Freedom & Unity:
Tales of Rebel Vermont

by

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Class of 2008

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in the American Studies Program

Middletown, Connecticut  April, 2008
Freedom & Unity

Tales of Rebel Vermont
Acknowledgements

I must thank my family. Mom, Dad, Jeff, Ashley, and everyone else for supporting me in everything I have done. I have had some incredible opportunities, and I wouldn’t be where I am today without every one of you. Claire Potter’s relentless encouragement and advice has been so incredible throughout the year. She convinced me to tackle this project at the being of the year, and without her I would never have completed the manuscript. It is an honor to call her my advisor and friend. I also need to thank the wonderful people at Olin Library, the Vermont Historical Society, University of Vermont, and anyone else who have aided my research along the way. Thanks to Ethan, Thomas and Lemuel for lending me their lives. Finally, thanks to my roommates and friends for putting up with me after long, sleepless nights. Thank you everyone, you’re wonderful.
For Grandma & Grandpa Noel,
Nana & Papa,
Thank you for everything.
I love you more than you know.
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Why historical fiction?

Conventional historians may argue that attention to detail and historical accuracy are lost when the historian is given the freedom to imagine the lives of their subjects. They may be right. Not everything in these pages actually happened. But what accuracy is lost with imagination is gained ten fold in the ability to relate to our past. My goal in these pages is not to give the reader a biography or historiography regarding a particular person or place. In these stories of early Vermont and it’s struggle for independence I wanted to imagine what might have happened in those moments that the history books and biographies couldn't possibly know.

There have been some incredibly powerful models that have helped me in this endeavor. Simon Schama’s *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted Speculations* complicated the mythology that surrounded the death of General Wolfe at the Heights of Abraham. Wolfe’s death has been immortalized in British lore by the famous Benjamin West painting, *The Death of General Wolfe*. Schama does well to break down the historical inaccuracies of the painting by portraying General Wolfe in a very human way, giving him flaws, fears, and a self conscious nature that isn’t often attributed to “heroes.” The second half of Schama’s title, *Unwarranted Speculations*, speaks to his ability to connect events that on the surface seem unrelated. He took the risk of inferring, making work infinitely more interesting and a great standard for my work with Ethan Allen.

Similarly, Gore Vidal’s *Burr* approaches history with a cynicism that deserves respect. Vidal presents some of the most important figures in American history,
chiefly Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, in a light that suggests the Founding Fathers might well have been deadbeat dads. Like Schama, Vidal breaks down the legendary status we have attributed to the heroes of the Revolutionary Era. The fictional narrator, a journalist called Thomas Schuyler, says that Aaron Burr’s mortality was, “hardly worse than that of anyone else at the time, or now.” Vidal shows that these legendary men were first and foremost just men.

Laural Thatcher Ulrich’s book, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary 1785-1812* took me in a different direction and served as a starting point for my second chapter. Ulrich’s book provided me with an important example of how to situate an ordinary person within a larger socioeconomic context. Starting with Martha Ballard’s diary, she was able to work outward and reconstruct the world around this ordinary woman. Ulrich was able to take Martha Ballard’s life and make it important, even if on the surface it seems very small. Ulrich provides a much needed illustration of how an historian can piece together sparse documentation to develop an intimate story about one person’s life.¹

It is this sort of intimacy that really attracted me to historical fiction. The genre provided me with the freedom to really know my characters as best I could. It gave me a relationship to my characters based on interpretation and imagination. I had the opportunity to dive into these peoples’ personal lives using archival evidence and secondary sources, and imagine what they thought and how they felt both about

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their surroundings, their moment in history, and themselves. History inherently makes us spectators. We can not put ourselves back in the 18th century and experience its sights and sounds first hand. We can only reproduce those senses in our own mind. It is impossible to know precisely Thomas Jefferson’s thoughts when he wrote his draft of the Declaration of Independence. But it is possible to make an educated guess as to Jefferson’s psyche based on the whole of his life, the traces of which remain today in the primary sources he has left us and the impact he has made on countless American’s lives.

This approach grounds the fiction half of the genre firmly in the historical half. These stories are not entirely true, but neither are they entirely false. There is actual history in these pages. And where what might be false is not intended to deceive, but rather to illuminate. It is only my attempt to relive the past through these characters. It is my perception of what they were thinking, feeling, or not feeling. Historical fiction, therefore, is anchored in the present through the mind of the author. As it turns out, I am not the first to think in such a way. In Hayden White’s discussion of Nietzsche and his views on history he said, “Nietzsche’s purpose was to destroy the belief in a historical past from which men might learn any single, substantial truth.” Instead, “there were as many ‘truths’ about the past as there were individual perspectives on it.” There must significance in the history if the author felt was necessary to bring up in the modern consciousness. Vermont in its infancy is relevant today, at least to me. By writing this work I tried to engage in what Nietzsche might call the “‘proper’ way of regarding the past.” A “life affirming kind,” that encourages,
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“as many different visions of history as there are projects for winning a sense of self in individual human beings.” I tried to find that sense of self.

Historical fiction in essence is an oxymoron. It’s history but it’s imagined. It’s old but it is new. And maybe the most important paradox of all, this piece of historical fiction is mine, but it is also yours. Because of its inherent contradictions, this genre allowed me to produce a piece of work that is thoroughly personal. I feel close to my characters. They have been a part of me for the past 9 months. But this piece is not entirely an evocation of my supreme expertise on these people, their lives, or the history they were a part of. Some of it is that, but if anything I wanted this to be a building block, the first lines in an historical discourse that I believe is important. Like most historical scholars, my hope is that someone else may someday join this conversation and challenge or add to what is in these pages in whatever way they see fit. Perhaps another academic will find Vermont’s history important enough to imagine it in a different way. This work is an expression of my ideas today and it is a challenge to the reader to come up with her own ideas and to complicate mine. It is a challenge to me ten years from now. I will be a different person then, but part of me will be the same. This work is an expression of the time I live in and the person I am now. In the future, I hope to be able to return as a better person in a better time and better the ideas that are within these pages.

These quotes come from Hayden White’s chapter on Nietzsche in his book Metahistory (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 332.
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Why these characters?

Ethan Allen was an obvious choice for any Vermont history enthusiast. Anyone who knows anything about Vermont knows the name Ethan Allen. People who know very little about Vermont might only think he started a furniture company. They would be wrong. To his proponents, Ethan was a Revolutionary hero, founder of Vermont, and relentless soldier of freedom. His detractors saw him as a domestic terrorist, a ruthless tyrant, and a greedy, attention starved self aggrandizer. It is this duality that really makes him interesting and such a great subject for historical fiction. He is one massive paradox, and my telling of Ethan Allen’s early adventures in Vermont is my attempt to grapple with this paradox.

I am not one to take sides really, and the Ethan Allen that comes through in these stories reflects that. He is like most of us in that he is neither all good nor all bad. He runs a middle ground that we all struggle with in one way or another. Allen’s relationships were often complicated. Like in most families, there were conflicts between the Allen brothers. Ethan was the oldest and most revered among the siblings, but faced a large threat to his leadership in the youngest of the Allens, Ira. In many ways Ira might have been the most influential in getting the family into Vermont. Many of the brothers had sparse land holdings throughout the state. But Ira was quite possibly the most calculating of the bunch. His History of Vermont reveals that there were clear conflicts between the brothers. Ira attributed much of his family’s success in land prospecting to himself in this work written later in his life. It would be foolish to take Ira at his word, but it would be equally foolish to disregard
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this claim. Scholars who have portrayed Ethan as a money-grubbing land merchant might well be underestimating Ira and disregarding the brotherly conflict that could have existed. This is just one example of many in which Ethan's legacy becomes very cloudy.

It would be equally as foolish to suggest that Ethan was entirely comfortable with his dominant position in early Vermont. We can only guess what his motives might have been, but over the course of my research it has become very apparent that his interest in his own political celebrity must have been incredibly conflicted. Ethan was definitely the consummate self-promoter. But there is no reason to assume that Ethan was any different than modern people of fame and recognition. Fame often comes at a price, as it did with Ethan. He was an alcoholic, even for the standards of the day when alcohol was consumed as a part of every meal. It could also be suggested that Ethan's struggle for stardom was in itself a means to hide his own inadequacies and guilt. We have seen similar examples of this during the Ethan's lifetime and in ours. John Adams' letters to his wife Abigail show a great amount of sorrow for leaving his family in America while he was talking politics in France. But John was haunted by supposed slights and oversights in his past and could not bring himself to leave the public stage unnoticed. I would argue that Ethan suffered from a similar paradox of guilt and being unsatisfied. He had a wife and children that he

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never saw, a wild temper that could lead him to do cruel and hurtful things, and a
father who died when he was incredibly young, leaving him to support his mother and
brothers. Ethan was human after all, and because of this he must have felt human
emotions. Pain, rage, contempt, love, lust, and remorse. His actions were neither
entirely altruistic nor entirely selfish. And I chose to write about Ethan because of
this. I wanted to look past the great hero and the tyrannical villain. I wanted to
explore Ethan in a way that got right down to the dirty little details in his
relationships, his flaws, his attributes, and his emotions. I wanted to look at the
human Ethan.

The other characters serve a similar purpose; they look at the people from
Vermont during the 1770s-1800s in this very personal way. However they also give me
the opportunity to step outside of myself and into the bodies of people completely
different than me. The first of these characters is Abigail Johnson, a woman with ties
to the colonial British elite and an unlikely bystander in Vermont, and America’s
struggle for independence. Her father was the Colonial Governor of Canada, but as
war broke out Abigail and her husband Thomas stayed in Vermont. The Johnson’s
story becomes an examination of why the young couple would remain in Vermont for
the rest of their lives, through captivity by the British in Canada and accusations of
treasons.

While in Vermont, a brief fictional encounter with the one and only Ethan
Allen allowed me to explore the two Ethan’s that we encountered in the first chapter,
the man and the myth. The ideals of Abigail’s youth are compiled in her head to
create the mythical “Man in Green.” But as Abigail’s relationship with Thomas grows it begins to break down the legend of Ethan, finally revealing the man in all his mediocrity, and a women who learns what love can really be.

In Chapter 3 we discover a most unlikely character to enter our discussion of Vermont during the Revolutionary Era. Lemuel Haynes was quite possibly the first black minister to preach before an all white congregation. Not only is this special, but the fact that Haynes’ congregation lay in Rutland, Vermont for 30 years is also remarkable. Vermont to this day is one of the least diverse states in the union despite the abolition of slavery in its original 1777 constitution, the first abolition law in North America. Haynes’ self-confessed identity as a black man is something that makes him unique not only in his location but in his time. The illegitimate son of an African man and a white woman, Haynes’ fared better than most would have given the circumstances. Indentured to a devout Connecticut family and treated like one the children, Lemuel began his most remarkable life. This is where the third chapter picks up, prior to his life in Vermont, at the moment when Haynes finds God.

The intersection of Lemuel’s race, religion, and political views put him in a unique intellectual sphere. He had the education and the knowledge to speak out about very large issues like freedom and slavery, and he did so around the same time he fought to defend America from colonial British rule. Haynes wrote as both a patriot and an abolitionist in this time, but he never could get up the courage to make his opinions public. Things changed when Lemuel entered the ministry, not necessarily his beliefs, but the way he was able to evoke them. His job became to
appease a churchgoing crowd that was vastly different from him. Early in Lemuel's preaching career one man noted, "The preacher had not proceeded far in his sermon before I thought him the whitest man I ever saw, my hat was instantly thrown under the seat, and I found myself listening with the most profound attention." Appeasing a white crowd was a must, and with that must have come a degree of self-imposed censorship.

When the third chapter comes to Lemuel's adult life we once again meet Ethan Allen, this time Ethan as a philosopher. Ethan is older, washed up, and pushed aside in Vermont politics. Ethan reaches Lemuel with the intention of discussing the principles of freedom that were held so strongly by both of them. A black newspaper in 1837 is known to have said that Haynes was, "the only man of known African descent who has ever succeeded in overpowering the system of American caste." Lemuel's conversation with Ethan becomes an exploration of this statement and the problematic aspects of it. Lemuel was clearly still bound by some system. In his early life he showed the impulse to speak out against injustice. But as a public figure it became much more difficult for him to express his views over time. One critic wrote after Lemuel's death, "if he had felt the scourge of slavery as strongly as he felt the scourge of a Puritan God, he might, with all his talents, have been an earlier Frederick Douglass." But it seems to me that he must have felt the scourge of both equally strongly. His conversation with Allen only reveals how the two greatly different men chose to fight similar battles for freedom. Allen chose to write his "Deists Bible," formally titled *Reason, The Only Oracle of Man*. Haynes chose to
fight slavery the only way he knew how, from the pulpit with sermons, prayer, and the discourse of his Puritan God.

The characters in these stories all have intensely interesting relationships to Vermont and American Revolutionary history. But the most endearing relationship I have found is more personal. These people have allowed me to be in a time and place that has always been out of my reach. I got to play the role of hero, and step into the shoes of a man I have always revered and came away knowing that he was only a man much like myself. And that is ok. I got to be a woman, as best I could, and pretend to be Abigail Johnson. Along the way I learned a little bit about my own relationship to infatuation, lust, and love. Finally I was able to borrow the life of a Black, Puritan man and piece together some parts of my own belief systems about freedom, and God, and peoples’ relationships to God that have been so incongruent over the years. For the past 7 months I have mad these incredibly diverse, and complicated people’s lives my own. Through this I have gained some perspective that I couldn’t have found any other way, and for that I thank them.
Why Vermont?

In the spirit of academic honesty I must be frank. I am in fact from Vermont, born and raised there all 22 years of my life. With that said, here are a few things I know from living in Vermont my entire life:

1. Vermont Maple Syrup is the King of all syrups. Challenge Vermont Grade A Pure in a double blind taste test, I dare you.

2. Vermonters are different. Like most regions of the U.S. or any other place for that matter, Vermont and its people have very distinct qualities i.e. ruggedness, independent spirits, a love of the outdoors, and a general discontent for outsiders and power. It is what makes us Vermonters.

3. These idiosyncrasies are directly related to our early history. We as Americans have developed a distinctly American persona that correlates all the way back to the Revolution. The rhetoric of freedom used to this day began with our forefathers. The very tenets of our country that we hold sacred as a country are written in our most important documents, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution, each with its roots in the Revolution. To say the Revolution is dead would be daft. This is also the case when looking at Vermont alone. The roots of what Vermont is now go back to the characters in these stories. Their lives helped shape my life, and the lives of all Vermonters, and for that they deserve some recognition. This leads us to our final and possibly most important fact.
4. Vermont’s Independence is something that cannot wholly be separated from the American Revolution.

The relationship between these last two events is symbiotic as this novel suggests. Vermont might easily have been crushed by New York had the Battle of Lexington and Concord never distracted the Crown. Without the artillery from Ticonderoga the American Army might have been crushed at the Battle of Boston. The two movements thus fed off each other and with remarkable similarity they both progressed toward independence.

When we come across the familiar narrative of the American Revolution we are used to hearing quotes from great men like George Washington that refer to how the people, “have reverted to a state of nature, and have since formed a government on the true principles of liberty.” But these are not Washington’s words; they are Ethan Allen’s. The two men, both the symbolic head of their respective causes, were personally very different. “There is,” Washington wrote about Ethan, “an original something in him that commands admiration.” Washington was a proper gentleman, and must have seen Allen as the vulgar, abrasive drunk that he often was. But Washington did say that Allen, “commands admiration.” I believe the one redeeming quality that Washington saw in Allen was one that they both shared, incredibly effective leadership.

But for both Allen and Washington, their position as the leader of their respective movements problemitized the entire cause. Neither man was wholly benevolent and acting on the greater good. Both Allen and Washington had their
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own self-interest to protect. Each had speculative land holdings, the value of which depended on the success of their fight. Allen’s Onion River Land Company would have failed miserably had New York’s authority in the New Hampshire Grants been upheld. The British forbade settlement beyond the Appalachian Mountains, thus Washington might never have profited from his land in the Ohio country had that Americans not defeated the British in the Revolutionary War. Because of these conflicts of interest Allen and Washington both showed spurts of overbearing, almost dictatorial control. As a result, each movement’s leader inherently compromised the ideals of republicanism and freedom that pervaded the American Revolution and Vermont’s struggle for independence. But they claimed these principles anyway.

The relationship of Ethan Allen to George Washington only scratches the surface of the greater connection between revolutionary Vermont and the American Revolution. But it is a powerful example of how closely the two events are linked. What follows is my attempt to dig deeper into these ties as well as an examination of their key differences.
Ethan Allen
Emerging from the pot-holed trail was the town of Bennington, the largest settlement among the wilderness of the New Hampshire grants. Surrounded by makeshift log cabins, stump ridden fields, and roughneck farmers, the fledgling township could hardly be considered settled. There remained half a frontier occupied by independent men. But the residents of means in Bennington, of which there were few, did their part to make it appear as if it were any New England town, and it wasn’t ever easy. The early residents had to contend with a thick evergreen forest. They cooked over open fires and spent the night under lean-tos made of branches and brush until they were able to complete their log cabins. Much time and effort went into settling the town, but for some there was money to be made. Despite the wishes of the Crown and Parliament, not quite all of the King’s land in the territory was in the hands of yeoman farmers. Benning Wentworth, the soon to be former governor of New Hampshire, had done well in lining his pockets, and the pockets of his cronies selling land to speculators throughout the colonies.

After winning a dispute with Massachusetts over the southern boundary of New Hampshire, Wentworth gained control of Massachusetts’s land grants west of the Connecticut River. The Governor immediately set out to establish control over lands west of the Green Mountains, and began to contend that New York’s eastern border had previously been established as twenty miles east of the Hudson River.

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There was precedent for his argument. Massachusetts and Connecticut had already won decisions deeming this invisible line their western margin. The only snag was New York’s original charter extending its territory as far eastward as the Connecticut River, a charter the Crown upheld. But the promise of fertile lands and speculative profits were too enticing for Benning to fold easily. Wentworth remained steadfast in his defense of New Hampshire’s jurisdiction east of the twenty-mile line. Benning’s friends, relatives, and speculators holding the vast majority of New Hampshire land grants stood to lose enormous future fortunes, along with the Governor himself who held large tracts of land in every one of his grants. Among these entrepreneurs were Stephen Fay and Samuel Robinson, two of Bennington’s founding settlers.

These two men set out to build a town that would not only be pleasant to live in, but could attract others in search of land of their own. Robinson and Fay had land to offer. They started by erecting a church in the name of the separatist ideals that had pushed them out of Massachusetts. The white steeple rose prominently over lush, green pines that bordered the town green. Oncoming travelers saw the sharp, white point of civilization rise ever so slightly from the hills above town and felt at

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5 Benning Wentworth’s very shady business deals are described well in Charles Minor Thompson. *Independent Vermont* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942), 38-39. He blatantly disobeyed the wishes of the crown by giving land grants to land speculators, often relatives and/or friends. Not only did the King frown upon land speculation, Wentworth was speculating in land that wasn’t his to give. On top of everything, Benning Wentworth often kept a large, very desirable lot of land for himself in each grant given out.

6 Once again, the most vivid description of Bennington’s founding comes from Robert E. Shalhope, *Bennington and the Green Mountain Boys*, 52, in which Shalhope portrays Samuel Robinson, Jr., son of the Samuel Robinson mentioned in the story, riding into town with a group of settlers on June 18, 1761. Robinson, Sr., and Stephen Fay would both get to Bennington later that year.

7 Robert E. Shalhope, *Bennington and the Green Mountain Boys*, 3-13, once again has a wonderful description of the religious oppression felt by Samuel Robinson and other Separatists from Hardwick, Massachusetts, where evangelism was frowned upon entirely. Also Thompson, *Independent Vermont*, 62.
Ethan Allen

ease. Among so much wilderness, Jesus still lived here. Soon a sawmill was built to help combat all that rough country. Along with a gristmill and two dozen fertile family farms, the economic enterprise of Bennington stabilized. With the most important aspects of any good New England town in place, Robinson and Fay had little else to do but sit back, wait for their land to accrue some value, and drink at Bennington’s centerpiece, the tavern.

Oversized considering Bennington’s population, Fay’s tavern soon became the social focal point in the most controversial of the New Hampshire grants. The freshly painted red exterior blended in seamlessly with the rich autumn foliage, brightened spirits in the rainy spring, and warmed the eyes while men shivered in the frigid winters. Opening the heavy oak doors promised warmth for body and soul as well. The liquor flowed freely and thawed the blood of fatigued and frozen settlers. Two large, stone fireplaces heated men’s skin long before the spring unlocked their soil from the winter ice. And around a handful of large, round, oak tables farmers and speculators alike gathered to talk of religion, government, and existence on the frontier. Rum and whiskey acted as lubricant for the social machinery that drove relationships in such a secluded place. Men came to brag about the completion of their cabins, and the surprisingly fertile soil that revealed itself beneath the acres of pines, maples, and birch.

But most importantly, the men of Bennington came to discuss the precarious nature of their land holdings themselves. Wentworth left them in a state of limbo. An illegitimate power granted their land. Men like Robinson owned too many acres on
too much credit to be able to pay the dues necessary to get New York patents. Others were in possession of land that had already been granted by the Yorkers, or titles that crossed Benning’s supposed twenty-mile line. Neither group could afford to pay in full what New York demanded. Farmers and land speculators alike gathered at the tavern to discuss their mutual apprehensions.

Poised sturdily on a tall pole above the door was the sign that gave Fay’s Tavern its name. The advertisement stood strong like the tall pines of the forest that made up its pieces, and served as a beacon for men of Bennington gather and discuss news brought to them from Albany. As it was the tavern had been re-named in a way over the past few years. When Mr. Fay built the enormous cube it was named much like any other colonial tavern, after its owner. Fay’s House spent is adolescence tending to the needs of red necked, calloused farmers. But recently Fay’s House had evolved into something greater alongside the red necked farmers it served so diligently. The sign so familiar to the residents of the town changed as well, a familiar pine square replaced by the most formidable predator looming in the hills of the grants. A catamount prowled over the heads of men from the towns surrounding Bennington. The king of the Green Mountains snarled, fangs bare, and pointed directly across Lake Champlain to the King’s colony of New York. In its infancy, Fay’s House became the Catamount Tavern, and soon baptized the men from around Bennington in the church of the Green Mountains.
The Letter

On June 5, 1772 the post carried a letter addressed to Bennington’s Reverend Jedediah Dewey. Dewey scanned the letter quickly, excused himself politely from present company, and scurried across town to the Catamount Tavern. His manner was representative of the whole of Bennington, uneasy. For many months the Green Mountain Boys were forced to defend their lands from New York speculators and grant holders. New York, they were convinced, threatened their very lives.⁸

Dewey blew through the heavy tavern door and signaled Mr. Fay from behind the bar. The two men strode up the stairs to the first door on the right. There they found Ethan alone. The hot, damp summer air permeated the room. Ethan sat by his window in a chair that stressed to hold his massive frame. Directly below loomed the furious stuffed cat. He wore only his undergarments and reeked of stale booze. Ethan had not been expecting company this day.

The short silence was broken by Stephen Fay’s energetic voice. “Ethan,” the post brought a letter from Governor Tryon.” Ethan rubbed circles around his temples with his thumb and middle finger.

“What does that fat-faced fucker want from me now? Another reward for any son of a bitch with the stones to arrest me I suppose.”

Fay reacted with amusement. “Actually, the honorable Governor of His Majesty Province of New York felt it unnecessary to address himself to a vagrant like

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⁸ Shalpole, Bennington and the Green Mountain Boys, Page? Also Thompson, Independent Vermont, 66.
Ethan Allen

yourself. He wrote to the good Reverend here, and,” Fay mocked, “the honorable citizens of Bennington.”

Ethan practically snorted, then winced, and returned his hand to his forehead. By laughing he convinced himself and the two men standing in his door that he didn’t feel the least bit slighted by Governor Tryon’s oversight. Still recuperating and half drunk, Ethan mumbled a few words. “Whats it say?”

Fay read the Governor’s letter verbatim, interjecting where he saw fit. “You’ll love this one Colonel. ‘If the lawlessness and unrest persists, the perpetrators must soon draw forth against the exertion of the Powers of this Government.’” Ethan scoffed. Fay continued. The Governor agreed to hear any argument the Green Mountain Boys wished to make and offered safe passage to those men sent to plead the Vermonters’ case with the exclusion of Allen and his closest friends and family. Tryon boldly suggested that Mr. Fay, Mr. Dewey, and a Mr. James Breakenridge argue on behalf of Bennington. The Governor refused conduct for Ethan and the more militant leaders of the Green Mountain Boys. Ethan was slighted again. Fay read the Governor’s concluding remarks clearly. “The Governor flatters himself, ‘you will improve this final offer of reconciling yourself to this Government. Your friend William Tryon!’”

“What now?” Asked Reverend Dewey sheepishly.

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“Take a seat Reverend. Let’s figure something out,” offered Ethan. Reverend Dewey and Fay sat to the right of Ethan at the small, square table in the corner of the room. “Our options are limited.” Ethan paused between sentences, pacing himself, and thinking over each phrase carefully. “Our best bet is to hold our ground. We must protect the validity of our grants and emphasize that the Royal Order of 1764 was merely a jurisdictional shift. Tryon will be easily convinced that our King’s infinite wisdom will settle the matter completely.” Ethan said his part and the discussion was over. Reverend Dewey sat at Ethan’s table, wrote the official reply to Governor Tryon’s in more amiable terms, and signed the letter, ‘Rev. Jedediah Dewey, and others.’ Ethan humbly thanked Dewey, shook his hand, and kindly relieved him of their mutual response. Satisfied, Dewey excused himself for he had church business to attend to.10

The humid, Vermont summer day passed slowly into a cool, starlit evening. Ethan had scarcely moved from his chair but to eat and piss. Mr. Dewey’s letter sat on the table flickering in and out of the candlelight. Resentment grew within the Colonel’s deep, green eyes as they followed the light. Only one candle was lit in the room, directly over the blatant affront to his leadership. He was the hero. There could only be one hero. The candle’s flame sparked the paper first in the bottom right hand corner, just below Reverend Dewey’s signature. At first, the stationary burned slowly. But as Allen’s pleasure grew so did the flames. Soon the entire sheet was engulfed, and Ethan smiled his first smile of the day. He held the letter, deliberately,

10 The letter sent to Governor Tryon signed by Reverend Dewey is in Slade’s, Vermont State Papers, 24.
until it was no more, and his fingers were thoroughly singed. There was a price to pay for being the hero.

Ethan passed the night on a stool at Fay's bar and in Fay's company. He woke the next morning just before noon alone in a bed that was not his own, but that he often frequented. Erin Lynn was a local widow slightly older than Ethan. Her husband lost his life in the French and Indian War. She was shrewd, pious, and reminded Ethan of his wife. He thought of Mary as he retreated to the tavern. Her nagging, her unsightly face, and her religious fervor irritated Ethan beyond belief. But he still felt guilty for putting her through his long absences and careless behavior. Mary was, after all, his wife, and he could never reconcile the fact that he had promised himself to someone he never really cared for."

Fay poured Ethan a brew, which he drank happily, and then another. The cook brought him a plate of brisket and fresh Macintosh apples from local trees. He ate quickly and moved to the solitude of his room. Today was a business day. Ethan knew Tryon must be convinced to maintain the status quo. Simultaneously he was aware that Dewey's argument of simple jurisdictional change would never persuade New York's governor. Allen was there when numerous ejectment suits against New Hampshire grant holders were upheld. He would be beating a dead horse. As Ethan dipped his quill in the thick, black ink he began to channel the dramatic, emphatic, colloquial voice that had won him so many admirers.

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"We don't really know why Ethan married Mary Brownson. But Jellison, Frontier Rebel, 7, does well in describing their relationship. He suggests that Ethan might have been attracted to a sizeable dowry that would have aided him in an ironworks project he was starting at the time. We may have learned more about the two had there been any correspondence between them, however Mary was illiterate."
Ethan Allen

The plight of true yeomen was a cause the government of New York, and the Crown, was sympathetic towards. Ethan launched into hyperbolic tales of men and women he envied but could relate very little to. “These settlers have been forced to suffer the inclemency of the weather, bereaved of all the necessaries of life, their new masters having monopolized their earthly ALL, to themselves.” The families of this frontier had built lives from the depths of a howling wilderness with their own two hands. They hoped to reap all the benefits of their labor, and entrusted their lives in the Colonel Ethan Allen, a man who knew nothing of their toil. He owned tracts of land he had never seen, intending only to sell them at a satisfactory profit to the men whose interests he was empowered to protect. “Can’t I protect my own livelihood?,” he asked out loud, pleading for a comforting voice. No one answered. Ethan Allen, the mythical man of the Green Mountains, sat silent, and felt the isolation of an ignoble man. As he signed his name, Ethan’s hand quivered with regret, shame, fear, and pain. It was three o’clock in the afternoon. By seven Allen slipped from consciousness under the grip of his drug of choice.

Ethan awoke alone the next morning slumped over in his chair. He took a cold bath and slipped into his carefully pressed uniform. Ethan grinned as the low, cock-crow sun glistened off the extravagant gold trim. Gazing into the polished

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12 This entire long letter can be found in Slade’s *Vermont State Papers: Being a Collection of Records and Documents Connected With the Assumption and Establishment of Government by the People of Vermont: Together with the Journal of the Council of Safety, The First Constitution, the Early Journals of the General Assembly, and the Laws from the Year 1779 to 1786, Inclusive to which are Added the Proceedings of the First and Second Councils of Censors* (Middlebury, VT: J. W. Copeland, 1823), 24-29. Slade’s collection is an invaluable resource for any historian of early Vermont.
buttons, Colonel Ethan Allen felt the euphoria of immortality. Time to rally the
troops.

The Colonel slipped through Bennington relatively unnoticed. He traveled
through the surrounding forests to nearby townships stopping first at the home of his
old ally Robert Cochran. From there the two men recruited Ethan’s cousin,
Remember Baker, and Baker’s cousin, Seth Warner, and returned to the seclusion of
the Colonel’s room. Colonel Allen read his reply to Governor Tryon to the men. He
knew he could not be the lone signatory. The letter must be the word of the people.
Cochran, Baker, and Warner readily applied their marks and together they delivered
Ethan’s letter to Mr. Fay. Stephen gathered his son, Doctor Jonas Fay, and the two
men inconspicuously left town en route to Albany. In Stephen Fay’s saddlebag was
the reply to Governor Tryon’s letter, presumably from the entirety of Bennington.
The two would take their time in responding to Tryon, making damn sure he started
to sweat a little. They wouldn’t reach Albany until late August. By sundown Colonel
Allen disappeared into the wilderness. The evergreen uniform camouflaged his exit.
Ethan Allen

The Company

Ethan had traveled the small roads and dim paths from Bennington to Salisbury dozens of times before. For the first time since he had entered the dense Vermont woods so many years ago Allen felt the full weight of every lush pine, jagged mountain peak, and cascading waterfall he passed. The smell of the evergreen forest filled his chest, adding weight with every breath. Ethan quietly strode by the homes of friends and neighbors. For the first time he had crossed the line from protecting his own self interests to entrepreneurial dishonesty and greed. When the travails of the wilderness drove him to the earth, Ethan made camp in isolated fields and unclaimed lots. He kept his uniform packed neatly at the bottom of his satchel. For the first time he yearned to rid himself of the Green Mountains he so coveted.

Allen’s return to his home went unheralded. The celebrity the Colonel had won in the New Hampshire Grants extended very little into southern New England. Outside of Vermont he was a heathen and a trouble maker. People in Connecticut didn’t pay attention to such people. He hitched his horse and walked slowly towards his modest New England colonial. Ethan noticed the mid-day foot traffic about town and wondered if Benjamin Franklin felt so transparent as he traveled through Philadelphia. Allen stepped foot in his den and appraised his scant collection of books. How vast could the study at Monticello be? Did Abigail Adams embrace John so coldly after such a long separation? For the rest of the winter Ethan sat idly, uncomfortably, in his family home. He drank away what remained of 1772 awaiting news from his brothers still playing up north.
As January of the next year progressed, the men of the Allen clan trudged across a snow-covered landscape, and reunited at the Salisbury farm that had become their family refuge. Ethan's cousin, Remember Baker, arrived first. Ethan greeted Remember with the warmth of an older brother. Remember did little to hide his exuberance in seeing the eldest of the Allen clan. For years Remember had seen the very best of New England men in his older cousin. Baker stood by Ethan's side as he led roving bands of Green Mountain Boys. And in Ethan's absence, Remember acted steadfastly with his mentor in mind. The two were certainly the most alike in the Allen's closest family. Remember loved the excitement of what the group was doing, both politically and physically. He was no stranger to the outdoors either. But he lacked Ethan's leadership ability. Instead, Remember was satisfied riding alongside his mentor, and the Colonel fed off Baker's admiration in turn.

After days of playing catch up in taverns, their hearts and nostalgia heated by a few brews, Ethan and Remember heard footsteps at the family's front door. Zimiri, one of the middle Allen brothers approached the home carrying gifts from his store. Zimiri embraced his brother with genuine warmth, a distinct satisfaction that had long been removed from Ethan's repertoire of feelings. Afterwards, Zimiri shook his cousin's hand gently and sought out Ethan's wife Mary in the kitchen. The gifts Zimiri carried were soon to become dinner. And as the three men sat down together, the final member of what was soon to become the Onion River Land Company barged through the front door.
Ira looked grizzled. He wore the wilderness he had submerged himself in on his face and hands. Most of the family had seen very little of little Ira. The last of his family to reach Vermont, Ira spent most of his time surveying along the northern coast of Lake Champlain. The work was hard, but with each job completed Ira added to his portfolio of land. His heart delighted in the region. A shrewd businessman, the youngest of the Allen brothers was able barter away swamplands and mountaintops for better land at the mouth of the Winooski River. Ira took the last remaining chair wedged between his brothers at the large rectangular table. The men finished their brisket and potatoes politely, as a family. And when they were done, the brothers discussed the land they had just left.

Ethan got right down to business. “For a good while now Ira’s been trying to convince me to buy up the Onion River. I gotta tell ya, he’s not far off.” Ira took this cue and jumped right in.

“Ethan an I went hunting last fall along the river, just so he could get a feel for the place,” Ira said. Zimiri and Remember glanced at Ethan for reassurance.

“It’s true,” Ethan affirmed.

“The trees grow tall and strong,” Ira asserted, playing the role of salesman. “Fresh water is abundant, the lands are fertile and Lake Champlain is right there to be accessed quite easily.”

“Also true,” added Ethan.

“Great,” Zimiri jabbed, “what’s it got to do with me?”
Ira took the floor once again. “We all have to pool what we have. Collectively our resources will go much further.”

“I don’t own any land on the Onion River,” Zimiri interjected sarcastically.

The depth of Ira’s plan began to come to light with each question asked. Ethan had been just as skeptical as Zimiri. It didn’t fit in with his Whig rhetoric. A huge consolidation of land, a single family controlling vast expanses of unsettled lands, none of it sat well in Ethan’s stomach. Sure he had done well with the lands he owned. Clearly he couldn’t possibly have cultivated every acre, but he had done it on his own, the way it should be done. Still, Ira’s veracious ambition in regards to the land, and the company eventually won Ethan over. As he listened to Ira sell the company to Zimiri, his uneasiness crept back through his nerves.

Ira posed a question. “Zimiri, what do you do?”

“For a living? You know what I do Ira you damned fool. I own this store. What’s your point?”

“And how many general stores are there in Salisbury right now?”

“Six.”

“Do you know how many general stores there are along the Onion River?”

“Well unless the savages built their own, probably none.”

“None. Think about it. There’s no competition. People need the things you sell and there is no competition. The water is right there. Set up shop right along
Ethan Allen

Lake Champlain like Skene did. A little elbow grease and you’ll be up and running in no time. Hell, you'll probably own your own town before long.”

“Ok. And New York?” Zimiri tried to poke holes.

“Ha, New York?” Ira bobbed his head in the direction of Ethan and Remember. “We already have our own police force.” Ira gestured like a magician with his right hand towards his older brother. Ethan was uncomfortable with his new position, but Zimiri saw the opportunity to turn a huge profit. Skenesboro had already been established across Lake Champlain in New York. Its central focus was on the general store established by the towns founder Philip Skene. Skenesboro provided Zimiri with an adequate model of fortune and he was sold. Remember only wanted some more adventure in the woods with his family. They were all on board, and Ethan had no choice but to stick with his family. They agreed to liquidate surplus assets and focus on the land Ira deemed most desirable.

The Allen clan passed a quill and a bottle amongst them. With the final swoop of Ethan’s pen, the Onion River Land Company was formed. The vast majority of the land titles were secured relatively easily and at reasonable prices. The owners, it seemed had less confidence in the validity of the grants as Ethan and his brothers did. Or maybe Ethan just knew that if he could not prove that his lands held their water in the courts, than he would put up one hell of a fight.

A good description of Colonel Philip Skene, a man similar in character to Ethan Allen himself, is provided in Thompson, Independent Vermont, 141-142. Skene and Ethan were in cahoots, at one point trying to establish a separate northern British colony that would include Skenesboro and Vermont. There is also a small blueprint for creating a town in Thompson, which would have attracted Zimiri
The Mob

Ethan stood tall at the head of a long line of men. As he walked down the road the only visible features were his broad shoulders, formidable jaw line, and green tri cornered hat. Of all the faces in the crowd, Ethan's was the only clean one. He held his torch high so it seemed as though it towered above the tall forest canopy. The men at his back numbered nearly one hundred and fifty. Most wielded clubs, some carried axes, and had others torches, a formidable weapon in its own right. Ethan's power in the region was waning, and he was back to prove his reclaim his land.

“The white one.” Ethan pointed to one of the larger homes on the main road in Clarendon, or as the townspeople had recently started calling it, Durham.¹⁴ The buzzing mob silenced, and 50 men broke from the crowd of well over a hundred and circled the house en masse. What remained of the men continued behind their uniformed Colonel. Ethan paced himself. Each step he took was deliberate, the stride long and powerful. Concerned mothers and fathers gathered in windows, staring down at Ethan’s army. Their eyes were fixed on his boots or the men that walked in his wake, anything other than Ethan’s fierce dark eyes. Not a sound was heard in the street except for the crunch of autumn leaves below the Colonel’s polished, brown boots. The sound resonated as Ethan cracked the spine of the mountains.

¹⁴The town of Clarendon had incited Ethan by seeking New York confirmations of their land grants. They also began calling the town Durham, which was the name given to it in the New York patent. A brief description of the events is in Jellison, Ethan Allen, 86. Ira Allen also provides and account in his The Natural and Political History of the State of Vermont (New York: C. E. Tuttle Co., 1969), 31. In the appendix Ira calls Spencer Mr. frightened away. There is also a deposition to the state of New York from Charles Button, November 30, 1773 in the Ethan Allen Papers at the University of Vermont.
The crowd parted in front of the thick oak door and Ethan emerged in his forest uniform and gold trimmings. He placed one foot on the home’s first step. His arm extended downwards at the mob, and once it reached its length his hand opened from a tight fist. A young, round faced man stepped forward. Glimmers of torchlight revealed his homespun clothing, and an impossibly large axe that he dragged behind him. The boy wrapped his second hand around the handle, dipped his shoulders and grunted the tool into Ethan’s hand.

As Ethan’s right hand clenched the axe forcefully around the butt, his left foot strode upwards to the second step. His foot landed gracefully, athletically, and as it did his right arm dipped beneath the weight of the massive iron axe. In the blink of an eye the Colonel’s right foot dropped on the landing of the steps, his hips snapping forward as he started the head of destruction towards the door. The point of the axe pierced the doors skin and the crowd of men gaped in revelry. Every New York sympathizer in the town saw Ethan slice through their leaders door in one fell swoop.

The Colonel looked at the crowd behind him. His eyes burned in the light of the torches with an intensity that gave even his closest friends nightmares. “Spencer!” Ethan boomed. Remember Baker, Seth Warner, Robert Cochran, and a handful of the higher-ranking men in the mob stood a good distance behind Ethan. Flames at his back and axe in hand Ethan stepped over the rubble of the door, entered the dark atrium, and stomped deliberately upstairs.

The doors to each bedroom proved less of an obstacle than the front door. One swift kick from the Colonel's boot ripped each off its hinges. Kick left. Empty
bedroom. Kick right. Empty bedroom. Kick left. The study. Kick right. Another empty bedroom. Baker interjected with the first words utter by someone other than Colonel Allen since the mob entered town, “the master bedroom.”

“Yup,” Allen responded, and the room grew silent once again. The room was much larger than all of the other bedrooms. It also had the special woman’s touch that was lacking in all the others. The curtains were draped meticulously, and the air smelled slightly of perfume. Ethan, standing in the hole where a door used to be, took an inventory of the furniture, paying particular attention the size of each piece. A trunk against the far wall originally caught his eye. As the Colonel approached the chest, the gang at his back herded into the room.

“Benjamin?” Ethan spoke calmly, nearly at a whisper. Even more inaudible were the deep, slow breaths that slipped through the cracks of the chest’s iron trimming. Whoooooo0000000000. Whoooooo00000000. “Benjamin.” Ethan’s usual, deep voice this time. The breaths grew faster, Whoo. Whoo. Whoo. And quickly turned to a high pitched whimper. Hmmm who who. Hmmm who who. Hmmm who who.

“Benjamin Spencer!” Allen grew bolder, more impassioned, but soon reverted back to a less terrifying tone. “Mr. Spencer,” Ethan reasoned, “the way I see is it we have two options.” The band of men at the Colonel’s back stepped forward and formed a semi-circle 3 feet behind their leader. “Either you grow a dick and get out of that fucking chest.” The chest took a deep breath and creaked slightly. Ethan’s voice reached a crescendo. “Or I take this axe and drive it straight through that little fort
you’ve got there, through your face, and through this entire house. All of which will make great kindling for our fires tonight.”

Benjamin Spencer, Justice of the Peace in the town and primary voice of Yorker concerns, stood up with tears in his eyes and piss in his pants. “You are a damned old offender, aren’t you?” Ethan proclaimed, hooting in laughter along with the rest of the mob. Ethan stepped forward pressing Spencer against the window at his back. “Let’s go.”

Ethan dragged Spencer down the stairs by the nape of his neck like a cat carrying its prey. He stepped over chunks of shattered wood as he left, and strode into the moonlit fall night. Spencer in hand, Ethan raised his arm triumphantly, nearly lifting his prisoner off the ground. The crowd of farmers waiting patiently outside burst out in a mix of cheers and laughter. Parting once again for their leader, the throng shouted threats and insults at the captive. The Colonel and his inner circle stayed the next two days drinking casually in the comfort of a friend’s home. Spencer sat hungry beside an armed guard in the shed. Allen returned to the steps in front of the shattered door at dusk on the second day with Benjamin Spencer once again in hand. The entire was torn from their daily chores and corralled in front Ethan’s pulpit by the Colonel’s army.

“My neighbors,” Allen exclaimed. “It seems certain men among you have led you astray. If you remain on your devious course of action, you too will suffer the fate of Mr. Spencer here.” The people of Clarendon were silent, nervous. “If I return to this place one more time, one more, folks like Mr. Spencer here will have a heavy
burden to carry. You have earned these lands, these homes, and these crops. You have earned your livelihood. Our elite neighbors across the lake threaten all of that. I do not want to do the same.” Ethan motions to the Green Mountain Boys. “We are all just like you. We have everything invested in these Grants, and we have your interests at heart. We will protect you should you follow our lead.” Ethan began screaming, “if you choose otherwise, we will reduce every house in this town to ashes and leave each one of its inhabitants a corpse. Take your pick.”

Ethan stepped down the steps, leaving Spencer in front of his home. “Burn it,” the Colonel said coolly. Four men raced from the crowd, took their places at each corner, and raised their torches to the roof. The mob continued to surround, the townspeople. In a matter of minutes the pitch was engulfed. The Colonel knew that he had already humiliated the Spencer beyond repair. The people of Clarendon were scared for sure. But he was convinced that a sign of mercy would sell the people of his cause entirely. “That’s enough,” Ethan muttered to Warner. On command the horde proceeded to remove the flaming roof, and left the rest of the home intact. “They get the message.”
Ethan Allen

The Bloody Acts

Fresh off his recent successes at quelling the increasing pressure from New York in his territory, Ethan returned to his favorite resting place at Fay’s Tavern. He did little to resist the temptations of the spirits. At Fay’s he was no longer the Colonel. At Fay’s Ethan dressed himself beside unfamiliar women in clothes spun at a home he hadn’t seen in months. He was drunk enough to forget the number families he had burned out of their homes. In the mornings Ethan smelled the piss in his sheets and thought of holding soiled, sobbing, and terrified Benjamin Spencer above his head for hundreds to see. At Fay’s Ethan hated his brother Ira for convincing him to stand in front of good, honest people and tell them, “we are all just like you.” At Fay’s Ethan was an alcoholic, a lush, a hero, a hypocrite. He could just be himself in solitary confinement with no pressures from the outside world. Only pressures from within.

In early March 1774 Govern Tryon gave Ethan his opportunity for escape. In response to the Boys actions in Clarendon, the Governor increased the rewards on the heads of Allen and his closest allies. In turn, the New York Assembly passed an act attempting to stifle the barbarous behavior in Ethan’s territories. The governor was pissed.15 But in the late afternoon at Fay’s Tavern, Ethan read the Governor’s proclamation and once again recalled the destruction of property, the utter ruin that fell in his violent wake. It was too late to rebuild the houses and the livestock was

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15 From Tryon’s Twelve Acts of Outlawry are given in Slade, Vermont State Papers, 42. The twelves act were written as a response to the violence of the Green Mountain Boys against people like Benjamin Spenceer. Allen and others in his circle came to call them “The Bloody Acts.”
Ethan Allen

already dead. Yet as sunlight loosened its noose around Ethan’s head, he realized that this was the opportunity he had been waiting for, the opportunity to lead as Ethan Allen and not the Colonel, the opportunity to take his place on the good side of history.

On April 28th, Ethan left his post at Fay’s Tavern in the early morning. It was the first time he had been sober in months, maybe years, and he left his uniform behind. He reached Manchester later that night in preparation for the convention the following day. Towns from up and down the western edge of the grants showed up to discuss what Ethan successfully labeled the Bloody Acts. Over the nearly two months preceding the conference Ethan overplayed the significance of the Bloody Acts and the government of New York’s threats on his life. As a result Ethan’s life became somewhat of a cause celebre to go along with New York’s steady encroachment on New Hampshire Grantees’ lands. The most salient threat to the Onion River Land Company’s holdings was no longer its neighbors, but Tryon, and Ethan could finally rally all Vermonters in a peaceful way. All of this added up to Ethan being well received when the convention met on the 29th.

Of course, as the convention commenced, Ethan took center stage. He stood at the head of the table, surrounded by the leading men from all the surrounding towns, and sparked the region’s fervor. “These acts,” he cleared his throat. “These tyrannical acts are replete with malicious turpitude, forced upon us by the Honorable Governor Tryon His Majesty and his stooge puppets, written in blood by villains and
Ethan Allen's response to Tryon's acts was written in an article to the *Connecticut Courant*, June 8 and 21.

“F*** the Company,” Ethan thought. These people trusted him, and it was about time he acted on their behalf.

The remorse that he felt for misleading these people could only be expressed with inaudible words on a page. “Our inhabitants will hold themselves in readiness at a minute’s warning to aid and defend such friends of ours, who, for their merit to the general cause are falsely denominated rioters.” Ethan’s roving armies were not rioters. They were regular men driven by desperation, starvation, and a sense of common good. They had tangible things at stake, families, farms, friends, and relatives. For so long Ethan mislead these people, swooned them with his power, both physically and verbally, and used their trust to protect the speculative lands of his family. In Ethan’s mind he wrote his letter to the men hovering around that table, not to Governor Tryon or the New York Assembly. He wrote them asking for the opportunity to be the man they thought he was.

Ethan took it upon himself to induce the delegates in favor of one particular point. “No inhabitant of the Grants shall hold and office of honor or profit under the colony of New York.” It didn’t take long to convince the conference that political autonomy was the most desirable outcome, and the resolution was voted for unanimously. What better could Ethan give the people than a true Jeffersonian republic? Ethan saw his name in textbooks and biographies in the hand of children.
Ethan Allen

generations down the road. Ethan Allen, Founding Father. It looked good. They would remember him as a republican, maybe a nation builder, not a terrorist. By denouncing the jurisdiction of New York, a jurisdiction validated by King George, Ethan accepted his role as the people’s primary political powerbroker.\textsuperscript{20} And he intended to use it for the will of the people.

Ethan left the Sunderland conference with a new sense of purpose. When he returned to his home at the Catamount Tavern, Allen spent day and night working on a new pamphlet, the final word in his long standing feud with the royal colony of New York. He spent long days in the woods outside of Bennington, thinking, formulated every argument used against their westerly neighbors in clear, common language. When he felt like he hit the nail on the head, he returned to his room at the tavern and wrote by candlelight. The pamphlet seethed with disdain for the landed gentry that Vermonter’s perceived to be running New York. In essence, Ethan devoted himself to putting the wants and needs of the people in the Grants and the men at the Sunderland convention in one accessible source. When he finished, Ethan left for the publisher immediately. The sooner the word got out, the better.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} A description of the resolution and its importance is in Jellison, Ethan Allen, 94
\textsuperscript{21} The work discussed is Ethan Allen, A Brief Narrative of the Proceeding of the Government of New York Relative to Their Obtaining the Jurisdiction of that Large District of Land to the Westward of the Connecticut River... (Hartford: Watson Publishing, 1774).
Ethan returned to Connecticut among the rich autumn foliage in 1774. He was no virgin to fall in the northeast, but this ride seemed especially colorful. The people's homes he rested in along the way seemed especially warm. He had a purpose, a purpose larger than himself.

Allen stopped first at the Company headquarters. He had apprehensions about staying with his brothers. They talked him into the Company. They compromised his integrity. They compromised his relationship with the people in his territory. They made him feel like a fraud. Ethan walked through the front door to the family property around 8 o'clock. Ira was sitting at the dinner table reading the Hartford Courant. Ethan thought the house was empty.

“Brother!” Ira exclaimed. Ethan's youngest brother had spent the last few months hunting and surveying on Company land. “It's been a while!”

“It has brother, it has.” Ethan spoke with an apprehension reserved for Ira.

“Get anything good?”

“Deer,” Ira replied. “always deer. What have you been up to? Still hell raising I hope, for our sake that is.” Without speaking Ethan dropped his manuscript on the table. “Ha, you wrote this?”

“I did.”

“What's it about?”

“Read it.”
Ethan Allen

Ira spent the next hour skimming the contents of his brother’s most coveted work. Ethan went upstairs to drop off his bag. He sat at the edge of his bed and placed the bag at his feet. Without unpacking, Ethan took a bottle of whiskey from the bag and sucked down its thick brown liquid without a glass.

After Ethan finished his bottle, he went downstairs to find his brother still thumbing through his pamphlet. “You know what this says?” Ira asked surprised.

“I wrote it”

“No jurisdictioin?”

“Nope. None.”

“You know better than that, brother.”

“Its what they want.”

“Who? The farmers? What the fuck do they know?” Ira scoffed. “We both know that New York has every right to rule over those fucking mountains.”

“So the King says. How are you siding with George right now?”

“I’m not. I’m just saying your fighting a losing battle.”

“Maybe, maybe not. It’s their land. They own it. They farm it. They rule it. They are convinced.”

“How convinced?”

“Positive. All of them. They’ve convinced me as well.”

“Haha, brother you’re the best thing to ever happen to this family.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?”
“You keep doing what you’re doing. This separation thing isn’t out of the question. Remember our old pal Skene. He’s thinking about the same thing. At this point, it might be the Company’s only option.”

“Right. The Company.” Ethan retired to his chamber with another bottle of whiskey. He replaced sleep with drink, and in the morning went to visit his family.

Ethan spent his few weeks at home in utter boredom. His wife was drab, and his kids were gone for the most part. Simple country lifting could not match the appeal of the frontier or the escape of the bottle. So the Colonel reverted to the latter. The second his pamphlets came from the publisher, he set off on his publicity tour. Ethan sold copies here and there, but his main focus was on the people in the Grants, the people who inspired his work. When he reached Fay’s Tavern the mood in town was more of ambivalence than pride. But, his expectation that the leaflet would become the next Common Sense proved overblown. Ethan waited, frustrated and angry.

After only a few weeks, Ethan began to relive his old behaviors. The drink poured more frequently. He was bitter. He had put so much into these people, and over the course of a season they had forgot him. The more Ethan drank, the more his temper flared. But soon he would have his release. Clarendon again. This time it was the town’s Baptist Minister, the Reverend Benjamin Hough. According to reports, the Reverend left town shortly after Benjamin Spencer’s public torture and returned with a commission from New York as the town’s new Justice of the Peace. Apparently they didn’t get the message the first time.
Ethan Allen

Allen shined his gold buttons and leather boots, gathered Seth Warner and his company, and hit forest bound for Sunderland where Hough was held prisoner. The Colonel would send one last message to New York and its sympathizers in his back yard. Ethan sat on the as the head of the court. The most damning and serious charge against Hough was accepting the commission from the New York government. Ethan’s decision was easy, and his resentment made it even easier.

A band of Green mountain boys tied tightly to a large willow tree in the center of town. His clothes were stripped while Ethan announced the panel’s sentence. 200 lashes. He grabbed a white, flexible birch branch from the living tree, and snapped it off with one hand. The birch in the hands of Ethan Allen frightened Hough even more than the axe intimidated Spencer. Hough’s screams of terror resonated throughout the town. The first ten lashes belonged to the Colonel.

Ethan felt the first crack of the thin branch pierce Hough’s naked flesh. The prisoner’s horrified screams soon rose in pitch to cries of utter pain. With each swing of his weapon the Colonel let out a guttural, animal grunt. Hough’s presence in the grants violated everything Ethan put his heart into over the past nine months and each one of Hough’s shrieks assured the Colonel that his message would be heard. The tenth crack drew the first visible signs of blood. When the Colonel finished he dropped the tool at his feet, stood in front of the captive Yorker. Every muscle in Ethan’s enormous body clenched tight, and he scolded the helpless prisoner. “You are all a bunch of damned cowards or else you would have come against us long before now!”
Ethan Allen

Ethan stayed true to his word. 200 lashes, carried out in full. A group of men cut the Reverend down from the tree and propped him up on their shoulders as Ethan approached his nearly lifeless body. “Leave this place,” Ethan said coldly. Naked and without the luxury of saying goodbye to his family, Hough staggered out of town westward.²²

²² The story of Hough's whipping is best told by Hough himself whose testimony to New York from March 7, 1775 is in the Vermont State Papers.
Abigail Johnson
The Trip

Upon the advice of my father, I left Massachusetts early in the new year of 1775. The atmosphere of the region was that of turmoil and upheaval. Lawless drunks passed through the streets causing havoc and disturbing well-meaning families like mine. Our faith and obedience soon became a giant target on the back of any Carleton. In truth I was happy to leave. I was sure that the theatre the city had become was beyond my character, especially now. I felt claustrophobic even before the hostilities began, but the horrible crackle of effigies ablaze and the occasional stone traveling through my bedroom window was enough to push me out of the region for good.

I had heard stories of a much more pleasant place for a while. Ever since father had been commissioned in Canada he’d been trying to convince me to accompany him. He said there would be infinite trees, so rich in color during the autumn no artist could fit all of them on his pallet. There would be beauty and simplicity in Canada that had left Boston a long time ago. In Canada I had the opportunity to live without fear, to roam the woods, and to be alone when I wanted to. There was peace and quiet. So father arranged for me to join him, and in the early spring I left.

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23 Sir Guy Carleton was the Governor General of Canada until 1778, aiding in the efforts to defeat the American army at Quebec. After Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, Carleton acquired the position of Commander-in-Chief of North America following Sir Henry Clinton's resignation. For more about this Carleton's life see Paul Revere Reynolds, Guy Carleton: A Biography (London: Gage Publishing, 1980) and David Paul Nelson, General Sir Guy Carleton, Lord Dorchester: Soldier-Statesman of Early British Canada (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2000).
We traveled via carriage through all of Massachusetts, the roads being adequate for such travel. By we, I mean myself, and two youngish, male escorts. One was a cousin of mine called Jonathan. He was a short, portly young man in his late twenties, a few years my elder. The second young man was a handsome friend of Jonathan’s who went by the name of Zeek. Zeek’s face was squarer than Jonathan’s, with large straight teeth, and green almond shaped eyes. Both boys sought a future in Canada working under my father, and escorting me would be beneficial. Being young I often fantasized about my male companions while bouncing along in the carriage. I could see my self marrying Jonathan, perhaps. When I thought of Zeek, I wanted to make love.

By the time we hit Williamstown the roads were beginning to falter. We traded the carriage for extra horses to load up our luggage. At first I hoped to ride horseback with Zeek, as his fine figure and good looks caught my fancy. But Jonathan commanded me to join him and took his position as the lead rider. Zeek followed with the baggage horse in hand. As we rode the roads shrunk to mere paths. Jonathan all the while stayed focused, constantly looking forward with an unrelenting sense of mission. I could sense the obligation he felt, the obligation to return me to my father safely, but more so the obligation to finish what he had started. Zeek had no such air about him. He followed Jonathan through the woods with a childlike sense of wonderment. Branches often walloped his forehead as he stared into the forest trying to spot deer, or as he gazed at the thundershowers forming slowly.
overhead. If I looked forward too long Jonathan’s anxiety would overwhelm me. But I could always glance back and smile at one of Zeek’s little idiosyncrasies.

It was early evening when we broke through the woods at Westminster, and we were struck by the commotion. We passed small little villages along the road. Towns here and there where we could grab a bit of food and be on our way, but Westminster was bustling. Horses were hitched on posts left and right all the way down the town’s main street.

“What in God’s name?” Zeek inquired.

“Something’s up, huh?” Jonathan responded.

“I’d say! Let’s call it a day and poke our heads around. There’s an inn up the road,” Zeek suggested eagerly.

Jonathan wanted nothing to do with Zeek’s suggestions. “Springfield is only a few hours ahead. We can make it there before it gets too dark.”

“I’m getting a bit weary from all the riding,” I interjected. “The trip is a little more difficult on horseback.” I knew Jonathan would dutifully adhere to my insinuation. It was quite possibly his most charming quality. But like Zeek, I was curious about this little town that was so very charged. I couldn’t have known just how life altering this suggestion would be. Fate brought me to this place at this electric time, and fate would soon reveal to me the two greatest loves in my life.
The Encounters

Jonathan helped me down from my horse, making sure to hold my waist securely so as not to touch anything inappropriately, fixing his eyes on mine. Zeek grabbed our luggage from the baggage horses and threw it all over his shoulders.

We approached the town’s only inn on foot. Jonathan and Zeek stood in front of me. They were roughly the same size with Zeek carrying the baggage. Over the bulky luggage and Jonathan’s round shoulders shone a pinkish-yellow hue. It was one of those warm spring nights that remind you summer is just around the corner.

From the horse hitch to the Inn entrance was only thirty or so feet and as we approached the door my escorts parted slightly. Through the crack in their shoulders, the caps and hats of countless other men revealed themselves. They gathered, drinks in hand, outside the tavern portion of the Inn. Apparently it was a popular place.

I wanted to see their faces. I wanted to know what lot of men were attracted to this tiny village in the midst of a vast wilderness. There was too much baggage. All I could see were burlap sacks shaded pink from the dusk sky, and filled with the clothes of a city woman. Instead of faces I was forced to make my judgments based on pant legs, shoes, and buckles. For the most part I was unimpressed. They were farmers. They wore broken and old leather shoes. Dirty shoes, some without any buckles at all. The mud that caked the sides often splashed up and drizzled mire on the pant cuff.
I could only imagine their faces. They probably looked something like their lower half. The skin on their face must have resembled the leather from their shoes. Worn and worked. Wrinkled and sun bleached nearly beyond recognition, as crusty as the mud that layered their boots. I was disgusted and all I need to do was see their shoes. They were yeomen, slaves to their land with nothing to do but dig, drink, and mob. I felt like I was in a backwoods Boston.

Zeek and Jonathan proceeded in front of me, shielding me from the wretched eyes that were surely looking my backside up and down as I walked by. Jonathan grabbed the door handle and nudged it open with the crown of his shoulder. The sign on the door read Norton Tavern, in simple black lettering.\textsuperscript{24} The tavern itself was a massive, two-storied frame house. The first floor was open, with tables strewn about in no particular order. Random assortments of chairs encircled them. Zeek set down our bags, and followed Jonathan to the long bar in the far east corner. I waited in the doorway, and felt the heavy gaze of the tavern’s patrons.

The men inside the tavern were of a different sort than those outside. Their clothes looked cleaner and better assembled. The smell of alcohol permeated the air, but was preferable to the smell of body soil and dirt that wafted from the peasants outside. My eyes wandered around, not fixing on one particular place or person. The men at the bar looked at me briefly, but soon returned to their drinks. A gathering at a table to my right was locked in conversation and spared little time for us foreigners. They spoke deliberately and patiently, allowing for the others to finish speaking.

\textsuperscript{24} Taverns around this time sometimes had Ladies Parlors and entrances. It is unclear whether or not Norton's had one, but my best guess would say no considering the type of place Westminster was and the sort of people Norton's served.
before the next began. Although I could not make out their words, it was clear the
topic was important.

One man, however, seemed deviate from the exchange. His simple brown
eyes met mine for a long second, then darted back to the table. He was put together
well. A clean white shirt hung loosely over his jagged shoulders while his hands
rested patiently on the table in front of him. There was no drink in front of him. He
glanced to the bar, and my eyes followed. My escorts were had finished with their
business and left the bar.

“We lucked out,” Jonathan said with relief.

“Really? How so?” I responded quickly.

“There are two rooms left, and we got’em,” Zeek interjected with excitement.

“That is lucky.”

Jonathan returned to his dutiful self, “The rooms are right next to each other.
There’s and adjoining door. Zeek and I will sleep together to give you some privacy.
You’ll be just fine. Let’s get you settled in.”

Zeek reached down and heaved the luggage back over his broad shoulder.
Jonathan led the way across the tavern floor to the stairs. As I weaved through tables,
the building felt miles long, even larger than it looked from the outside. I waited a few
steps before following my entourage. I wanted to be seen on my own, and the men
were responsive. The tavern hushed a bit as I strolled across the oak planks. Each
tap of my foot announced my arrival and I felt the warm eyes of these respectable men
at my back.
We walked up the stairs, and a heavy pounding on the floor above drowned out our steps. Jonathan and Zeek pressed themselves against the wall suddenly. An attractive woman slid by them in the other direction. Her hair was a dark brown, and matched the color of her eyes. She looked about my age. At the top of the stairs Jonathan hooked a left, and Zeek followed. I approached the top of the stairwell alone as the pounding reached a crescendo.

I stood at the top of the stairs and looked to right. About a yard in front of me was the source of the racket. Two immense feet waited idly. Light from the candlelit hallway glimmered back and forth of the top of the shiny black leather boots. The gold buckles that adorned them looked like a fire about to ignite the neatly tailored pant that grazed their tops. I followed the gold trimming that ran down the side of this man’s right leg with my eyes for what seemed like an eternity, pausing at the pelvis. The belt around his waist matched his shoes perfectly. From there a series of gold buttons traced another long path to the man’s impressive chest. Thick, muscular tendrils sprouted from the collar of the ornate, forest green coat.

By the time I reached his face, I could tell the man was smiling. The skin around his pronounced chin was taught, forming small lines that ran vertically on both sides of his large mouth. He grinned with an inherent charm, and we locked eyes.

“Miss,” the man said deliberately, nodding in my direction while removing his cap.
I stared up at him, powerless, like I was standing in the shadow of some unconquerable mountain. My mind told me to retreat, to cower, but I was already returning the smile that he so generously offered me.

"Abigail," Jonathan's voice broke my daze. "We are over here." I paused for a moment, my eyes still locked on the specimen in front of me. "Abigail!" Jonathan again.

As I turned his eyes moved up and down my body. Their touch grew more faint with every step I took until the door to my room finally released me from their grasp. Zeek had already placed my belongings on my bed, and I dropped down next to them. So powerful. So pristine. So handsome. I wanted to feel his gaze again. The next morning I woke fully clothed with my arms above my head, still beside my unpacked clothes. The sun came through the large window on my left and warmed my face and chest. Before long there was a light knock on the door.

"Abigail?" Jonathan muffled through the large wood slab. "Are you awake?"

"Yes Jonathan, one second," I responded drowsily. I changed quickly into my nightgown, and slid the rest of my belongings into the closet. Pulling back the covers of the bed, I slipped beneath the sheets. "Come in Jonathan."

"Good morning Abigail," Jonathan said steadily. "Would you like to have some breakfast with Zeek and I? Despite its appearance, the locals tell me this place makes some delicious meals. You'll need some food in you before we head out for the day."
“I...” I hesitated, “I’m not feeling well this morning Jonathan. Maybe just some water will do.”

Jonathan approached worriedly, and sat at the edge of the bed. He reached up with his right hand and placed the back of it gently against my forehead, still warm from the morning sunlight. “You do seem to be running a fever. I’ll go get you that water and see about a doctor.”

“No, no, no, Jonathan,” I replied convincingly. “I don’t need a doctor, just some rest maybe. We have been traveling rather quickly.”

“Your right Abigail. I shouldn’t have been pushing you so hard. A woman can only be expected to endure so much on the frontier like this. Let me get you that water.”

“I can get up, Jonathan. Breakfast might make me feel a little better and we can head out in a few hours.”

“Absolutely not. We’re going to wait this out. I am sure that I am the cause of all this and I don’t want to provoke your illness any further. Your father would be quite distressed to learn I made you ill, none the less made you travel in such a condition.” Jonathan left to retrieve some water for me and correct what he clearly felt was a grave error. I returned to my pillow, still longing for the giant man to touch me once again with his beautiful eyes.
The Night

Throughout the day I heard the beat of the town pounding throughout the tavern. Thump, thump, two steps across the tavern floor. Scurrying footsteps followed, voices grew louder. The lifeblood of Westminster had been stirred beyond comprehension. Occasionally he wandered outside, mingling with the rabble as he passed. Crowds gathered, gazing skyward at the large pine-colored man that moved through their streets.

People came and people went with surprising frequency. There was one artery in the center of town, and the traffic flooded in and out. They were important people it seemed, at least for such a place in the world. It is safe to say that they were the finest that could be expected of little Westminster. Some of them looked weary, some of them fresh, some simple and some less so. They must have come from all over. Westminster was clearly not large enough to be hiding all of these upper level civilians.

And as I peered out my window I saw the man from the night before move slowly along the soil. He lifted his legs slowly and deliberately, and then released them, letting his thick extremities fall to the earth. Thump...thump... his feet clung to the ground for a moment. I imagined roots springing from his feet, clinging to the land that fed them and gave them life. Then, when they felt their descent, the roots stretched from beneath him, pulling taught with lustful anticipation. Thump... thump. I felt his walk from my window. Thump...thump. With every heavy sole dug deep into dirt earth he seemed to grow an inch or two. His shoulders broadened, his
limbs elongated, his chest inflated. Thump...thump. One after the other, men approached. Thump...thump. Either coming or going. Thump...thump. Either way, they passed through him.

By sunset my supposed fever had dissolved. I was hungry anyway, and Jonathan was more than happy to bring me supper. We would be headed off again in the morning. Zeek, Jonathan, and I sat for a while talking of people and places, where we were going and where we had been. Quebec, it seemed, made us all a bit nervous. I worried about the losing some of the excitement of the city. For so long it was my home, and there was truly so much to do. Jonathan worried mostly about father, and whether or not he had performed well enough to impress the Governor General of Canada. Zeek, it seemed, was more worried about the job itself. He never was the royal government sort.

The commotion in town did not slow in the shadows of moonlight. Men came and went in a similar fashion. But by then the streets were less busy. The tavern became the center of all activity. After dinner I retired to my room. Jonathan thought it a good idea for me to rest as much as possible. My two companions went to the tavern to socialize with the rest of the boys.

It was impossible to sleep. I had witnessed the most powerful, jaw dropping man I ever met or would ever meet. I kept my ear pressed against the covers of my mattress. There were no thumps. I heard muffled voices singing an incoherent song. Every now and then Zeek burst in with a chuckle and spouted off some nonsense to
the other patrons. Jonathan didn’t speak a word. Or if he did, it was far too soft to be heard through straw, and oak.

I don’t remember hearing the thumping when he walked in. I don’t even remember falling asleep. I still had my day clothes on with my ear pressed against the foot of my bed. The first thing I heard when I woke up was the booming baritone voice that I knew could only belong to the man I met the night before.

It was startling, and I jerked my head around and clenched my pillow with both hands. I sat up, a little dazed and waited for another burst. The words enunciated clear as day, though the floorboards, through my bed, through entire inn I was sure, even out through all that wilderness.

“You yellow sons of bitches,” the mountain of a man bellowed at the crowd that apparently still convened in the tavern below. I worried for his safety. I’d seen many a drunken buffoon during my days in the city. Mobs got out of hand pretty quickly. My man seemed to be inciting one.

“They are killing your friends and neighbors.” His voice, much calmer with a hint of real sadness, still resounded through my room. Between each sentence the crowd at the bar bustled a little bit, murmuring inaudible responses. The giant green man spoke again, “We are not so different, you and I. I am not from here, but I am of here. Eat, sleep, and breathe here in the wild forests of Vermont.” Every pause the man took, his crowd reacted even more favorably. He was inciting them alright, but not in the way I’d expected.
“We are all tied to this land, in one way or the other, and we will all return to it. A month ago,” he paused while the room went silent, “two men met their final resting place long before God intended. We have a choice to make gentlemen. I have already made my choice. I chose a long time ago to never let someone steal my hard earned land from underneath my feet. I made the choice, like those two young men made, to protect my right to own and cultivate a piece of land or to be buried on that very plot.” The crowd and the man peeked together, but he continued speaking, more reasonably now.

“This is not an eastern issue or a western issue, it is a Vermont issue. It is a New York issue. There is no way for all of us to keep our land if we keep those giant mounds of earth between us. Those mountains are the spine of Vermont. It holds us together. It makes us one entity. I refuse to watch any part of it be held in bondage by New York’s class of false elites.” I had no idea what he was talking about, but his powerful oration won me over. I wanted to join his struggle, whatever it may be. He spoke with so much passion, like the soul of the Green Mountains exploded out of his mouth in this tiny little town.

I woke a few ours later in the depths of night to more pounding. Thump...thump. He was still in the tavern but he was moving. Thump...thump. He was getting closer, finally hitting the stairs. Thump...thump. I felt compelled to move with him. He took two more steps, and I took two steps out of bed towards.

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25 The very distinct difference in how Vermonters viewed themselves compared to how they viewed New York is described well in Thompson, Independent Vermont. New York represented a landed gentry in America that would have been very averse to people in Vermont, especially if they felt their land was present.
Thump...thump. We moved in unison, he up the stairs, and me towards the door.
Thump...thump. I reached for the knob and turned it as quietly as possible.
Thump...thump. Tiptoeing into the hallway, I closed the creaking door behind me.
Thump...thump. As I slid down the hallway, I first saw the shadow of his foot as it reached the peak of the flight. Thump. His second foot reached the top, and the pump in my chest pressed out its last load of blood and stopped.

The hallway turned pitch black, veiled by his frame. His silhouette imprisoned me. Solitary confinement. I couldn't make out any curve or feature of his body, but I felt him only a few yards in front of me. I felt his eyes touching me.

“Shouldn’t a young lady like you be asleep at this hour?” he asked me sarcastically. He knew. He knew why I was there. He knew I’d be there the first time we crossed paths at the top of those very stairs.

“I couldn’t sleep,” I responded nervously.

“My fault probably. I don’t have what people call an inside voice.”

“It didn’t bother me much.” I was the apologetic one. I didn’t mean to insult him.

“Good,” speaking suggestively, “either way, this is no place for a young lady to be wandering around all alone.

“I’m a big girl.”

“Sure you are. Even big girls need company now and then.”

“You’re right. They do.”
Thump...thump. My heart started again, thump...thump, pounding as heavily as his footsteps on the hard wood floors. Thump...thump, louder and louder, heavier and heavier as he approached until he was by my side.

“What’s your name?” He asked softer than I would have believed he could speak.

“Abigail.”

“Well Abby, I’m Ethan.” I didn’t ask him his name. It didn’t matter to me. He wasn’t merely a man. He resembled no other man I ever met, in appearance, personality, or character. He was something entirely different, something without a name, and he had already won.

He draped his arm over my shoulder and squeezed my shoulder gently. Each finger stretched nearly to my elbow. As he squeezed my chest pressed against his, and nudged me forward. Thump...thump. His steps and mine hit the floor in unison once again. Thump...thump. After a few steps my heart was synchronized to the beat. Thump...thump. We passed the stairs and if he was speaking I didn’t know it. Thump, thump. His feet, my feet, my heart pounding against his chest, it was all so deafening. Thump...thump. It dazed me. Only half conscious really, thump...thump, when we got to his room. Thump...thump. And his shadow covered me completely as we slipped into one radiant, white-hot night.
The next morning I woke to an entirely different kind of tapping. Jonathan was at my door.

“Abigail,” he spoke without coming in. “Would you like some breakfast, Zeek and I are headed downstairs.

“Sure, Jonathan. Give me a moment to get ready.” Truth be told, I was starving. I hadn’t eaten a real meal in just about 24 hours, and I never really was all that sick.

“We’ll grab us a table.”

As I dressed I grew anxious. What if he were downstairs? What if he said something to Jonathan or Zeek? He couldn’t have been there. I didn’t hear his thumping. I didn’t feel him. When I went to the dining room the tavern was entirely empty, except for my two escorts who sat at a small table in the middle of the rectangular room. After pushing through a hoard of stray chairs, I sat down next to them both, catching them in mid conversation.

“I liked him. He certainly could win over a crowd. And he bought me a drink or two. No harm in that.” Zeek admitted to Jonathan.

“I am sure, Zeek. And I’m sure for every drink he bought you, he had five times as many for himself. He’s a brute and a drunk. The only thing he’s good for is stirring up mobs.” Jonathan responded with contempt, and I tried not to seem defensive when I sat down.

“Good morning, gentlemen. What are we having?” I asked politely.
“Some eggs. Some bacon. Pig’s fresh killed. Should be good,” Zeek answered like a little boy waiting for Sunday brunch after church.

“Some coffee Abigail?” Jonathan asked.

“Tea please.”

“We’ll be off as soon as we eat. If we hurry, we might reach Canada within the week.” With Jonathan’s dutiful reply hit me. Canada, father, I had forgotten why I was there and where I was going. I panicked for a moment. My core was bouncing, jostling my insides. It was all I could do to keep it restrained. He was inside me. The mountains, the trees, the earth, this place, it was inside me. I felt him and it inside me and I couldn’t pull it out. I didn’t want to.

I packed my belongings in the quiet inn, hoping every moment to hear him, but he never came. Zeek threw my bag over his shoulder along with the boys’ things and we headed for our horses. Jonathan helped me mount the large, deep sierra colored horse that I had been riding throughout the trip. Before that point I just regarded him as another horse, one of many I rode in my lifetime. But somehow its mane looked differently. The horse’s hair, brown and flowing, looked like his. It smelled of the earth he belonged to, the soil that was in me now. I sat atop his powerful frame ready to ride away from this place, knowing all too well that it would never leave me.

We strolled through town as I came to grips with what leaving really meant. As we headed north up the street a man rode beside us across the street. We passed the meetinghouse, and the large, simple church. Westminster seemed a little more
developed than it once appeared, at least for one of these frontier towns. The man across the street passed it all in step with our entourage. The road began to converge, abandoning its quasi urban shape so it could squeeze into the sea of green in front of us. Before long we were side by side with the man traveling in the same direction.

We stopped. I'd seen him before. He was in the tavern when we arrived. The man who made eye contact so briefly, then looked away.

“Morning,” the man said cordially, “My names Thomas, Thomas Johnson.”

“I'm Ezekiel,” always happy to meet new people, "they call me Zeek.”

“My name is Jonathan, that's Abigail.

“Where are you headed? Somewhere up north I suppose,” Thomas inquired.

Zeek joked, “Ha, to Quebec...eventually.”

“W ell you are headed in the right direction.” Thomas was properly dressed, as clean cut and proper as his introduction. I could have sworn id seen him somewhere before. “I live in Newbury. ‘Tending to some business down here, but I'm headed home now. It's a straight shot up north, just past the White River Junction. I'd be more than happy to travel along side such a pretty young lady,” he offered in what I would come to know as his sweet, corny way.

“Much obliged, sir,” Jonathan was worried, “but we wouldn't want to keep you from your family any longer than is necessary.”

“No, no my boys and girls are grown enough to take care of themselves and the house. I run a small tavern and inn there, not quite as big as Norton’s o'er there, but it’s a nice place.”
“Don’t be rude, Jonathan.” Zeek was grateful. He liked the woods from day one. “The man is offering a good nights sleep.”

I offered my opinion on the matter. “Yeah, Jonathan. I’m not sure how much riding I can take today.”

“We’ll see when we get there.”

“We should go soon or we wont make it by sundown.” Thomas grew a bit impatient, so we left. And for once Jonathan did not lead the way. Now he followed Thomas, the forty something man who called me pretty. As I strolled the narrow, heavily wooded paths I felt the beast between my legs. Branches caressed my shoulders with a pleasant stiffness. I felt Ethan, in the trees and in my horse. I heard him in the animal howls and saw him in the shadows. My mind wandered to the night before. The boys talked boy talk.

Zeek was curious about the stranger. “So what were you doing in Westminster? Business, you said before, right?”

“Yeah your right. Not business in the economic sense really, but business none the less.”

“What other kind of business is there?” Jonathan, too, was intrigued.

“Its sort of a complicated subject. It involves my business. It involves my land. But some are trying to make it more than that, politics and such.”


“Exactly.”
“So what exactly happened?” Zeek was wrapped up in Thomas’ story. “There certainly was quite a commotion for a smallish frontier town.”

“It’s a long one.”

“We’ve got time,” Zeek said eagerly.

“Alright you asked for it,” Thomas prefaced his story. “I must tell you, the people here, they’re...they’re different.” I already knew they were different; I had the difference inside me. But I let Thomas explain a bit more. “In Westminster they store their gunpowder behind the pulpit.”

“Ha, no wonder they’re all the way out here in the sticks,” Zeek joked.

“Its true. A different breed. They have had problems with the courts, New York courts.”

“We’re in New York?” Jonathan was quite surprised.

“Supposedly. New York’s charter extends its eastern border to the Connecticut. The King agreed. But these people are hot to trot right now; worried the Yorkers are going to steal their land from under their feet. Alls they really need to do is apply for a charter from New York. Worked for me, I’m not worried about it. But they refuse to make things easy, not since those boys got shot.”

“Shot?” If Zeek’s horse were a seat, he’d be on the edge of it. “What for?”

“Yes sir. Shot dead. Deserved it if you ask me. They’ve been holding up courts. Judge Chandler is a Yorker, they think he’s biased, trying to steal up their farms and give ‘em to Yorkers. The Judge was supposed to hold hearings, so he left his home, gathered his justices, and headed for Westminster. Well, the townsfolk
caught wind he was traveling with an armed guard.” Thomas spoke with hesitance. He hadn’t quite made up his mind about it all, but he continued his story. I listened intently. He must fit into it somewhere, the shadowy figure that traveled in and around me.

“They thought they were being invaded by some foreign legion ready to rape and pillage. So they did what anyone would do with this state of mind, they gathered their own battalion. A man they called Uncle led the pack I guess, along with another man who is known in these parts for holding a Minister and Deacon at gunpoint. Ha, supplied them with clubs from his woodpile. It was the best most could do in this neck of the woods. They claimed they had no guns.”

“I find that hard to believe.” Jonathan was always picked apart the best stories, contesting minor facts and proper verbage.

“Me too,” Thomas began again. “Everyone has a gun out here. At the very least it’s a necessity while in the woods to hunt and for protection.” Thomas rode unarmed. The only man with a musket was Zeek. “Guns or no guns, they barricaded themselves in the courthouse, refusing to leave unless the court opened on the locals’ terms. They met at the courthouse and exchanged a few curses, ‘damned rascals, insolent puppies,’ this and that. But they agreed to hold off anything that would happen ’til morning.”

“They got ambushed!” Zeek suggested in anticipation.

“Well sort of. Turns out all the Yorkers in town got drunk and decided it was a good idea to try and take the courthouse by force in the middle of the night. But the
militia was waiting. At first the Yorkers just tried to walk right through the door, but apparently the wooden clubs actually work, that is until the guns came out. A few shots were fired and the militia took cover in the courthouse. Tories ransacked the place in the dead of night. They killed two young men, shot one 5 times."

"And you were there?" Zeek asked with admiration. "For the militia? No, the Tories?"

"No, no," Thomas seemed a little offended. "Neither. I had nothing to do with those deaths or the fighting. I was sent, as a delegate from Newbury, to discuss what happened, to talk about the supposed New York problem. It finally reached us."

"By us you mean?" Jonathan asked, still clarifying facts.

"The eastern towns. It seems a little counterintuitive, or maybe not, but the counties east of the mountains haven't had any real trouble with New York up until now. People are transferring their grants and for the most part are content with the Yorkers."

Jonathan again, "And the westerners aren't?"

"Of course not. They are savages, like Indians. They are instigators. They prod the Governor, torture anyone trying to salvage their grants by seeking security from New York. Colonel Allen being the chief criminal." Thomas was right. His story was long. We must have been half way to Newbury by now, and finally he piqued my interest. It was him, the man born from this frontier. "He's a tyrant across the mountains, whipping civilians and burning houses."

26 A good description of the events on the night of the "Westminster Massacre" as it was called is in Charles Miner Thompson, Independent Vermont (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942), 163-169.
“I told you Zeek,” Jonathan boasted proudly.

Zeek defended his stance on the matter, “I liked the guy. He bought me a drink.” Good old Zeek.

“Did I mention he’s a drunk?” Thomas added with a hint of sarcasm. “He’s crossed the mountains and I fear he’s shaken up the people here beyond return. The meetings we had, the delegates from the east, they went too far. The convention voted to align themselves with the westerners, they even voted to have the Colonel draft their resolutions.”

Jonathan felt compelled to add his two cents, “it seems invasion from within is more of a threat than New York.” Thomas agreed. But his denigration of Ethan did little to deafen his touch within me. In fact quite the opposite. I was sure now that he was of this earth, that the Green Mountains were his spine, not the region’s as he’d proposed. His power transcended rivers, streams, hills and mountains. The more soil he touched, the more his influence grew. And it was in me, traveling north to Canada.

We took our first break in the afternoon, stopping in a small clearing to eat some lunch. There was a brook that snaked through the little pasture where we watered the horses. Jonathan and Thomas led the horses through what must have been an equine paradise with tall yellow-green grass that grew to their knees, and cold, fresh mountain water straight from the summit. As they walked beside two

horses each, Thomas turned his head around slowly, straining a bit to have it twist beyond his shoulder. His head bobbed in my direction, and Jonathan turned around.

Thomas seemed small next to the horses. He was taller, and lanky. Next to the muscular horses he looked frail, but he was a thoughtful, and intelligent man. I wanted to know what Jonathan was telling him. He'd probably mention my last name, and the discussion inevitably landed on my father, how he sent for me, how we were going to Quebec for safety. Thomas and my father would get along quite well I thought. I'm sure Thomas was impressed, and liked the idea of helping the daughter of a man in his position.

Zeek and I finished preparing lunch, and the four of us gathered around a small horse blanket to eat. My two escorts surrounded me with Thomas directly in front. Every now and then, after biting off a piece of bread, my eyes would catch Thomas's. Each time his eyes darted back to his food, the horses, or the sky just as he had done in the tavern. Thomas gathered our horses to leave, and personally walked my familiar animal companion to my side. He put out his hands, the left on top of the right, and boosted me onto the back of the beast.

“Go on ahead,” Thomas shouted to Jonathan, “just keep following the trail. You can't miss it. I'll take the rear for a while.”
The Fort

I became Mrs. Thomas Johnson the following fall, November 26, 1775. In some ways it seemed very sudden, and in other ways not so very. Thomas was a caring man back then, a gentle and appeasing husband. He had been widowed twice. The second wife had died less than a year before our marriage, so he sometimes carried with him an air of the pathetic, lonely and pining. But his pitiable countenance was often what drew me closer. Also Thomas was a prominent man in Newbury. His inn gave him a standing in town that made courting me more affective. My needs and wants were catered to with chivalric duty. Most of all, it was easier to fall in love with Thomas than to convince my father to let me stay in the wilderness that I knew I belonged to.

It was a series of events having nothing to do with Thomas that eventually sealed my marriage. We all stayed at Thomas’ inn, Zeek, Jonathan and I. Zeek was enjoying the woods very much, and spent much of his time hunting and fishing. Jonathan enjoyed the idle life much less. He was restless, and didn’t enjoy spending days in the forest with Zeek. Instead he helped around the house, working with Thomas to keep the inn and tavern in running order. Me, well I did what any girl would do in my situation, I sat back and watched the sunsets from my room, enjoyed the finest free meals, and allowed Thomas to shower me with affection. It wasn’t a difficult existence, but it was a boring one.

We were not in Newbury for more than a month before my heart lit up again. It was early afternoon in mid May. Thomas and Jonathan had taken to the fields,
preparing the corn for the summer harvest. The Connecticut River Valley was home to the sweetest sweet corn I'd ever come across. Bright as sunshine, the kernels were little, moist, earthy drops of delight on hot summer days. I had eaten two ears at lunch. When Jonathan came back he showed little expression. His face was sweaty and he looked slightly unhappy. Sometimes he liked the fields sometimes he didn't, but when he spoke it was with a certain urgency.

“You hear the news?”

“Yes Jonathan, one of the bluebirds told me. No I haven’t heard the news.”

“Well I’m surprised, people won’t shut up about it.” Truth is I never liked “the people” all that much. They were not the people I imagined living in this land when it first touched me. They were not like Ethan. They seemed a touch feeble and prude.

“Well what’s going on Jonathan?”

“They took Fort Ticonderoga, Colonel Allen and his boys. They snuck in a few nights ago. Didn’t even fire a shot.” The flint of my heart cracked against my steel brain and set it ablaze. “Your father will want you to go to Canada.”

“I’m not leaving.” I was dazed a bit. But I felt him again, for the first time in a while, and I knew once again that I was invested in this country and could not leave. I hardly noticed Thomas walk into the room.

“Please Abigail, stay.” Thomas pleaded.

“I just told Jonathan, I won’t leave.”

Over the next week or so stories of the capture of Ticonderoga trickled over the mountains like a stream picking up speed and mass as it fell towards the valley. It
Abigail Johnson

was the talk of the town. And when I went to sleep at night I reenacted the scene over and over again in my mind. It was a miracle that the British soldiers sleeping in the fort did not hear his thumping from across the lake, a miracle that the sentries never saw one of the thick green pines inching closer to their walls. It couldn't have been a miracle that he convinced so few men to take on such a formidable task. His words sliced through doubt like the gargantuan sword that hung by his belt. Less than a hundred wide-eyed, idealist men stood in front of him. Their hearts must have pounded as mine once did. His eyes must have touched their cores too as he made his battle cry.

“Friends and fellow soldiers, You have, for a number of years past been a scourge and terror to arbitrary power. Your valor has been famed abroad, and I now propose to advance before you, and, in person, conduct you through the wicket-gate; for we must this morning either quit our pretensions to valor, or possess ourselves of this fortress in a few minutes. Inasmuch as it is a desperate attempt, which none but the braves of men dare undertake, I do not urge it on any contrary to his will. You that will undertake voluntarily, poise your firelocks.”

The phantom of the Green Mountain stole a fortress from beneath the British regulars and became the object of all my most intimate desires. He claimed all of his bounty that morning, “in the name of the great Jehovah and the Continental Congress.” The battle lines were drawn. I straddled the fence.

28 Stories of the capture of Fort Ticonderoga can be found everywhere. Of note however are Michael A. Bellesiles, *Revolutionary Outlaws: Ethan Allen and the Struggle for Independence on the Early American Frontier* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 116-118. Of course we can count on Allen to give us his own version of the events that took place which can be found in Ethan
The Peace

Thomas left in 1776 to help trace a route for the American army to a British fort at St. Johns, Quebec. He woke up before me as he usually did, kissed my cheek, and whispered, “goodbye” in my ear. When I rose for the day he was gone and I didn’t see him for over a year. Thomas reached Ticonderoga in 1777, all the while moving up the ranks. He wrote me letters from the front as often as he could but they did nothing for me. It was dangerous, and terrifying he would say. Thomas was never a man to mix himself in anything life threatening, which is why his service in the army really aggravated me. I never knew why he left his family, the comfort of his own home, and our infant child. We ended up paying for him to go fight this war; paying for the hired hands, and helpers on the farm, paying for food and rations and helping out the American army. I was bitter when he returned. The wounds of him abandoning me were still raw. But Thomas also had a chip on his shoulder, from what I never knew, and we spent the next three years sleeping in separate beds, averting our eyes from each others’, and feeling general indifference.

But that all changed when Thomas bought a paper in April of 1778. Ethan had returned from captivity. I was in the middle of making Thomas some lunch when he sat down at the table in the chair farthest from me.

“How’s your day so far Thomas?”

“How?” He often pretended not to hear me.

Allen, A Narrative of Colonel Ethan Allen’s Captivity (Boston: Copley Publishing, 2002), 6-7. Although his has been questioned, Allen’s telling of the events are used in the speech given before the capture, and in famous quote as he broke down Captain DeLaplace’s door. It is Ethan’s legendary telling of the fall of Ticonderoga that Abigail would have heard, and she would have been unaware of any inconsistencies.
"Your day, Thomas. How has it been?" He removed the folded paper from under his arm and laid it face down in front of him.

"The same as it always is Abigail, what's so special about today?"

"Nothing Thomas, just thought I'd ask." I carried the skillet from the stove to Thomas and scraped its contents onto his plate. "Same as usual."

"Watch it, Abigail!" A few drops of hot grease dripped off the pan's rim and landed on Thomas's lap.

"Oh no, did I get you?" I asked jeeringly.

"Yes. Yes, you got me."

"Terribly sorry, Thomas."

"It's fine."

He began to eat while I cleaned the kitchen. Thomas's lips always smacked when he ate, but today they seemed especially loud. It drove me insane. I heard him flip the paper and unfold it on the table.

"He's back."

"Who's back?" I replied with real curiosity.

"Ethan Allen, he is back. It says it right here. 'The Return of a Hero. Ethan Allen finally reaches Vermont after 3 years of captivity.' Huh."

I spoke a bit too impulsively, and far too honestly. "That's great."

"Why's that great?"

"He's a great man. Why shouldn't he be allowed to go home?"
Thomas stood up with both hands leaning hard against the table, pushing all the blood from his knuckles and turning them white. “You would say that.” Then he lifted his hands, turned around and walked towards the door, speaking under his breath the whole way. “Don’t want a man like that running around this place,” he mumbled as he walked out the door. I felt like he knew. He must have known.

Nearly three years later, February 18, 1781, Thomas left me for the second time. Ethan had gained even more prominence in that time. He took care of Vermonters in an incredibly paternalistic way, helping to build homes, rescue lost children, prosecute Tories, and seize their land. Thomas’s indifference often turned into overt anger over those three long years, booming like Ethan’s celebrity. That morning Thomas left without saying goodbye, but a note on my bedside table read, “Gone to Peacham for business,” in Thomas’ neat, uniform script. He wouldn’t return for 8 months. I learned two weeks later that some British had abducted my husband in a field just as he was leaving for home. But I suspected something was up from the get-go. Thomas had spoken after the war of the friends he’d made while escorting British prisoners at Ticonderoga. Certainly the spy’s knew my father, and Thomas would have no qualms about revealing that he was married to the daughter of Sir Guy Carleton, former Governor General of Canada. It all added up very neatly.

Thomas wrote me as often as he could, but it did little to affect how I felt about the situation. Nothing had changed since my husband had left for Ticonderoga. The feelings of ambivalence prolonged even into his captivity, until I received one letter nearly half way through Thomas’ absence.
The postman knocked around noon on the comfortable summer day. It was dated May 21, 1781, and written with the dame steady hand that wrote, “gone to Peacham.” I sat on the porch to read the letter, getting some sun and rocking in the rocker Thomas had made years earlier. The beginning of the letter was mundane, extraordinarily similar to every other letter I had received. But Thomas wrote more this time, extending the letter onto the back of the page. The second side looked as if another person had wrote it. The words were jagged, scribbled with more agitation and urgency. As I read I felt Thomas’ reach out from the paper and grasp my hand tenderly.

“The pleastantest part of a mans Life is generally that which passes in Courtship – provided his passions be sincere.

It is easier for an artful man who is not in love to persuade his mistress he has a passion for her – and to succeed in his pursuits – than for one who loves with the greatest violence. True love has ten thousand griefs, impatience and resentments that render a man unamiable in the eyes of the person whose affection he solicits. Besides that it sinks his figure, gives him fears, apprehensions, and poorness of spirit, and often makes him appear ridiculous when he has a mind to recommend himself.”

Tears welled in the corners of my eyes, and I spoke out loud, “I’m sorry too Thomas. I am so sorry.”

“I shall prefer a woman that is agreeable in my own eye, and not deformed in that of the world. To a celebrated beauty, if you marry one remarkably beautiful you must have a violent passion for her, or you have not the proper task of her charms.
And if you have such a passion for her, it is odds but I would be embittered with fears and jealousies. Good nature and evenness of temper will give you a gay companion for life, virtue and good sense an agreeable friend, love and constancy a good wife or husband.”

“I will try to do better too Thomas. I will try so hard.” I said to myself. The letter went on.

“Being inspired with such sentiments what wonder is it if I sometimes break out into such ejaculations of temperance thou goddess most worthy to be adored, thou patroness of health, thou protector of beauty, thou prolonger of life, thou insurer of pleasure, thou promoter of business, thou guardian of the person, thou preserver of the understanding, thou parent of every intellectual improvement and moral virtue. I miss you so very much, and I love you so much more.”

The tears evaporated in the hot air as they strolled down my cheeks. I continued speaking to Thomas hundreds of miles away, “I love you too Thomas. I love you so much.”

I have never been able to go back and reread that letter for fear of guilt. Those years of utter animosity were too much to relive. So I kept it tucked in the drawer of the bedside table, the same bedside table that held Thomas’s goodbye letter. Even though the letter was stored away, its words stayed as fresh in my mind as the moment I read them. For the next four months I continued to sleep alone, only now I

29 The Johnson’s relationship has been pieced together through what is left of their correspondence at the Vermont Historical Society in Barre, Vermont. Thomas kept a journal while in captivity, Doc. 574:03 and Doc. 574:05, which was invaluable in knowing his character. The letter to his wife that is quoted nearly verbatim, Doc. 574:04.
spent my nights under the covers of Thomas’ bed. On October 12, 1781 we pushed the beds together to celebrate my husband’s homecoming. They stayed together the rest of our lives.
Lemuel Haynes
The March

The first time I stepped foot on Vermont soil was in 1776. I was a boy. I had left my mother and father two weeks previous to my reaching the Green Mountains. Step by step we marched closer to nothingness. To shadows and black. Step by step and inch by inch I moved farther from the piety I was so accustomed to. From the farm work that developed my body and gave me the features of a man, inside and out. Farther from peace and farther from the God I grew up with. It was October. The leaves had changed. The wind bit our bare faces. My cheeks were rosy and my nose snotty, and I was singing as loud as I ever had before.

"Howe and Burgoyne and Clinton, too,

With Prescott and Cornwallis joined,

Together plot our overthrow,

In one infernal league combined."

We knew our enemies, and we knew the stakes. We sang the same lines over and over again. It started in Lexington and continued to Roxbury until the British submitted in Boston. We sang it in their faces when regiments surrendered, taunting.

"The foe comes on with haughty stride,

Our troops advance with martial noise;

Their vet'rans flee before our youth,

And gen'rls yield to beardless boys."

But when I sang William Billings’ renowned psalm, I sang the first stanza with particular zeal. I made it my own you could say. It practically was my own you
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could say. It felt as though I had written it. Not so much before the war broke out, but afterwards. You see things when you’re fighting. I saw things. Strange things that didn’t bother me none so much at the time. You sort of just glance and move on. We were fighting after all. But back home those things didn’t seem to link up anywhere in my neat little brain. The opening lines to Chester somehow connected the dots, things made sense, the war made sense, my cause made sense.

“Let tyrants shake their iron rods,
And Slav’ry clank her galling chains.
We fear them not, we trust in God.

New England’s God forever reigns.”

We brought that God with us as we ventured through New England. Northbound. There were islands of red at first between towns and cities in Massachusetts. More of the same all the way up to Springfield. We climbed north. The islands soon looked more like the water not the land. Large lakes of auburn and orange burned around tracts of modestly urban settlements. I knew we had reached Vermont when the islands of turning leaves had succumbed to a fiery blaze. I’d never felt closer to hell. The whole landscape flowed. The hills combusted above our heads on either side waiting to cascade down on us lowly soldiers trying to do God’s work. Beelzebub couldn’t have been far off, hidden somewhere in the naked shrubbery with their tips glowing red like fallen embers of Vermont’s autumnal inferno.

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And still we sang. We marched on without fear for we had freedom with us, as well as our God. The hellish scene all around us did little to deter the youthful exuberance of a band of young men bursting with patriotic duty. Through the darkness that snuffed out the burning mountains and froze the world in a sheet of black, we sang, until we reached the heavenly water that was our final destination.

Few living things are nestled in the Green Mountains. Most of what I saw in Vermont was pounded into existence by God and man. Rocks mashed and beaten until they resembled gravestones. The earth penetrated a thousand times over until crops sprung from its skin like so many unwanted hairs. Trees chopped and slashed, framed and nailed into the shapes of houses and doors, benches and swings. It seemed so unnatural, buildings and monuments awkwardly added to the texture of the land. But Fort Ticonderoga, a structure of a size unseen in the entirety of Vermont, slid up out of the water like a smooth gray beach and rose like the eroded remains of an ancient crag.

Our leading officer, Lieutenant Colonel Timothy Robinson, stood barefoot at waters edge with each big toe plopping up and down. The concentric circles distorted the fort’s reflection at his feet, making it appear to grow then shrink with each passing wave.

“Home, sweet home boys,” Robinson jested.31

It was to be our home, at least for the unforeseeable future. We were to find comfort there in the fort, the constant glow of the fire, and the cold black water that

31 Lemuel marched to Ticonderoga in October of 1776 in Capt. Aaron Coe’s company under the command of Lt. Col. Timothy Robinson. More detail can be found in Richard Newman, Black Preacher to White America (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990), xx.
rose to its edges. I would never forget the sights and sounds of my march through the Green Mountains to Ticonderoga. I didn’t know it then, but I would return to Vermont years later.


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The Help

In my younger years, I stayed to myself for the most part on the Rose's farm in Granville, Massachusetts. We had all sorts of helpers besides me. I never actually would have thought of myself as one of their helpers per se. Technically yes, I was indentured to Deacon Rose. But in actuality I was one of the kids. There were hired workers that helped on the farm that were only that, workers. But I entered the Rose household as an infant, a dependent, and they looked after me as such. I thank God nightly for putting me in their care. For a mulatto child, it could have been much worse.32

Where was I? Right, Vermont, the Rose farm. I enjoyed the work on the farm for the most part. I loved the animals. I saw a simplicity in their empty eyes that I often envied. The cows and horses never worried about what was to come or fretted over their actions of the past. The beasts in the fields lived their lives from second to second in the present and I found a certain solace in them. So I made it my goal to work with the animals on the farm as much as I could, especially the horses. I strove to be one of them. Their dark skin resembled mine more than any of the Roses. I admired their incredible physique and athleticism. The more I worked the more I felt my muscles hardening. The more power I felt in my frame, and more I fitted in with my equine friends. They kept me safe and comfortable in the fields that we shared with half a dozen or so hired white labors.

Like I said, I stayed to myself on the farm, the horses and I, until one cold spring morning, the results of which still mark my face. There were three medium sized pastures that formed a U around the immediate perimeter of the barn. In one were the four horses that the family shared. The second lay fallow, giving the grass a much-needed rest between grazings. In the final pasture were a twelve or so dairy cows with large black spots and equally large white udders. They milked well, and supplied the family and most of the surrounding neighbors with generous quantities of milk and butter. Accompanying the cows was one extremely large Hereford ox. The deep brown bull had a white fur on his face that slid down the midline of his neck, and narrowed at in the center of his belly. For years he had been trained and worked by one of our hired hands, a small farmer from down the road called Jean Rouch. Jean called the ox Woody, claiming his coat resembled the pine bark.

Jean generally was the only one to work with Woody. Deacon Rose claimed I was too young, and I never really doubted him. To be honest Woody frightened me a little. I liked my horses. Some days, when Jean fell ill or had some sort of familial obligation, I did any work necessary with Woody. “Gentlest critter on the farm,” Jean would always tell me. And it was easy for him to say. No other man that walked on that farm would have the audacity to call Woody a “critter.” But Jean and Woody seemed a match made in heaven. They were gentle brutes, pleasant giants. Jean almost played with Woody. He’d wrap his wide square hands around each horn and roll Woody back and forth with his huge frame and weight planted in the ground. Woody kept his thin, pink lips pulled back on his rectangular snout, grinning, but
unsure just what he was smiling about. When Jean was absent, Woody’s grin looked flatter, more indifferent.

There was plowing to be done. It was spring and we already had a late jump on the planting season. Jean had been out of town for the past three days, but Deacon Rose couldn’t afford to miss another opportunity to ready the fields. It had poured the night before; heavy beads of water pounded the farmhouse roof as I tried to sleep. But the soil was soft in the morning, gliding from under the soles of my boots and layering the sides in the mahogany soil. Behind Woody, riding the plow would be easy work on such a day.

Deacon Rose Stepped out of the large swinging barn doors in to the field directly at the large red buildings rear. He found me to his right, in the field with that held the horses, saddling the Deacon’s favorite ride. “Can you handle Woody while I’m in town this morning?”

“You mean in the field?” I balked.

“Yeah with the plow.”

“Sure”

“It’s just, I don’t know exactly when Jean is coming back to work, and we must get to plowing. If you’re not...”

“I am. I’ll be fine.

“Good.” I understood why the Deacon questioned me, I was unsure of myself and he knew it. But he seemed slightly proud that I’d willingly take on such a big responsibility. It wasn’t like I was incapable. Lord knows how many times I’d seen
Jean plow, pull stumps and logs, carry loads with the big ox. There wasn’t much to it. I helped the Deacon up onto his horse, said God speed, and removed myself to the barn to get started on my task.

Woody waited patiently for me in his stall. The ox rested his white face on the doorframe as if it were made of lead and too heavy to hold up while he waited for his turn in the fields. The cracked barn door shed a sliver of light on his docile face. He followed my footsteps on the dry hay with his eyes, tracking me slowly as I walked. His ears fluttered in my direction with every step, but his head stayed stationary.

“Morning Woody,” I said politely, to break the ice. Woody didn’t move, just looked up at me with his glossy, brown eyes, and exhaled heavily through his nose. “Have it your way,” I responded to the lethargic bull and opened the gate to his room in the barn. His head dropped nearly to the floor before he caught it and looked up at me. “Let’s get going.” As I spoke I began to walk towards the fields, and Woody followed slowly. He stopped at the door as his head hit the natural sunlight and looked left then right while squinting. After his appraisal of the situation, Woody stepped into the sunlight, shaking off the previous night’s sleep.

In some ways I began to like Woody more than the horses. He was less frantic and excitable, slower moving and peaceable. The horses needed to be told what to do, but Woody waited at the gate to be let into the field all on his own, and presented himself in front of the plow without any lead. Woody’s unquestioning obedience was the product of years of training. The big ox stood still, gnawing on some grass as I threw the plow belt around Woody’s back. The snap, and mash of the field grass
between the ox’s flat, square teeth was almost deafening as I passed the belt under his belly. Snap and mash as I put the belt through its loop.

The third loop was clearly the widest, but when I gently pulled the tan leather belt to latch the metal prod, the whole harness seemed a bit stretched. Consistent use over the years had turned the circular hole into a cylindrical slot, a bit too loose for safety. So I placed my left hand on Woody’s coarse rear hind end, and yanked the long end of the harness towards the ground. I felt the belt move, about a half an inch in the inch long space to the next notch. Woody whined the low-pitched moan of an angry male and swung his back hips around ramming me with the meat of his back leg. My eyes closed and I reached my right hand down to brace the fall. My fingers hit the wet, soft earth first, resisting futilely to keep my body from the ground. I heard the front of my body splat in the soft soil. I must have been in mire an inch deep from head to toe. My head and face snapped hard to the ground immediately following my body. I managed react in time to shield half of my face from impact. With my one clean eye, I found the ground, placed both hands where I could see them, and pushed off the soggy dirt bringing my knees to my chest like an infant just learning to crawl.

The supple earth dampened the reverberations of Woody’s charge. By the time I turned my head upwards enough to see the grey sky it was too late. In the time it took me to hit the ground and get to my hands and knees, Woody had backed away to the point where he thought he could do some real damage to begin his task of crushing me. He came into sight at 3 yards or so. I rolled back onto my feet, still crouched with my knees touching my chest. Two yards. I could hear Woody’s
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breathe in and out of his nasal cavity, in quick, huffy bursts. The smile that usually graced his face evaporated into a grimace I had never seen before, from him, or any other animal I’d worked with. One yard.

My hand reach backwards, at the same time turning my torso and face away from what would have been the impact point. I lost sight of the charging bull as my left eye escaped danger. All I could see was the blur of the red barn. My right eye stayed closed. Somewhere in the darkness I felt the Woody’s cold ivory horn sink into the warm flesh of my cheek. I waited to hear it scrape bone against bone, or worse yet the pop of bone puncturing bone. It wouldn’t have taken much, any more than an inch deep and my cheekbone would have been completely exposed. But Woody only managed to slice my face half of what was necessary to do any grave damage the first time around.

It wasn’t until Woody turned to me the second time that I panicked. I felt the warm blood strolling down over the mountains of mud on my face like a stream dropping in altitude and reaching its final resting pool around my lips. The salty, irony taste puckered my mouth. There was no distinguishing between the skin of my body and the grime that covered it. So I hid. I curled up as best I could, and huddled on the ground. At least this time I was prepared for impact.

A whip cracked against Woody’s flesh somewhere at my back. It sounded closer than I cared to know. “What in God’s name is wrong with you Woody?” Jean’s voice echoed from some far away place.  

33 All of these biographical stories originate from Haynes’ first biographer, Timothy Mather Cooley, Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes, A.M., For Many Years Pastor of a
My lungs felt heavy in my chest as I tried to regain my senses. I picked my head up and watched the barn turn red circles around me. The fences were stationary with Jean poised behind one post, my anchor in a sea of red and brown. Two loops and my stomach hit my throat. My head cocked forward while my shoulders and chest heaved to the sky, expelling quickly the modest remains of breakfast. Once more and the leftovers from last night were gone. Last came straight bile, burning holes in my throat along the way.

“You alright, Lemuel?” Jean spoke with remorse.

“I’m alive Jean, thanks to you.” I gasped as I spoke

“Don’t know what got int’ him.” Jean grabbed Woody by the horn with one hand, the other pulled the white-faced ox close to the fence by the gut. He was smiling, Woody that is, same as usually. He snapped and mashed small bites of yellow-green grass as we talked, looking up with content eyes ever so often to catch a glimpse of Jean.

“If you don’t mind, Jean, I reckon I’ll leave the plowing to you this afternoon.”

“Don’t mind a bit, Lemuel. Best get inside clean up. Mrs. Rose should look at your face.”

“Prob’ly should,” I replied with what I believed was poise, but what Jean likely saw right through. Woody had me rattled. When I stood, I stared for a minute at the white bits of biscuit resting in the thick orange mess at my feet. I scooped a few layers

of earth from the ground and I shoveled it over my mutilated breakfast, shielding it, and my incompetence, from view as best as possible.

As I walked across the field embarrassed, I caught eyes with Woody. He seemed to grin, happy in the company of his old friend. I avoided working with the animals from that point on. Their sense of immediacy, of the unpredictability of the now no longer appealed to me. I almost pitied them. Had Woody been in my shoes, he would know nothing of the fear that I felt, he would know only pain. He could only watch as the life leaked from his body. He would not get sick, as I had, if he survived at all. He would never wonder what might have been had God's final blow been laid. He would never worry about seeing his loved ones, or about all that he had left to live. He could only sit and watch with his vacant eyes. Most of all, he could never know the tremendous gratitude and love I felt toward Jean. The overwhelming beauty of one creature helping the other was far beyond his grasp.

I had felt this beauty other times throughout my life. There was another day, where the long outstretched hand of the neighbor Jean would protect my soul from the fiery abyss. Jean had a small pond on his property that he liked to dip and wash himself in. There was one afternoon later that same spring. The Deacon chose me to go deliver Jean his ration of butter for the week. I slipped on a rock, at the edge of the pool and flopped back first into the dark, cold water. The chill kicked me in the chest, driving out my last gasps of breath. As I flailed wildly, reaching for the sides that dropped deeper far too quickly to be of any aid, I hopelessly sucked water into the my lungs. The butter was ruined. I was again about to die. Alone. Only this time death
was black, not brown. Soon the cold water covered my eyes, but I strained to keep them open, to find a foothold somewhere in the fluctuating darkness. It became clear to me that my thrusting arms were only aiding gravity in pushing my body to the floor of Jean’s pond. So I stopped, and floated for a second. The butter was ruined. It floated at above my head tinted brown from the two feet of murky water that separated us.

As I stared, a heavenly aura surrounded the square block of butter. Thick tubes of light refracted left and right around its mass. The light was pulling me closer. Light sent down a thick, muscular arm waving back and forth with the moving water. At shoulder depth, the arm clenched the collar of my work shirt. It pulled me to the light, popping the very top two buttons out of their sockets. Then there was no more light.34

When I came to I saw was on the ground by the side of the pool, staring with empty eyes at Jean.

He joked, "You’re lucky I stuck around this summer."

“Yeah, suppose I am.”

“Don’t sound too excited, you’re only alive.” I wasn’t excited. I thought I was chosen. I thought I was ready for eternal happiness and bliss. I thought I was chosen.

“I am. I am Jean. I can’t tell you how grateful I am.” I wasn’t chosen. Yet.

“You’d do the same for me. Know you would.” I wondered if I would. I hoped I would. At least now I knew I should. Jean was my reminder. I experienced the hand of God in Jean’s quick whip. I saw the hand of God. It was Jean’s hand that pulled me from darkness. It was Jean’s calloused and cracked hand, his pale winter white forearm, the grace of God that pulled me from a bitter eternity. For the rest of my adolescence I strove to know God perfectly, to abide his every word, and to never forget the grace he blessed me with. But it was His wrath that drove me to salvation and to the fiery foothills of Vermont.35

35 Nicodemus’s twofold obligation, according to Haynes, was to be ‘born again’ and to join ‘the spiritual Kingdom of Christ here in this world’ with ‘that gracious temper of mind, or those holy dispositions that are implanted in the heart by regeneration.’ Haynes was part of the New Divinity movement emphasizing rebirth and revival. For more see John Saillant, “Lemuel Haynes and the Revolutionary Origins of Black Theology, 1776-1801,” Religion and American Culture, Vol. 2, No. 1. (Winter 1992), 82-83.
Lemuel Haynes

The Touch

My conversion crisis began in 1773, sometime after my twentieth birthday. The series of events started with a simple thunderstorm during another Massachusetts spring. The wind began to pick up in the early afternoon, but the air stayed warm and humid. The animals were normal all day, no jitters or jumps from what I could tell. So the Deacon and Mrs. Rose left as they had planned to attend a dinner with their family at a close relatives home in a neighboring town. I stayed back on my own to tend to the house.

The wind stayed at a constant heavy gust, and the light of the afternoon darkened only slightly into night. I sat at the kitchen table with a lone candle to light the small dinner of boiled pork and bread Mrs. Rose had prepared earlier that day. The pork was a bit tough, leaving meaty tendrils lodged between my teeth. I stood and placed my plate in the washtub, pausing for a moment to pick out the debris left from my meal.

Satisfied, I carried the lone candle into the study. The heavy back door had been blown open by the wind. “Must have been a good gust,” I thought. I proceeded to the study without any more curiosity. I folded open the worn binding of the Deacon’s large bible. It included his favorite hymns and was read regularly along with

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his favorite sermons from Whitfield and the like. I preferred the original, the untainted, immortal word of God.37

Thunder began to roll over the pastures to the east. It had not rained all day. I found my mark and began my reading where I left off the night before. Luke 21:36, “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” It was an ominous passage, one that filled my heart with fear. The drumming storm was much closer now. I began to question my worth in the eyes of the lord. I had done little in my lifetime to be worthy of His presence. Quickly, I shuffled through passages in my mind, doing an inventory of the rapture.

I Thessalonians 4:16-18, “For the Lord himself will come down from Heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call and the dead in Christ will rise first.” I saw the first flashes of lightning. Jagged, sin crushing sparks of the heavens surrounded me, now sweating profusely in the Deacon’s desk chair. Without hesitating I leaned on the window that had just blown open, closing and latching it as if the glass was sturdy enough to repel the Almighty. It blew open hard in my face as a bolt fell behind the large blooming maple in the front yard, casting a shadow on the newly green grass in front of me. A face glowed back at me, lit from the heavens and resembling mine own. It swayed with the wind, but with every new burst of light there I was, projected on the lawn.

37 The Roses read sermons from Whitefield and all the other great revivalists of the time, see John Saillant, Black Puritan, Black Republican. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14 and Richard Newman, Black Preacher to White America (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990), xx.
I had sharp eyes, shaped slightly like the leaves that adorned the tree. The branches traced the outlines of my dark face and wide nose, the scar left by the raging bull the year before. He was asking for me. Calling for my soul.

I flipped through the pages. Zephaniah 2, "Gather together, gather together, O shameful nation, before the appointed time arrives and that day sweeps on like chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's wrath comes upon you.

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility: perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger."

And so I knelt with my knees on the hard wood floor and my elbows resting on the windowsill. My face, distorted by evil and sin, still sparkled on the wet grass. I felt the judgment upon me. I saw below me my soul, burning in the molten depths of the underworld. It was the second coming. The faithful dead would soon rise from their graves and all I could do was pray.

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, Deliver us from evil, Deliver us from evil.”

I lost myself in this recitation. All I heard was my own voice. “Deliver us from evil.”

I don’t know how long I prayed at the Deacon’s study window.
“Deliver us from evil.”

But when I finally opened my eyes, storm had passed. I begged, in a low, airy whisper one last time.

“Deliver us from evil.”

Then I stood, closed the window in front of me, and wiped the windblown water off my face. The floor around me was damp, and the Deacon’s Bible lay right in the middle of it. I took the handkerchief out of my front pocket preparing to dry the pages as best I could. The pages had shifted in the breeze. I read the final passage, closed the Good Book and placed it back in its usual place in the center of the Deacon’s desk.

I lay in bed that night mulling around the nights events in my head. I dared not close my eyes for fear that I would wake up in the presence of Lucifer himself. I just stared at the ceiling, and lay in wait for the moment when God himself found me hiding in a vacant home. I must heed the words he left me with.

Matthew 16, “The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

He replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’

And in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know to interpret the appearances of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the time.
A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none shall be given except the sign of Jonah.”

For days and days I waited. Waited for the sign of Jonah, for the sign of a great miracle that would save the people of this world. I worried that the sign the Lord spoke of was not one of salvation, but rather of destruction. I felt His presence throughout my life, but I never really knew Him. He grazed my body and soul from time to time, with interventions by Jean, and wonderful gifts of life. But he was never in me the way I knew he should be. The sign of Jonah became a source of anxiety instead of joy, of pain and instead of pleasure. The sign of Jonah, when it finally appeared a week and a half after the storm, changed everything.

I woke in the night to pacing footsteps outside my second floor bedroom; the soft pats of night socks on wooden floors. The shades were drawn, but the night must have been clear. A soft glow of light penetrated the edges of the curtains, throwing pyramids of teal green light at the two walls. Pat pat, pat pat, creak pat pat creak. The floors never concealed movement. An astute ear could differentiate the size of the person pat patting through the halls depending on the pitch and volume of the floor's shriek. It was the Deacon, to be sure. He was the largest of the family, and when his feet bent the floorboards they made a very low moan that was easily distinguished.

I left my bed and poked my head out the bedroom door. “Sir?” I asked seriously.

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“Lemuel, go back to bed.” I opened the door further, and slid out into the hallway, leaning sleepy against the wall.

“Everything alright Mr. Rose? It’s awful late.” The Deacon and I were both in white nightgowns. He held a candle up high so I could see his face. The light flickered above his unsteady hand. Bags sagged below his eyes, and the caverns in his wrinkled face looked especially dark in the dim light.

“No. Lemuel. Nothing is all right.” I felt my mouth open but could do nothing to close it. The Deacon had caught me off guard. I figured he’d had a nightmare or was worried about the planting season. Nothing? Nothing was ok? Exaggeration wasn’t in the Deacon’s vocabulary. “Follow me, you should see this.”

I followed the Deacon who still carried the candle in front of him. I could see little but the outline of his head and shoulders. Down the stairs, now two pairs of socks on the floor, patpat patpat, walking in step. We reached the front door. Once again moonlight shone through its cracks. The moon wouldn’t have been full. There had been a full moon just before the thunderstorm. The Deacon swung open the front door and stepped into the light, out to the front porch. My eyes closed slightly, squinting to try and stay with Mr. Rose, and I stepped out with him.

It is unclear what chilled me more, the cold wood porch on my shoeless feet, or the swirling blue green light that covered the entire northern sky. The design waved down from the heavens from left to right, stopped abruptly at a point, and then mirrored its descent down to the earth. The moon sat off to the right, in between the two streams of radiance. The eye of heaven looked down at us on that cool spring
night. The sign of Jonah, the moon trapped in the belly of this whale of lights had come.

“You see why I can’t sleep Lemuel,” the Deacon said worriedly.

“Oh my God.” I could utter nothing else.

The Deacon turned to me quickly. The candle fell to the ground, rolled into the dewy grass, and snuffed itself out. The aurora illuminated the Deacon’s sharp, fearful eyes. He grabbed my shoulders and squeezed hard with the tight grip of a workingman.

“Have you been saved?” He shook me hard from the shoulders. I had no words for him.

“Have you been saved, Lemuel?” He was yelling now.

“Have you been saved?” Yelling, wimpering.

“Have you been saved?” Just sobbing. Sobbing.

The Deacon folded onto the ground sitting upright, his legs tucked under his rear. One hand held his wait. The other covered his eyes.

“I love you Lemuel.” I had no words for him. I only sat by his side on the chill front porch staring up at my fate.

Nothing came in the next few days. No more thunderstorms, no more rains, no more images of the fiery hell that awaited me beyond the grave. Just blue skies dabbled with puffs of white clouds. I spent most of those days in my room, alone, and around the house with Mrs. Rose, helping her with laundry and dinner. The Deacon
went about his usual chores, only now he worked slightly more diligently in account of my absence.

By day four, I was eating regularly again. The initial shock of seeing the face of God had worn off quite a bit. I ate a somewhat large bowl of oats for breakfast and after a hearty nap ventured outside. Mrs. Rose’s small, ornate rocking chair sat on the right edge of the porch, just in front of the kitchen window. I sat there first. It was comfortable at first. I rocked a few rocks. But it wasn’t long before I felt the hard wood on my tailbone through the small, knit pillow on the seat. I rocked a few more rocks. The wooden rods that made up the back braces wrapped around my midsection. They began to hug chest and squeeze my ribs. I had to leave.

I stepped off the porch and as I did, I noticed the Deacon leading his favorite horse from the barn out into its field. He nodded in my direction and smiled a big, kind smile. “Morning Lemuel.”

“Morning Deacon,” I replied stiffly. I was unsure of where I was headed and I didn’t want him to ask.

“Beautiful day, isn’t it?”

“A gift from God sir.”

His smile closed a bit, and pushed towards the left side of his face. “That it is Lemuel, that it is.” He was less happy now, more pitying. My mentioning of God only brought to the Deacon’s mind the horrible realization that I had yet to be chosen. I walked away with thoughts of those lights in the sky, the large tree whose shadow resembled me so closely, all the terror in contrast to this day’s beauty.
I walked for a while longer, not quite noticing where I was going. Just wondering. There was a small path that wound through the woods. It opened to a small, overgrown pasture. The grass was brown but tall. It had been growing for sometime, only to be crushed and pressed under the winter snow. It was dead. A small, gentle crabapple tree marked the center of the field. So I approached it, my hands brushing against the rough bristles of grass seeds.

The tree’s resilient fruits managed to sprout before the grass changed colors. Small green nubs of apple flowers dotted every branch. The largest of the roots formed four corners around the base of the trunk, protruding quite a bit out of the earth. There was an early thaw, and the soil sank beneath the weight of my body. A knob served as a headrest, and the roots held my arms comfortably. Water from the soil seeped through my pants and warmed my lower half. I was secure in this tree. I was safe, held by this tree.39

It’s quite hard to describe what happened next. I was overcome with joy, a joy I’d never felt and that I would never approach again. My face was wet with tears although I was unaware that I had begun to cry. I couldn’t feel my arms on the roots. I couldn’t feel my leg on the earth. My arms were the branches. My eyes were the soon to be apples. My legs were the four thick roots penetrating the ground.

I tried to open my eyes, my buds, but they were pinched tightly shut. I could only peer through tiny x shaped cracks to get a view of the entire prairie from each individual bud. I saw myself, motionless below. My arms were just as stationary.

Lemuel Haynes

They flexed only slightly when I tried to move them. But when I tried to lift my leg from the Earth I felt the soil shift below me. I was a tree, and I was moving. At the peak of my ecstasy I heard a thunderous crack. I struggled to peer through the buds. My white center was now exposed from the ground to just above the midsection of my trunk. Before my elation could fully evaporate I fell back into my body.

In the span of little more than a fraction of my young life the course of my existence was determined. It was these days that drove me to the clergy. It was these days that gave me the courage to show people the wrath and the beauty of our god despite their prejudices against me. It was these few days that drove me to join the Minutemen in 1774 when my indenture ran out. I wanted to fight side by side with men like Jean, so we never became beasts like Woody. It was these days that lead me to Vermont, to the fiery foothills on the shore of Lake Champlain, and would bring me back to preach some years after the war.
The Talk

I had heard of one Mr. Ethan Allen long before I spoke with him. Stories of his attack on Ticonderoga at the onset of the Revolution trickled down Lake Champlain and its tributaries into Massachusetts. He was admired in the Grants for bravery and courage. But stories of so-called terror also pervaded the newspapers. Gangs, the Bennington Mob, and the Arlington junto struck fear into the hearts and souls of many loyal, God fearing citizens of Massachusetts. Stories of fires and murder, of beatings and lashes. When our ferry finally arrived in 1776 to take us across the Lake, Mr. Allen had already left the fort. Each soldier there had a different telling of Ticonderoga's fall. All included Allen at the forefront, most included the party that would follow. It was the remnants of the nearly 100 gallons of rum that had been seized in the battle that killed the pain of my sickness when I fell ill. It was said that Allen drank nearly a quarter of it on his own before heading north. He brought another quarter with him. The rest was left to the sick and weary men guarding the dilapidated fort. As I left Vermont for the first time, weary and ailing, half drunk, I was saddened. Despite the rumors, it would have been nice to meet the mythic man himself.40

It was over half a decade later in 1783 when I made Vermont my permanent residence. I was less of a boy at that point, and a newly ordained minister.41 When he

40 Haynes contracted typhus in Ticonderoga and returned home less than a month later on November 17, 1776. See Richard Newman, Black Preacher to White America (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990), xx.

41 Haynes returned from the war despite his indenture having ended. There he began to study under a Rev. Mr. Ferrand, He received his license to preach in 1780, and was commissioned in Rutland, VT in 1783. All from Timothy Mather Cooley, Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel
first rode into Rutland I was walking through the center of town. He seemed tall. His thick legs hung low to the ground, especially when I took into account the size of his horse. His coat looked old, and could have used some new buttons. The green fabric stretched over his broad square shoulders and chest. He left it open to allow his stomach a little breathing room. He had probably grown quite a bit since it was tailored. Soft flesh now layered his clearly muscular frame, and Mr. Allen rode through town with a boyish smirk on his face, nodding in my direction as he passed.

By the time Sunday came around it became clear that Mr. Allen intended to stay in Rutland for a while. His tall head towered over the crowd from the back pew at service. It seemed strange to me. Mr. Allen, a known atheist, had apparently gone out of his way to attend my sermon. He remained attentive and silent in back of the church. His uniform replaced with common homespun shirt and pants. No one approached Mr. Allen or made any inclination that they recognized who he was.

When the service was over, Mr. Allen waited. He waited as I spoke to members of the congregation that wished to chat. He waited as I walked one of the older women to her front door near by. By the time I returned, the church was cleared except for the one bulbous head still looking forward from the back row. I shut the door behind me and he rose, slowly, and turned my way. A whole half head taller than me, I found myself staring at his mouth with its big brown teeth and two pronounced fangs.

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“Mr. Haynes.” He spoke with the rasp of an old drunk, his throat burned by too many unholy spirits. Mr. Allen reached with his large right hand and grasped mine tightly. “It’s a pleasure to finally meet you.”

“The pleasure is all mine Mr. Allen. You said finally. Were you expecting me?”

“I wouldn’t say expecting.” Mr. Allen replied dryly. “Just a bit curious.”

“What makes you so curious Mr. Allen.”

“A few things. How about we sit down and discuss things over some drinks?”

“Tomorrow night then?”

“Tomorrow night.” Mr. Allen then turned towards the door and walked with a slight shuffle towards the door.

“But Mr. Allen, where should I meet you?”

He spoke without turning. “Don’t. I’ll find you.”

That night I asked my Elizabeth what she thought of the day’s news. I waited until we were in bed. She would feel safer there with me holding her. She would also be tired. I nuzzled up next to her and put my hand on her hip. She lay on her side facing the window as I nudged over from behind. I mentioned to her softly that I met someone new that day. She adjusted herself, snaking her body a bit. My hand moved up from her hip, grazing her side and shoulder, and stopped at her neck. I pulled the hair that covered her nape and rested my head near her ear. Casually she asked whom I had met. Equally as casually I told her. She rolled onto her back and looked at the ceiling. She asked general questions, where, when, why, all with her

hands folded over each other on her stomach. I stayed on my side looking in her direction. My hand was steady on her thigh. When she found out why we met, that he wanted to talk, she rolled quickly to her side, facing me. Her hands came together in front of her as if she were praying, and she slid them under right ear. Her round, hazel eyes stared directly at me with intense concern. I stroked her hair, explaining to her how harmless he seemed. She pressed herself up against me, her eyes still locked with mine, and told of stories she’d heard about fires and whippings. In return, I put both my hands gently on her soft, pale cheeks and kissed her lips lightly. It was time for bed.

The following day passed quickly. I kept my eyes open as I ran errands and took care of the business of the church. Not once did I see Mr. Allen. Not until I headed home. As I approached the house I noticed a shadow rocking back and forth on the porch. It was too large to be Elizabeth or one of the kids. I could see Elizabeth’s fearful, alabaster face glowing slightly by candlelight through the parlor window. I must admit, the sight of such a broad man looming in the dark of my porch struck fear in me as well.

“Mr. Haynes.” I heard his voice long before I saw his face.

“Mr. Allen. How are you today?”

“Just fine Lemuel, yourself?”

“I am quite well Mr. Allen, I hope my wife hasn’t left you out here all by yourself. How improper.”
"No, no Lemuel, I spoke to your wife and she was more than cordial. This here rocker just caught my eye, thought I give her a little spin while I waited."

"Yes of course Mr. Allen. My apologies for keeping you waiting, I didn’t know when I’d be expecting you." I finally reached Mr. Allen’s side. He stayed seated, but reached a hand out to shake mine. I was close enough to make out his face. It was the same face I had seen the day before only slightly darker. The scars and cuts that painted his face seemed a little deeper in the shadows, harsher, and more pronounced.

"Of course Lemuel. I enjoy being out of doors anyways." Mr. Allen stood, wearing the same garb he wore to my sermon the previous day, and towered over me.

"Shall we go inside, Mr. Allen?"

"Not here, Lemuel. Some place more private."

"The church?"

"Sure."

We walked across town to the church side by side in genuine silence. The pews were empty and the church was pitch black. I groped my way to the front and grabbed one of the large altar candles and we sat in the front pew, Mr. Allen at my left.

"You and I aren’t so different, Lemuel."

"How is that, Mr. Allen?"

"We are both rational people, aren’t we?"
“I’d like to think so Mr. Allen. But I have heard of the things you have done. I have heard of the torture, and the home burning, and the blasphemy and such. Those are not things I stand for.”

“This place has changed quite a bit, Lemuel, from the days when I first got here. When I returned from Canada, I came home to a different Vermont. A Vermont full of prudes and Bible toting nay-sayers. These people are the people you preach to Lemuel. The people in your parish.”

“So what if they are Mr. Allen. These people are good, god fearing citizens. Many of them are patriots like you. Many of them fought for the same things you fought for. The same things you went into captivity for.”

“These people are not like me Mr. Haynes. These people are not agitators. These people are not willing to do what it takes. They’ve stopped half way.”

“You are right Mr. Allen. They are not willing to whip a man within an inch of his life.”

“You are a negro Lemuel.”

“I am Mr. Allen.”

“Then you of all people in this place should know something about the glory of the gift of freedom.”

The tension was palpable. My throat was dry. We were not yelling at each other yet, but we were talking powerfully and with greater severity than before. I was a negro, and it was never more clear to me than the time I spent in Vermont. There

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were few men like me, and certainly fewer of my standing in society. For him to say it seemed so unnecessary.

“Would you like a drink Mr. Allen? I have some wine in back.”

“Yes, Lemuel, thank you.”

I lit a small candle to guide my way and walked in back visibly frustrated. The short trip gave me time to compose myself, and I returned with two glasses and a bottle.

“My intention is not to offend you Lemuel, and I am sorry if I did. It’s just...who you are, it is quite extraordinary.”

“I assure you Mr. Allen, I am just a man before God, like everyone else.”

“My point exactly Mr. Haynes. Your perspective, however, is not like everyone else’s. The idea of freedom is one that few men can approach with the intimacy you are able to.”

“Because I am a negro?”

“Yes.”

The wine cut the tension. “Mr. Allen freedom is not a realm to be thought of in categories like black and white. Freedom is a mandate by God laid upon all men. I am no more qualified on the subject than any other man.”

“Precisely, Lemuel. This state has been fighting for freedom since we first stepped foot on the grants. But these days, we are in danger of losing such a fight.”

“I believe you underestimate the capacity of your neighbors Mr. Allen.”
“My neighbors tell me I am not needed anymore Lemuel. My neighbors want stability. My neighbors, Lemuel, have grown complacent.”

“Complacent how?”

“They have convinced themselves that the fight is over, that we have won. Meanwhile they hide behind their God, and suppress people like myself.”

“We do not hide behind our God, Mr. Allen. I can not speak for everyone, but at least the people in my parish for the most part are merely acting to please God, to feel God’s touch so that they can be saved.”

“People have said I am a heathen Lemuel. Truth is your God is also my God. I believe. But I also believe that God created this Earth and with it he created laws by which men live by. Laws like the right to freedom. All we as men are able to do is strive to abide by His laws of nature. In their quest to be saved people like those in your congregation oppress opposing views, go on witch hunts, and bury dissent.”

“Is that any different than your quest for freedom Mr. Allen? What about those men that you tortured? What about the families whose homes you burned?”

“What cost would you put on freedom Mr. Haynes? What mercy would you give to those who resist reason and natural laws? What mercy would you give those slave traders and masters who enslave your people?”

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44 All of Allen’s religious beliefs are espoused in his what has been called a deist’s Bible, *Reason, the Only Oracle of Man*, (New York: Scholars Facsimiles & Reprints, 1940). It becomes quite clear that contrary to popular belief that Allen in fact did believe in God.
Lemuel Haynes

The bottle was half empty. My tone grew somber. I feared for Mr. Allen’s soul. “My people are the children of God, Mr. Allen. My people are all men. Would you have me trade one torture for another Mr. Allen?”

“To defeat tyranny Lemuel?” He paused hard, “Yes.”

“That is not a concession I’m willing to make.”

“Well I am sorry to hear that Lemuel.”

“Don’t be mistaken, Mr. Allen. This cause, the cause of freedom one dearer to my heart than you will ever know. But I can only fight the way I know how, through God and with God.”

“And I can only do the same.” Mr. Allen rose from the pew, bumping the empty bottle by his side to the floor. I stood with him. He looked me square in the eyes and spoke with frank compassion, “Good luck, Lemuel. Don’t forget, the battle hasn’t ended.” He reached down with both hands, and hugged me more gently than seemed possible for such a powerful man.

“Indeed Mr. Allen,” I replied after our brief embrace. “I hope to see you again soon.”

“I wouldn’t count on it Lemuel. I’ve got a project I’ve been meaning to finish.”

“Well good luck Mr. Allen. Godspeed.”

Ethan walked between the tall pews flawlessly in the darkness and left without another word. Our conversation was relatively brief but it stuck with me. The

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45 Ibid. Allen spent the last years of his life out of the public eye. His one accomplishment of not was Reason, the Only Oracle of Man.
ferocity with which he argued his point made me question that adequacy of my own arguments. I stuck to my guns for quite sometime, preaching the word of God as well as ever, and praying that the point would come across. In 1789 I learned Ethan had died. He was knocked unconscious after falling off a wagon, a drunken mess, and never woke up. After he passed the people of Vermont seemed to fall asleep with him. Soon I witnessed another shift in the people of Vermont. Little kids began to haze me. Their parents tried to push me around. One day they drove me out altogether.46

In writing this memoir on my deathbed I tried to convey the most pivotal moments in my short life and my one conversation with Ethan Allen has never escaped me. I have question the adequacy of my fight ever since. As I boy I felt compelled to fight against the tyrannical British rule.47 I justified that fight to myself. But as a grown man I could never be convinced to join Ethan in his struggle for absolute freedom. As I die a part of me wishes I had. If there is an afterlife I pray that what I have done during this life is enough to please God. Ethan showed me how much more I could have done.

46 Mr. Haynes left his church in West Rutland on April 29th, 1818 by “mutual agreement, see Timothy Mather Cooley, Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes, A.M., For Many Years Pastor of a Church in Rutland, Vt. And Late in Granville New-York, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1837).169-173. The shift in atmosphere and tolerance is well described in Richard D. Brown, “Not Only Extreme Poverty, but the Worst Kind of Orphanage”, Lemuel Haynes and the Boundaries of Racial Tolerance on the Yankee Frontier, 1770-1820,” New England Quarterly, LXI:4 (December 1988), 513-516. “Haynes was reported to have said that, ‘he had lived with the people in Rutland thirty years, and the were so sagacious that at the end of the time the found out he was a nigger, and so turned him away.” In Richard Newman, Lemuel Haynes: A Bio-Bibliography (New York: Lambeth Press, 1984), 16.

The End