Germain sat upright and rubbed his eyes.

“A child's game, I assure you,” Thompson said. Dumbfounded, Germain stared at the empty spot. “In God's name, where did it go?” Leaning forward, he shoved his hands through the air. “I can't find them. Ouch!” His hands jerked back. “Merciful heavens!” He lifted his fingertips to his nose and sniffed. “I burnt myself.”

Thompson rose from his seat and quickly grabbed a soft cushion from a window box seat. He turned and placed the cushion on the partial pedestal shelving. Lord Germain followed every movement.

“Expecting that carriage with the horses and the pedestal to reappear soon? I doubt it.”

He sighed, drumming his fingers on the desk. Thompson paid no mind to Lord Germain's rambling. Instead he focused on the cushion.

Germain crossed his legs. “You've made your point, sir! Shall we continue with our discussion? I have no time for parlor tricks.”

Still, he remained silent and examined the contents of his chamber. His landscapes and portraits were intact upon the walls. Only that carriage with its two horses and part of his pedestal were missing.

Thompson ignored him, but concentrated on the pedestal. Lord Germain studied him. Bushy eyebrows that connected to an aquiline nose, scraggily red hair; was this man a charlatan or a dreamer? Undisturbed, Thompson watched as Lord Germain fidgeted.

“I don't understand what you're trying to prove. I saw it disappear, but it's got to be here. Where else would it go?” and Germain shifted in his seat. “I have a right to know if I'm financing your expedition.”

Another white light showered them and was followed by an insect-like drone. The carriage reappeared with the remainder of the pedestal and graced the cushion. Lord Germain stared wide-eyed at Thompson.

“My intentions are to travel into the future, steal the Declaration of Independence with all 56 Delegates' signatures affixed, and return with it, giving you the Declaration so that the colonies will lose their rebellion.”

This time Lord Germain didn't dare interrupt him. He hadn't expected rational explanations to his questions, but before he pledged his and the King's support, he must extract all relevant information.

“Time is critical. The King will require proof. When can I receive it? All 56 signatures must be on that document before we can stop the Rebellion and hang its ringleaders.”

“In 1774, the rebellion would've started, but the conspirators were not solidified as yet.”

“When can you leave?”

“I require one day to settle my affairs and arrange passage on an outgoing sea vessel.”

“How will I know you in 1774? Your activities in Boston are not common knowledge and the Home Office wants to keep it that way.” Lord Germain half smiled.

“A mutual acquaintance whom you already knew, in 1774, perhaps?” Thompson suggested.

“Yes, I know someone who will oblige me. When she reports in, I'll send her along.”

“Splendid.” Thompson stood up and put his carriage and horses back into his leather wallet, then put it in his pocket. Lord Germain wasn't finished.

“You'll recognize Betsy by a section of golden strands amidst her auburn hair.” Germain sighed as he breathed deeply into his perfumed handkerchief. This signaled the end of Thompson's interview, and he left knowing that Lord Germain was interested in spite of his qualms and lack of faith.

Thompson came back to reality sneezing and half witted, and reached for his cane. A guard strayed into the chamber and pointed to his watch.

“Ten minutes before closing,” and walked away. Feeling the cane brought him back to reality and he picked up his jewelry tools. Examining the case, Thompson moved as close to it as he dared. He noticed thin hairline cracks around the glass and realized that the alarm would go off if tampered. Frustrated, he put his tools away and took out his leather wallet from his pocket. Thompson removed the carriage and reviewed his options. Looking beneath the cabinet, he saw that six inches below the encased

Declaration was an ornate carved wooden ledge. Thompson saw that the carriage would just fit into the alcove. Biting his lips, he set the date and placed the carriage far into the alcove so that the guards wouldn't notice it.

No alarm sounded. He pushed the primary lever down.

Chapter Two
Bennett Air Field, Headquarters
Jamaica, Long Island
13 October, 2276

Huey stood at the top of the stairs and looked down into the abyss of the Library Archives. Grabbing the banister, he clumped down the stairs, motion lights activated with each one of his steps. He entered the Archives and shivered from the chilled granite stone blocks that encircled him like a mummy in a sealed tomb. Huey switched on the overhead lights and glanced around. Long, supple wooden dowels hung in mid-air suspended by chains and rocked as the clean air blower disturbed them in their final resting place.

He walked to the first metal file stack and read the neatly printed index cards that listed the city, state, and date when that particular newspaper had been published. Stepping in between the aisles, Huey searched for twenty minutes before he found the index card he wanted: Historic Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2176.

Lifting the *Philadelphia Inquirer* from its pole, he brought it to a beat-up wooden conference table. Placing it flat on the table, he carefully turned its plastic laminated pages.

In Section Two, Business Reports, two bold headlines caught his attention: “Right Before the Guard's Eyes” and “Desolation Sweeps the Country.” Pulling up a chair, Huey straddled it; buttocks firmly encased between the two armrests. He rested both elbows on the table.

Philadelphia, PA, 2176, A 20 million dollar security system with state-of-the-art-security alarms failed to prevent an original copy of the Declaration of Independence from being vandalized last night.

Carpenter's Hall Historic Museum opened its doors at 9:00 a.m. to families, school groups and political researchers for visiting and viewing the many historical exhibits of portraits, documents and recreations. No suspicious activities were noted or reported.

Midmorning two false alarms went off when zealous patrons leaned over the sonic fields guarding the showcases, but no malicious intent was reported by the security guards.

The Museum's policy is to post a twenty-four hour guard to protect the inner galleries while guards under a federal government contract patrol the grounds continually. At night our precious Documents are stored in an underground vault north of the City.

Museum officials tell us that ten minutes before 5:00 p.m., a man dressed in colonial apparel was seen loitering near the Declaration of Independence display in the Octagonal Room, recently dedicated this fall. When the alarm tripped for the second time, five minutes before five, the security guards sealed off the area and inspected the premises. There was no sign of forced entry or break in via the domed skylight. The only clue left was the one-third framed section of the Declaration, which remained inside its sealed, laminated, ballistically tested glass case.

In the photo, guards point to the exact spot where the Declaration once hung in its entirety above the ornate, wooden and marble shrine constructed in the early part of the twenty-second century.

The Museum's historians have recreated the document by computer generated copy and can show us which sections are missing; namely 46 out of the 56 Delegates' signatures and the most important words significant in today's world: We, Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in GENERAL, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude... FREE and INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political Connection between them and the State of Great-Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as FREE and INDEPENDENT STATES, they have the full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce and to do all other Acts and Things... And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor. Signed by ORDER and in BEHALF of the CONGRESS, JOHN HANCOCK, PRESIDENT. ATTEST: CHARLES THOMSON, SECRETARY. PHILADELPHIA: PRINTED BY JOHN DUNLOP.

The rip in the page was so sharp that investigators believe that the theft was engineered by a high tech group, though the Police Commissioner believes that a hate group, responsible for breaking and entering other historic sites, is responsible for this break-in too.

Huey mused over his finding. He couldn't understand why just the Delegates signatures and that one portion of the Declaration were missing.

Disturbed, he returned his attention to the second newspaper article and noticed that it was a copycat version of the first one, except that in this article, the police had questioned no one nor had they introduced any suspects. The colonial-dressed man was never found, nor were there any leads on him. The FBI's only suspect was that man and he was nowhere to be found. They only had the guard's story and nothing else.

Was there a connection? Huey shook his head. He re-affixed the newspaper onto the pole then returned his attention to the other item he sought. He couldn't find the remaining original copies of the "Dunlop Broad sides." There were twenty-five in all. Maybe Joseph had found some clues in the Archives. Huey went back to the main

stairwell and cupping his hands, shouted, "Joseph?" Huey waited, "Joseph? Are you there?" Joseph's head twisted into sight.

"Did you find anything?"

"I found one listing."

"Good! Bring it up and let's take a look."

Joseph skipped up the stairs. He hugged a worn leather portfolio under his left arm. Huey leaned forward and grabbed it. Greedily, he opened it and removed several pieces of discolored parchment. Maybe these documents could tell him where the remaining 25 original copies of the Dunlop Broadsides would be.

In another part of the building, Abidemi Black entered the Wait Stall area before her on-again, off-again friend, Mark Monsanto, arrived. Dressed in black leather jeans, an organdy halter top and recycled tire boots, Abidemi strutted like a peacock whenever she could. She swiveled her head to see if anyone noticed her grandiose entrance, but the stall remained empty. Sighing, she dropped her shoulders and her jauntiness disappeared. Slumping into an overstuffed couch, with feet swinging, Abidemi waited for Mark to make his mean entrance.

Mark arrived five minutes later, out of breath, his camouflage uniform in full disarray. He sat at the far end of the Stall, as far away as he could get from Abidemi.

"Wonder what Huey wants ... this time." Abidemi called out as way of greeting him.

"Probably the same thing he wanted from you the last time we met, except you refused on the grounds that it might humiliate you."

Abidemi bristled "Did not humiliate me!"

"Whatever."

Abidemi dismissed him and concentrated on counting the contraband (thermite charges and rifles), she would've sold and monies collected. It lulled her into somnolence and she caught herself with a start. She mustn't fall asleep on the sofa or she would never hear the end of it from Mark.

"It's probably your fault," Mark remarked. Abidemi sweated. Memories of her recent initiation into Miriam Haleen's government-run street gang, The Mechanics, haunted her. The official black, red, and purple bangle beads were still strung tightly around her neck. Miriam had shoved some white and gold bangles up her arms and at the last minute, snapped on two imitation tennis bracelets around both of her ankles, making Abidemi look like a bejeweled snake. She had kicked and scratched back, but Miriam was too strong and shoved her into a concrete wall, punching and pinching her. On top of that,

the Rat Patrol appeared and caught her as she tried selling black market rifles and plastic bombs to The Regulators. The whole mess had blown up in her face and Abidemi became Miriam's whipping boy. Huey imprisoned her in the Lock Keep for the night and notified her grandmother, Mbakondja Black, to come and get her in the morning. The next morning, not only did she scold her, but also confined her to Black National Towers for the remainder of the semester, another five months, another sort of jail.

Miriam, who was also taken by the Rat Patrol, endured no such ordeal, since the Rat Patrol recognized her as one of Huey's minions.

Mark broke her reverie and twisted the screw further in. "Remember what Mbakondja implied about Huey and Miriam?" "I wouldn't have gotten caught if you hadn't squealed on me. What's wrong with joining? Everyone's doing it, except maybe you, mamma's boy."

Mark crouched into his seat, his soft hands covering his face. Abidemi chuckled, adding, "None of Mbakondja's platitudes and dead heroes for me. It didn't work for her and it sure ain't gonna work for me!"

"The Rat Patrol brought you in and they have a lousy reputation. Miriam would sooner see you dead than alive. She'll probably lay the blame on you. I know her game and so should you by now."

Joseph Chow walked into the Wait Stall area as Mark threw his verbal one-two punch at Abidemi. He glanced from Mark to Abidemi.

"Getting a bit chilly in here?"

They ignored him. Joseph worked for Huey, but no one feared or respected him. Both Abidemi and Mark turned away from Joseph's sudden entrance. He continued speaking, anyway.

"Huey will see you separately. Abi," She hated his nickname for her. "Abi," he repeated, "Go in and ..."

Before she left, Joseph moved in closer and detained her. Stretching his hands forward, he unclasped the multi-colored bangles from her throat and arms, and lastly, removed the two tennis bracelets from her ankles.

"You look so much better without all that stuff on you." He pushed her towards Huey's office. "How come he's seeing us alone?" Mark whined behind the cover of his hands. Joseph stared at his posture and took in his disorderly hair and less than spic-and-span uniform.

"Less you know, the better it is for all concerned."

“Huey's got a job for us?”

“He's got an assignment for you. An easy one. Do it well and ...” Joseph shrugged his shoulders. “Graduation for you and a reprieve for Abi if she follows directions and obeys orders.”

“Does Mbakondja approve?” “Not your business,” Joseph said, nervously rearranging the military and naval magazines on the racks. He leaned against the opposite wall from Mark and studied him.

Inside his office, Huey watched as Abidemi swaggered in. “Close the door and pull up a stool.” She slammed the door shut, pulled up a chair close to his desk, and plopped into it.

“What do you want?” and tried staring him down. “As if you don't know.” “What did Mbakondja have to say?” “The usual, but she doesn't scare me.” “How many demerits do I get this time?” blinking her eyes rapidly. “It depends.” “On what?” “I want you and Mark to pull a job for me. Accomplish it within the defined time limit and you're both home free.”

“Mark Monsanto? You're kidding. That chump?!”

“Better than five weeks solitary with bread and water.” Abidemi leaned forward and gripped the edge of Huey's desk. “I want you and Mark to travel by train to Historic Philadelphia and get a document for me. Generations ago it was called the Declaration of Independence.”

“The Declaration of wh-a-a-t?” “A paper written by some American colonists who desired freedom from an out-of-date government.”

“Totally useless. I know someone who's tied to the past and could use a decree like that.”

“Mbakondja,” Huey said and they both laughed. “Describe it,” Abidemi requested. “The text's written on very old paper, parchment, it's called. On the top, in all caps, it reads: IN CONGRESS JULY 1776. Then underneath, the second line says: The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. Underneath, the document starts with these words: When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for a people... and so on and so forth.”

“Just words.” Huey blinked. “On the bottom of the Declaration there are signatures, 56 Delegates' names in all.”

“Where's it stored?” “In the decrepit Carpenter Hall's Museum, which is now considered the war zone between old and new Philadelphia.”

“That tells me squat.”

“Sixth and Walnut. Follow the terminal signs. You'll get there okay. You're in charge.”

“Of whom?”

“I told you, Mark Monsanto. Bring me back that Declaration and you're guaranteed an immediate membership to The Mechanics ... and more.” Huey didn't mention Miriam and Abidemi didn't ask. “Don't worry about your grandmother.”

She laughed in his face. “I never do. She takes care of herself!” Huey studied her. Abruptly, he hit the intercom button. “Mark, get your sweet ass in here.” Abidemi twisted in the chair and stared as Mark minced his way into Huey's office.

“Mister, you'd better walk like you mean it. Tough. Aggressive. Arrogant. You're an elite cadet. Shout it to the world. None of those half-ass, sissy steps here.” Abidemi giggled. Mark glared at her, his fists clenched and body rigid.

“Mark, pay attention. You and Abidemi are going to Philadelphia to get me a document.”

Abidemi clapped her hands. “She knows which document I want. Remember. Your duty is to me, the Overkeeper of the Keepers of the Flame.” Huey glanced down at his digital watch. “Time to go. Here's your tickets. I've cleared it with the Rat Patrol so that you can ride the tubes back to the Island after curfew.”

“Sweet,” Abidemi said, but her enthusiasm dimmed when Mark scowled and twisted away from both of them. Huey watched the dual performance; Abidemi's cocky departure and Mark's sullen retreat.

Chapter Three
City Tavern, Philadelphia
Corner of Second and Walnut Streets
7 September 1776

Dr. Franklin eased his bulk into the great chair by the fire. It was his designated spot and no one ever usurped it. Adams left to go upstairs to write to his wife, Abigail. Dr. Franklin settled in, rested his gouty foot on the stool and huddled closer to the fire, pulling his woolen shawl tighter around his shoulders. He never saw nor heard her coming.

Betsy Freeman, provincially dressed, deposited a pewter mug of mulled cider on the table alongside Dr. Franklin. She watched as he automatically reached out, brought the mug to his lips and took a hesitant sip.

“Is it too hot for you?” Startled, Dr. Franklin hurriedly put down his mug and glanced up. “Betsy! What a pleasure. Come and join me.” She dropped a deep curtsy. “I’m paying off my passage. The kind gentlemen over there,” Freeman turned and waved to a man with reddish hair who wore homespun clothing, “he made it possible for me to stay here.”

Dr. Franklin straightened up and caught the man's eye. Honeyman didn't wave, but politely lifted his glass in a silent toast, and went on eating his meal. Freeman didn't even have the grace to blush.

“Newest conquest?” “Not yet. He tells me he's married and happily so.” She shrugged. “What brings you back so soon?” “London became tiresome.” Dr. Franklin's eyes twinkled. “Your Lord threw you over for another woman?” “What makes you think it was a she? He turns both ways, that one.” “When he's not with his wife.” “Or with me.” Dr. Franklin eyed her. Her clothes never did her justice, but for all their plainness, the material was costly and appealing. He tried another tack.

“Philadelphia isn't a safe city at the moment, Betsy. You should consider New York or returning home to London. You're perceived as a Tory by most of Philadelphia.”

“I've just arrived. If you can't be more fun than this, I'll join my redheaded friend. He's certainly having a good time.”

Hearing Betsy's throaty voice, Honeyman lifted his ale glass although the smile he turned upon Dr. Franklin wasn't inviting. Dr. Franklin slumped into his chair. Peevishly, he stared at the dying fire.

“It's gone out again. Betsy, lend me your strength. Grab the iron and give it a poke.”

Honeyman, noticing that the flames were flickering, drifted over. "Here, let me help." He removed the iron from Betsy's clumsy hands and gave the brands a quick shove. They moved apart and allowed a tiny flame to escape from the glowing wood. Bending over, he grabbed three maple logs from the stack box and arranged them on the fiery embers so that the wood would catch quickly. As a sudden burst of flame engulfed the wood, Dr. Franklin leaned closer in to it, felt its welcome warmth and watched the flames dance merrily up the sooted bricked chimney.

"Better?" Honeyman asked, his attention fixed on Dr. Franklin's trembling frame.

"Thank you. The older I get, the colder my bones feel." Betsy watched Honeyman's administrations closely. She couldn't decide whether Dr. Franklin knew this man or not. Sometimes, it was hard to know. He was such a consummate actor.

"Now that you're here, I might as well introduce you. Dr. Franklin, John Honeyman." She watched as the two men greeted each other warily. Almost like dancing, Dr. Franklin leading while Honeyman, followed. Betsy cleared her throat. Both men stopped their idle conversation and looked over at her expectantly.

"Dr. Franklin was just telling me that Philadelphia isn't a safe haven for me anymore. Is that true? Is New York, better?"

"That depends." Honeyman frowned. Surely, she wasn't that ignorant of recent political and military events. Dr. Franklin mentioned offhandedly that she worked for the Committee of Safety. Why the pretense ... unless she had something to hide?

"It's not so much that Philadelphia is an unsafe city, but between an enforced early curfew and The Sons of Liberty, women shouldn't be out on the streets alone."

Betsy glanced from Honeyman to Dr. Franklin. Why the lie? Colonial women were known for their bold actions and rude speech. Dr. Franklin broke into her thoughts.

"General Washington needs help. What can you tell us about the British? Is Lord Germain still pursuing his hard line of attack against us?"

"He believes that the colonies will fail in their attempt at separation. Not all of the cabinet members agree, but the King refuses to heed them. Hence, Lord Germain will continue his plan to beat the colonies for the King's pleasure."

"Is that all?" Dr. Franklin asked. "I will tell you plainly. The King considers your act of defiance a rebellion, not a revolution."

"He's not taking us seriously enough. Just like Boston Harbor. He's not paying attention," Honeyman said.

“You don't like the British?” Betsy asked him. “I don't trust the British. They're quick to hire foreign mercenaries when they believe it's beneath their Empire's dignity to use their own soldiers.”

He stared down at his calloused palms. Dr. Franklin turned away from him and spoke to the flames.

“I want you to carry some misinformation for me to London. If Lord Germain is determined for war, I think I can oblige him in that area. Honeyman will see you to the Dock. There's a ship bound for Plymouth and I know the sailing master. He'll take you without asking too many questions.”

“What sort of misinformation?” Betsy leaned closer to Dr. Franklin's chair and pushed her ears close to his lips. Honeyman dragged over a nearby screen and positioned it around the two co-conspirators. No sense in inviting trouble.

“Tell Lord Germain that General Washington knows about General Howe's plans for severing the colonies at the Hudson River so that he can capture New York City. He understands that General Howe plans on taking oaths of allegiance from The Island's citizens, preventing them from joining up with the rebels once General Washington recommences attacking the British. He will burn New York City if he evacuates it rather than allow it to fall to the British ... that should give him pause.”

“What about Honeyman?” Betsy gazed at his loitering figure by the bar. “How well do you know him?”

“John Honeyman? General Washington told me that he fought with him during the French and Indian Wars. He was impressed by the British when he was a young man and was appointed as General Wolfe's bodyguard. After the war, he settled in Boston, then relocated to New Jersey. He supplies the British and General Washington's army with fresh beef and horses.”

“Honeyman's an old man.” Betsy probed, “What else?” Dr. Franklin raised his voice. “I believe that Honeyman is secretly sympathetic to the British. Rumor has it that he collects information on our troops and passes it along to General Howe.”

“Funny, Lord Germain never mentioned his name to me.” Honeyman smiled to himself at the bar. Dr. Franklin was certainly laying it thick, he thought, as he slipped out of the room for a breath of fresh air.

On tiptoes, Betsy peered over the screen. Honeyman had disappeared. She squirmed beneath Dr. Franklin's steady gaze. He was the only one who could discomfit her. Betsy seated herself gently on his lap and curled her arms around his neck.

“Miss me?” Dr. Franklin untwined her arms and kissed her. “Maybe next time. Adams will have a fit if he saw us together.”

“I'm not decorous? And Honeyman?”

“He'll take it in stride. He doesn't embarrass easily.”

Betsy wondered about Dr. Franklin's last statement. Maybe he didn't know Honeyman at all and was being polite. Yet her gut told her that he bore further surveillance.

“Here, get me more cider and find Honeyman. I require further speech with him.” Betsy slid off his lap reluctantly, gave him a peck on the cheek and left, taking Dr. Franklin's empty mug with her to the bar. She saw Honeyman coming back into the room out of the corner of her eye and watched as he ambled towards Dr. Franklin. Betsy noticed that Dr. Franklin's face remained serene, but impassive.

Honeyman pushed a chair closer to Dr. Franklin and sat down. “Told her about the general, didn't you? How much did you exaggerate?” Dr. Franklin held Honeyman's eyes.

“Enough to convince her that we're all on the same side of the law.” “British or American?” “Whichever side she convinces herself of...” Dr. Franklin laughed and his entire body shook. “I often wonder whether she doubts me as much as I doubt her.” He glanced towards Betsy as she received the refilled mug back from the tap man. “Here's her passage money and the written draft of our conversation. Take the missive to General Washington and let me know his thoughts. I've heard some disquieting rumors.” The coins clunked in Honeyman's hands and Dr. Franklin leaned back into his chair, closed his eyes and stretched out his one good leg.

He waited by the sleepy Dr. Franklin. When Betsy arrived with Dr. Franklin's mug of cider, Honeyman took it from her and placed it on the table.

Dr. Franklin mumbled, “Thank you, my dear. Have a safe voyage back and write me often. I miss our repartee.”

This time, Betsy's smile was genuine. Honeyman took her by the arm and led Betsy out of the room. Dr. Franklin watched them leave. At the same time Adams entered the room rubbing his hands.

“Ready for supper?” Dr. Franklin, still caught up with Honeyman and Freeman answered crossly. “The King doesn't take us seriously, but he will by God, he will!”