

The Short Saga of Fox Graffam

HMS *Canceaux* and three Royal Navy warships sailed into Maine's Falmouth harbor on the October tide and dropped anchor, ready to fire broadside volleys. By sundown, fifteen-year-old Fox Graffam was hunkered down among the ale kegs in Salter's tavern, nearly invisible and ready to begin reading the lips of riled men brandishing pitchforks, harpoons, and relic muskets.

Rabble was what Fox's master, Squire Wakeman, called them. Hard men up from the sea. From farms. Though deaf and without speech, Fox was to "spy on them and never trust them."

Earlier in the day, he watched a Royal Marine officer post the notice that sent runners crying the alarm through town and countryside: "*In the name of King George III, citizens of Falmouth have until 8 am tomorrow to surrender cannons, weapons, and prisoners, if any, and swear allegiance to the King anew. Signed: Henry Mowat, Lieutenant, Royal Navy.*"

Behind the barmaids, Fox remained in the shadows among the kegs as men jostled and shoved, extending empty tankards for refills. Ruddy-face men bent down so close he smelled their foul breaths and read their words—*Bunker Hill, Minutemen, Freedom*. With tankards full, the words soon became a fiery chant. Fox couldn't hear them but watched as they punched the air with their weapons and stomped a thundering approval across the pine boards.

Vibrations of rebellion carried long into the night until the tavern and everything in it, even the candles lining the walls, seemed in defiance. Fox felt it. Not just the tingling coming through the thin soles of his shoes. But everything. The room, the men. Fox began to understand that Squire Wakeman was right to be wary of men who risk hanging to gain their freedom.

As a lad in Widow Graffam's house near the gaol and gallows, Fox witnessed from his bedroom window the horror of seeing a man dangling at the end of a rope. Now, he tried to stifle old terrors as he stepped out from behind the kegs. He was fifteen, far too old for boyhood fears.