

**T**he rain poured from the heavens as we fled across the mud-flats, that scene of desolation; it soaked through our clothes and bit at the skin with its chill. It fell hard and ceaseless from the heavens as the deluge that had both inundated Deucalion and buoyed up Noah; and as with that deluge, we knew not whether it fell as an admonition for our sins or as the promise of a brighter, newly washed morning to come.

I left all that I knew behind me. Though the ways of the College of Lucidity were strange to the world and the habits of its academicians eccentric, they were familiar to me; and I traded them now for uncertainty and strife. Though I returned, indeed, to Boston, that town best known to me, its circumstances were changed, now that it was the seat of the King's Army and sat

silent and brooding in the Bay. We knew not what we would find therein.

Dr. Trefusis and I stumbled across the ribbed sand. Treading through seaweed mounded in pools, we slithered and groped, that we might retain our footing; and on occasions, we fell, Dr. Trefusis's hands bleeding from the roughness of rock and incision of barnacles.

We wound through the meanders that led between stubbled mud-banks in no straight or seemly course. I pulled Dr. Trefusis out of the ditches where water still ran over the silt. We crawled over knolls usually submerged by the Bay. At some point, soaked, he shed his coat.

After a time, there was no feature but the sand, corrugated with the action of the tides. We made our way across a dismal plain, groping for detail, sight obscured.

But that morning I had been a prisoner, a metal mask upon my face, and my jowls larded with my own vomit, in a condition which could hardly have been more debased; but that morning I had watched the masters of my infancy and youth writhe upon the floor and fall into unpitied slumber, perhaps their bane. A sentence of death might already rest upon my head. The thought of this plagued me—the memory of those bodies on the floor, bound with silken kerchiefs—and I found I could not breathe, and wished to run faster, that I might recover my breath.

Tumbling through the darkness of those flats, revolving such thoughts amidst utter indistinctness, I feared I would never again find myself; all I knew was lost and sundered from me; I knew not anymore what actuated me. We ran on through the night, across the sand, and it was as Dr. Trefusis had always avowed in his

sparkish philosophy, that there was no form nor matter, that we acted our lives in an emptiness decorated with an empty show of substance, and a darkness infinite behind it.

Forms and figures loomed out of the rain: boulders in our path, gruesome as ogres to my susceptible wits, hulking, pocked and eyed with limpets, shaggy with weeds.

We came upon a capsized dinghy in the mud, mostly rotted, and barrels half-sunk. My aged companion now leaned upon my shoulder as we walked, his breath heavy in his chest.

Once, I started with terror at a ratcheting upon my foot, to find a horseshoe crab trundling past in search of a pool, its saber-tail and lobed armor grotesque in the extreme. Dr. Trefusis, wheezing, greeted it, "Old friend."

His amiability to the crab, I feared, was merely a pretense to stop our running. He did not seem well.

We could no longer detect the city, the night was so black, so full of water and motion, so unsparing was the drench. Our senses disorganized, our frames trembling with cold, we calculated as best we could the direction of our town and made our way across that countryside of dream.

Once I was shown by the scholars of the College a rock, spherical in shape, which, when chiseled open, revealed a tiny cavern of crystal; and they told me that these blunt stones often held such glories; that though some were filled only with dust, others, when broke open, enwombed the skeletons of dragons or of fish, beaked like birds. Thus I felt in approaching my city; that place which seemed known stone, but which, when riven after its long gestation, might contain either wonders, or ash, or the death in infancy of some clawed terror.

We found ourselves at the brink of the returning tide. We walked through it without notice, so thick was the very air with water, until the flood reached Dr. Trefusis's knees, and there he halted, swaying. "I cannot continue," said he. "I will return to shore."

Thus his offer; but well did I know that he had no intention of returning to the bank and could not unassisted, did he wish to. I was aware that if I left him, he would sink to the ground and allow the waters to cover him.

I instructed him to climb upon my shoulders.

"I will drag you down, Octavian."

"You have risked your all for me, sir; and it is only right that I do the same for you."

He considered this, and at length, we now feeling the motion of the tide through our legs, said, "When I become burdensome, cast me off backwards."

I leaned down as best I could with the waters rising, and he clambered atop me, clawing at my head and neck for purchase. When he was situated, I stood again and began striding through the returning sea.

I know not whether we miscalculated the hour and season of the tides; whether we had stumbled too far out in the darkness; whether the mud-flats were less passable than they appeared from the shore, flat puddles actually concealing deeps; or whether, had we been able to see the topography of the mud-flats around us, we could have avoided this current by circumnavigation. There was no time to ponder the extremity and futility of our progress. I walked on, clutching the ankles of my shivering tutor.

The water soon was around my waist. The tails of my shirt were licked to the side. By such actions of the tide, at least, I determined the direction of the mouth of the Bay, whereby the water returned; and knowing this, I oriented myself so that we headed, as I figured it, near to due north, so we would intersect with the city, were we not swallowed up by the waves.

The waves came up around my elbows. They slapped at my chest. One beat as high as my neck, and I struggled to remain upon my feet, hitting at the water for balance.

“Saint Christopher carried the infant Christ upon his shoulders,” murmured Dr. Trefusis above my head. “And now, the child carries me.”

“You have carried me often enough, sir,” said I. “Whenever you praised me to Mr. Sharpe, you held my head above the water. For that, I owe you my eternal gratitude.”

“My boy,” said Dr. Trefusis, weeping, and he slapped his hand, clammy and shaking, on my forehead.

This display of sentiment was interrupted by a detonation so loud I stumbled. It was, I perceived, summer lightning cutting through the storm, etching mud and spire.

"No worry," said Dr. Trefusis. "The most excellent place one could be in a lightning storm is stranded in the middle of a wide, featureless plain, chest-deep in water."

"The lightning has at least afforded us a glimpse of the city, sir. It is to our right."

"We will not reach it, Octavian. Throw me off and swim."

"I can do no such thing."

He sighed and tapped my arms. "I hope to meet Louis the Fourteenth again in Hell."

"Do not speak of that place, sir."

"I was but a child when introduced to him. I should like to ascertain if even in the flaming chasms of Tartarus, he wears high-heels."

"Please, sir." I stumbled onwards.

Again, the lightning rolled through the heavens. This time, I perceived something near to us—a dark shape upon the water but a few rods off. I believed it was a boat.

I stalked forwards, the water now risen fully to my chest. The drag upon my limbs was considerable. With difficulty did I make my way across the seaweed beds and barnacled rocks beneath us.

The boat rested upon the waves; and therein, slumped, was a single, cowled figure. There was a lantern before him, fixed to the seat, which illumination touched the edges of objects obscure in their outlines.

The water surged past my swaying frame, and I sought to remain tall as the wavelets teased me.

The cowed figure perhaps surveyed us, or perhaps was hunched in sleep or even death.

"Sirrah," said Dr. Trefusis. "You are in a boat, and we are out of one."

I reached out and seized upon the gunwale of the boat. "Sir," said I, "we must beg your mercy. Might we climb aboard?"

The figure, dimly seen in lamplight, pulled one oar free of the lock and suspended it above my hands, prepared to do violence to my grasping fingers.

"Gentle Charon," said Dr. Trefusis, "conveyancer of the dead, I have obols on my tongue."

The figure made to strike us with his oar.

Rapidly, I translated: "My master offers you money."

The figure regarded us. "Ye," said it, "are a strange kind of fish."

"Never has fish been so eager to be landed," said Dr. Trefusis. "Though not, perhaps, gutted."

"When this fish talks of 'money,' what does it mean?"

"Sums in excess of one crown for passage to the city."

"Describe the excess, sir."

"Two shillings. I offer you a crown and two shillings."

"In fish money. Surely that ain't good human money. Refigure. What d'ye call that in the money of men?"

"In human currency, I should think that an even pound."

"Yart a good, talkative fish, but not strong in sums."

"Perhaps I mistook the exchange," said Dr. Trefusis. "A guinea."

"And two shillings more for not slitting ye and frying."

"Agreed," said Dr. Trefusis. He reached out to grasp the lip of the boat.

Our conductor said, "One other rule, sirs: Ye glimpse my face, and I cut your throats."

Dr. Trefusis climbed aboard. The water was now moving strongly against my chest. My weight being much greater than Dr. Trefusis's, there was some danger of my upsetting the craft as I clambered aboard. Both my tutor and our mysterious captain leaned out over the water opposite to me, that they might right the boat while I struggled over its gunwales. The boat was heavy laden with casks covered in a tarpaulin. I scrambled up, heaved by our captain's hand, and lay panting upon the boards.

Once we were settled, facing resolutely away from our host and his fatal visage, he commenced rowing.

Dr. Trefusis and I huddled side by side, our eyes fixed upon points in the darkness, that we might avoid any accidental glimpse of our captain's features. We heard only his rowing and felt the advancement afforded by his strokes upon the oars. We kept ourselves in silence, in obedience to his dictatorial will.

I know not what his errand, so hidden in obscurity, was that night. After a half an hour, we were approached by a whaleboat, also marked with a lantern upon her, and the two drifted without words until they were joined in comfortable parallel. Shadowed sailor confronted murky oarsman like a levee of the dead. "Gift for your mama," said our shrouded captain. Without further parley, he unloaded his wooden casks from beneath the tarpaulin, and they were received by two figures on the other vessel, which wraiths stowed them under a cloth and produced a purse that they proffered to our host. He took it, said only, "Keep them dry, boys," and began to row away.



The rain had lessened now. The returning Bay was fully in sweep around our prow. It was but fifteen minutes after that we approached the wharves of our interdicted city.

Our revenant rowed to the side of a dock and held it with one hand. "Two pound," he said.

Dr. Trefusis did not argue. He reached into his shirt, drew forth a money-bag, and paid out the sum.

We rose and stepped out of the boat.

We were come at last to the city.

Our spectral host lifted his hands from the dock, thus giving himself over to the directions and exhortations of the tide; and with that, he was swept away into the darkness.

Our mysterious ferryman having deposited us on a wharf off Essex Street, we made our way to South Street, where Dr. Trefusis recalled that there was an inn that might accommodate us. This found—the Graven Bull—we roused the innkeeper and begged a room.

It must be admitted that we presented an image little calculated to quell fears of the indigent and the beggar: a tall, gawky Negro boy in torn breeches and loose smock (and, as most certainly I was, wild-eyed with fatigue and the allure of the cook-fire within), and an aged man in tattered stockings and breeches so involved in mud that their color could no longer be descried. Though that very morning, Dr. Trefusis had been dressed in all the finery of leisure and the cut of fashion, now was he reduced to the appearance of

one who had snatched his clothes from a rag-cart, being slashed from barnacles, bruised from falls on stone, wigless and almost hairless, a few wisps straggling down the side of his skull, dripping with rain as he shivered and coughed profoundly.

The innkeeper informed us that he had no rooms, the most of them being enjoyed by the King's officers, but that for a few shillings we might sleep by the kitchen fire, though he complained of entertaining such vagabonds. Notwithstanding the price was exorbitant for such hard accommodation, Dr. Trefusis nodded, which movement was imperceptible almost from the palsy of his chill, and we were admitted into the house.

We slept, therefore, upon benches next to paltry flames. The hearth smoked immoderately, given the dampness and warmth of the night. During the early hours of the morning, I stoked the fire more than perhaps I should have, attempting to warm my tutor, whose very life I feared for, so clutched was he by shivering and agues. I slept but little.

In the morning, with great anxiety I left Dr. Trefusis huddled upon the hearthstone and went forth to seek us more permanent lodgings.

Beneath gray skies, I wandered the streets, engaged not simply in my errand, but also in wonder at what was about me. By the light of day, I saw the changes wrought upon Boston by military rule. A great metamorphosis had come upon the city since last I had been there, the winter previous. The whole of that town was occupied in making preparations to repel the assaults of rebellion.

All that I saw struck me with the transports of wonder, for these habitual scenes were so greatly transformed, the familiar mingling so unreservedly with the confusions of combat, as to

suggest the landscape of dream. Still could one mark the bustle of citizens with baskets, the cluck of drovers, their flocks reduced; still did one see the chaise and coach resting before houses; still did one hear the banter of livestock, the cry of the hawker, the tears of children, the exasperation of drays; but now, the hustle of commerce gave way in every corner to the demands of martial regularity and the irregularity of hasty defense.

Soldiers in red marched ranked down private avenues, muskets held at ready. At certain intersections were deposited mortars and cannon, a few idle powder-monkeys lying atop them to guard them, awaiting commands or playing cards in the shadow of these engines of destruction.

By the Common, the almshouse yard was thick that morning with Tory refugees fled to the city, groping now through the palings of the fence and clamoring for coin. Such an uproar and the sight of those pathetic faces could not but spur me on my errand, and impress upon me the necessity for swift accommodation and employment; for I had no wish to end my voyage incarcerated there.

The Common itself was little more than an encampment, the infantry having erected their tents in among the malls and grazing-fields. Many of the trees that had lined the gracious and pleasant walks of the Common were cut down, and the smoke of countless cook-fires hung heavily in the humid air upon those denuded slopes. The paths and lawns were turned to muck with exercises and evolutions.

The regulars marched upon the green in their formations as tiny men snapped orders.

The beacon-mast upon Beacon Hill had been removed, and replaced instead with a wooden turret; there was another fort stood opposite Carver Street, and a battery of guns atop Fox Hill. Flag-Staff Hill was dug up with entrenchments. Down at the bottom of the Common, where on sunny days in years of peace, the tanners had pursued their noxious trade in yards, and the clamor of tinsmiths shearing and riveting their goods with doors thrown wide had fallen upon the ear as harsh and lively as the tanners' art upon the nose, now doors were closed; the Marines were encamped along the road. Graves were dug for soldiers, some still open pits, others marked with wooden crosses.

There was, as I wandered through the streets, a continual popping and cracking as the guns on Copp's Hill fired, though I have no notion of what they might have aimed at.

At the first instances of shelling, my breath was arrested and my motions strangled by the alarums of fear, lest at any moment return fire should be hurled back across the roofs and channel; but no such return was offered, and gradually I perceived that this dialogue of shot was empty of communication, its leaden utterance falling short, rebel and soldier gasconading as two libertines discoursing in their cups, lain on two sides of a ditch, their language full of gesture and epithet, but debating to no purpose, their subjects dissimilar, their logic a-ramble, their ears closed to suasion.

The populace went unimpeded about their business, little regarding the detonations, betraying no notice that invisible to sight, all about us on the streets and the green sward of the hillside were extended sweeping the dotted lines of ordnance

calculation and the hovering directrix, focus, and vector of martial geometry.

The streets near the city gates were almost entirely evacuated, owners fearing too much the assaults of enemy artillery. To frustrate invasion, the avenue hard by had been torn up into trenches; fascines and abatis—bound together out of tree trunks stripped of bark and sharpened to fierce points—lay on the street before the empty houses of society dames and gentlemen of fashion. Stacks of cobbles, pulled up out of the dirt, were piled in yards.

Along the road there were mounds of furniture and clothing: stacks of headboards, gaming tables, stools, and Dutch *kasten*; these being the belongings of such as petitioned to be allowed to quit the city, but who had not yet received their exit pass, and so had been forced to tarry. Many of these chattels were on their way to ruin by the late rains, their veneer being invaded by the water and swelling so that the wood wrinkled and buckled. A soldier stood by to frustrate the designs of thieves.

For a time I regarded the picket-guards patrolling the gates of the city. I meditated upon the peculiar circumstance, that but a half mile away, across the Neck, my former companions—good Mr. G—g among them—glowered back from the fortifications at Roxbury.

Such was the state of the city at this time.

My search for accommodation did not go easily. Officers had laid claim to most of the rooms in likely inns; others were taken by the wealthier of Loyalists come in from the countryside.

I passed by the abandoned habitation of the College of Lucidity on Cambridge Street. Notwithstanding the hazard was too great for us to take refuge in that mansion, lest some agent of the

College return, I wished to see it now that my circumstances were so deeply changed.

I lingered before its gates. Guards in red coats with buff facings were stationed by the door. I made bold to approach them and, in the guise of a slave, make inquiries as to who dwelt there. They replied that the house had belonged to members of the rebel faction, and had been requisitioned as barracks for Clavering's Regiment, the 52<sup>nd</sup>. As they spoke, the doors opened, and several officers issued forth, laughing and tripping down the steps.

I bowed my thanks and walked on. I marveled at the strangeness of those rooms so well known to me—the moldings and wainscot, the herbs hung to dry on the back stairs—now echoing with the tread of martial boots and the shouts of command, the arcane experimental chambers, perhaps, housing the pallets of rank and file.

I left behind that scene and sought our accommodation further.

The difficulty lay not in finding vacant rooms—for there were whole houses vacant—but rather vacant rooms in houses where owners were present still to let out their property. At length, inquiring at an inn, I heard of a woman of some quality who wished to take on boarders and put them in her former bedroom, where her husband had died of an hectic fever in the most exquisite agonies some months before, the chamber being now loathsome to her, associated with the remembrance of pain and the tauntings of former felicity.

The price, given her distress, was such as would not soon be met with elsewhere. I told her therefore that likely my master—for so I called Dr. Trefusis, though he would have protested—would soon return with me and we would take up residence there.

Now I hurried through the streets beneath a new drizzle to the inn where we had stayed. Upon entering that house, I discovered a pathetic scene that moved my heart: The room now was filled with merry-makers and roustabouts upon the trestle-benches, calling toasts to one another. Slumped by the fire, in the midst of all of that shouting, was Dr. Trefusis, insensate, shivering though near flame, stubble upon his cheeks and chin, his scarce hair still clammy.

I woke him and told him that I had located a room for us in the North End, upon Staniford Street. He congratulated me, and asked that we might remove ourselves there instantly so he could sleep without being roused by Irish balladry and ensigns lifting their shirts to compare back-hair.

I helped him rise to his feet, though he was unsteady. He begged me find a hired chaise on which he could be conveyed to our new dwelling, to which I eagerly assented; we only then discovering that, while he had slept, his purse had been stolen.

We did not even have money sufficient to pay for our miserable night's stay at the inn.

The landlord, little inclined to believe our tale of distress, pointed out that he had seen our money the night before, and that we should make good on our promises now. We begged—we remonstrated—and, at last, he agreed to take Dr. Trefusis's silk waistcoat, ruined as it was, in payment.

So we walked the mile to our new lodging. Dr. Trefusis leaned upon me. I could feel the expansion and contraction of his ribs with each breath. He scarcely showed the spark of consciousness in his eyes. I am certain we looked to those we passed like a scene of utmost destitution and ruin; and indeed, perhaps we were:



myself, newly liberated into penury; and Dr. Trefusis, who had, just twenty-four hours previous, sat drinking tea in a country house, surrounded by all the trappings of luxury, waited upon by servants and bondsmen, now stripped to his shirt.

We arrived at our destination; where our hostess, seeing the state of my *quondam* master, refused us the room. I begged. She denied. I pled. She was hard as iron, saying that her nuptial chamber should not be subjected to the stench of the sea-bottom that accompanied this penniless wretch.

Dr. Trefusis, for his part, reached over and picked a white cushion off the chair and held it on top of his head.

I assumed he had gone deranged.

The cushion held to shield his balding pate, he said, "Madame, your servant."

The hostess regarded him first with disgust—then with fury—then with astonishment—then, finally, with abashment.

"Dr. Trefusis," she said. "Sir." She curtseyed. "I knew you not, without the wig. . . ."

"Indeed," he said. "I shall have to purchase another. But first, I have some need of sheets, a bolster, a fire, and, with an even greater show of celerity, Madame, a bucket into which I may vomit broth."