

It was the middle of the night and the moon was absent from its normal perch among the stars. But the absence of its light didn't bother John Adams.

He had *other* things on his mind...

He gripped his pistol tight, watching the trees about him for any sign of movement. Tonight, of all nights, he could not afford to be careless. If he lowered his guard for even an instant it could mean the difference between survival and a gruesome demise.

He took an instant to glance down at his left where a man knelt, clutching a lifeless woman against his bosom. He looked despondent and lost. Like a man who had all the fire in him snuffed out in one terrifying instant.

John knew he should rouse him. Knew the time would be upon shortly when he would have no choice but to try. But he sincerely wished for his friend and Commander in Chief, George Washington, to have these precious few moments to himself. To have the time to absorb the awful loss he suffered so little time ago and to gather his wits for the fight to come.

Assuming he had anything left to give of himself, of course. Any man, even this great one, had to have a breaking point. Could he truly blame the other if he'd reached it?

He resumed his sentry duty, searching the dark forest about them for signs of pursuit by their bizarre enemy. Nothing stirred about them but that meant little as far as he was concerned. They'd come too far to back down now and it wouldn't be long before someone realized the President of the United States was not among the many victims claimed.

He holstered his pistol and un-slung his musket instead. It was also only a one-shot weapon but at least it had a bayonet attached to the end. If need be, he could pierce an enemy in one strike. And it seemed only prudent with this particular beast to keep it at arm's reach.

A rumbling sound caught his attention back from the direction in which they'd initially traveled. He glanced at the President and considered his options. He was sworn to protect this man, his friend. But a part of his mind was also curious. Had their forces routed the Enemy? Or had they overwhelmed the men they'd left behind? The men sworn to protect the President even if it meant giving over their very lives to do so.

He considered his options for an instant then headed back toward the site of the White House. He had to know what had befallen their comrades and he hoped he wouldn't be away for too long to cause the President to come to harm.

He moved swiftly, over the hill and into the little ravine beyond. The hike up the next hill was more extraneous than expected but he managed it all the same. Reaching the summit, he paused a few moments, catching his breath before soldiering onward to the one place he'd recently escaped from. The one place he had hoped never to see again this night. But a place he had to return to, in order to know the outcome.

He came to the edge of the clearing, making certain to stay concealed by the forest about him lest he make himself a target in the process. What he saw beyond him was a sight to behold, breathtaking and heartbreaking all at once.

The White House, the seat of power for their fledgling nation, was aflame. The top was totally engulfed in flame while the lower floor was only just beginning to combust.

There were no men left about the gardens now. None alive, anyway. All about the clearing he witnessed men standing a macabre witness to the carnage, seeming devoid of purpose now that the deed had been done.

None of them were American soldiers. All of them were the twisted, decayed grey bodies that had besieged their home. It was as Clear Brook had said—the dead had been risen from their

resting places. Animated by a power he could not comprehend, set on the very seat of power of the United States. A black magic conjured in the spirit of revenge by the wayward Indian Chief, Crazy Horse.

He cursed the cavalier attitude of Thomas Jefferson. This had all been his doing. It had not been enough that the Cherokee had met their defeat at the hands of the U.S. army. He'd had to rub salt in their wounds by claiming their Princess as his bride.

A screech snapped him out of his reverie and he realized belatedly that one of the dead had spotted him. It alerted the others with a hoarse shriek--what remained of its voice, its boney finger pointing crookedly in his direction.

He turned and rushed back the way he'd come. He'd been spotted. There was no point in wasting time trying to silence the creature now and it would be a waste of precious ammunition to even attempt it. No, moving for safety was his best option now.

He just prayed he could make the President rise and escape with him. Otherwise all those soldiers whom they'd lost defending their lives earlier would have died in vain. Seeing his friend devoured by a legion of the un-dead was unacceptable as far as he was concerned and he would not let it happen.

The hill was steep and he was moving swiftly, trying to keep his footing as he maneuvered through the darkness. A tree root caught his toes once and he stumbled, barely able to keep from tumbling the rest of the way down. Somehow, miraculously, he maintained his balance just enough to stabilize himself.

He moved slower after that, staying alert to potential danger on the ground beneath him. He'd do no one any good if he fell now and broke his leg. He just hoped the enemy wouldn't catch up to him before he could reach George.

He reached the bottom of the small ravine at last, the apex between the two hills where the ground was level for a few feet and glanced upward. The second hill was lower and easier to maneuver. If his luck just held out a little longer he'd be back to where he'd left the President behind and relative safety.

He glanced behind him up at the hill he'd just traversed and discovered several figures already limping in his direction. The un-dead seemed slow but they had still managed to cover the distance in relatively short time. He feared what would happen if they caught up to him now.

He turned and began to move up the adjacent hill when he realized three more of them had appeared there too and were now moving down at him. Their slow, unsteady gait was unmistakable even in the dim light.

He swung up his musket and took aim at the center figure. Slowly, cautiously, he made certain he had the creature squarely in his sights then squeezed the trigger. The musket cracked loudly, losing its deadly projectile at the beast. The bullet tore through its head and it collapsed to the ground lifelessly.

He'd discovered it early on. The creatures could be rendered inert if they were shot or stabbed in the head. He'd passed the knowledge on to their guard, of course, but the sheer numbers of their enemy made the odds of survival low even with this newfound knowledge.

John charged the remaining two creatures, his bayonet out and ready for the attack. The first creature lashed out with its arm, forcing his blow to go wild.

He moved with the weapon, carrying himself out of its immediate radius of attack while un-holstering his pistol. He fired wild, trying to strike the far creature while evading the closer one's follow-up. As fortune would have it, the bullet struck its target and the beast dropped

where it stood.

The closer dead man swiped his hand at John, slapping the smouldering pistol away from his grip. He thrust the musket up, jamming the butt of it into the creature's chin. On a living opponent it would've at the least stunned them. On this one, though, the creature was merely slowed before immediately reaching out to him with its claws, intent on finishing him as quickly as possible.

He jammed the musket between them, catching the dead man's hands with it and blocking its strike. He kicked off the creature's torso, shoving it backward and away from him before it could strike further.

The movement also resulted in him losing his own balance and tumbling to the soil. He hit the moistened ground hard, feeling his hip take the worst of it as he landed.

He grimaced at the pain and searched desperately for where the musket had landed. The effort of getting the dead man away from him had resulted in the weapon being launched away from either of them.

He spotted it on the ground, lying squarely between his own location and that of the remaining creature. He doubted the beast would be able to use it as he could but if it were able to intercept him before he reached it, he'd be finished just the same.

He observed the decayed man stir and instinctively scrambled for the location of the musket. Pain racked his body but he forced himself to strain against it. He had one chance to get the gun. He had no time for pain in the face of imminent death.

He heard the other growl as he scurried atop the weapon in the nick of time. He gripped it in both hands and began to turn when the creature was suddenly atop him!

He shook it loose slightly but couldn't completely free himself from its clutches. The other's hands struck out for him and he wedged the gun between them once more, delaying its advancement.

The un-dead beast tried to jockey for a better position but he did his best to use the musket as a barrier between them. Still, the beast was faster than it looked and he didn't know how long he could go before it would luck out and reach his neck or before he would lose his strength and succumb to the inevitable by proxy.

He kept the rifle blocking off the creature's clumsy advances and freed his right hand, pushing it's maw up and away from his own head. They transmitted their rot by attempting to consume their enemies and he would do his best to ensure he did not meet such a gruesome fate.

The crack of a pistol startled him just then. His opponent abruptly slumped lifelessly and he was able to twist then shove the corpse off him.

He glanced up to see George Washington standing over him, a still smouldering pistol in his one hand while the other was proffered toward him. The President looked regal and as unshaken as ever.

"Are you safe, John?" he asked.

"With thanks to you, I should think," he replied, taking his hand and using it to help rise to his knees. "It was a most close call. Too close for my comfort."

He rose, wincing as he did.

"You're hurt!" George exclaimed, moving to help support him.

"I struck my hip on the earth when I fell," he explained. "It hurts but I should be all right in time."

He met the other man's gaze. "And you? I thought you had been stricken dumb by your

loss.”

“I will confess I am not sound in mind.” George’s eyes betrayed an uncertainty he had seldom seen in the President before tonight. “But what is done is done. We must rally together and work to defeat these...*things* before they ruin us utterly.”

“The White House is already lost I am afraid,” John explained. “There is nothing left to salvage from its remains I fear.”

“Be that as it may we must—”

George stopped in mid-sentence, his gaze transfixed on something nearby. John followed his gaze, noting a brown wolf had emerged from somewhere in the dark woods, its glowing eyes observing them intently.

Just as suddenly as it had appeared, the wild beast twisted and contorted its form, reshaping itself impossibly into the appearance of a brown skinned man. He was naked but his appearance was unmistakable.

An Indian!

Doubtlessly one of the Cherokee who had initiated the attack in the first place. He’d come to finish the work his un-dead minions had started.

He howled a war cry and charged them, drawing a hatchet from somewhere John hadn’t observed.

To his credit, George stood his ground. He removed another pistol from somewhere on his person, drew a bead on the attacker then squeezed the trigger effortlessly. The pistol cracked with the sound of gun powder and the Cherokee warrior stumbled then dropped.

John knelt and checked the man to see if he was still breathing. There was no sign of life.

“He’s dead.” He glanced up at George. “Now, what do we do, Mister President?”

“Now, we find shelter and regroup,” George replied. “Then, we’ll see about making these red-skin bastards pay.”