

Dockyard Dog

Lyle Garford

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Dedication

This is for my ever so patient wife Kathy.

Chapter One

June 1784

Aboard HMS *Wind* Off The Coast Of Antigua

The sway of the mast got worse the higher he went. Much worse.

"Bastard," he swore under his breath, although it mattered little as no one could hear him and the insistent strength of the wind carried his voice away anyway. Cursing his Captain yet again the young officer risked a glance upwards, hoping the remaining distance would seem less daunting the closer he got to the maintop and the tiny perch already occupied by a lookout.

Mistake. The masthead, still over ten feet away, swayed in a steady arc back and forth against the high, thin cloud in the sky. Had the ship been at a standstill the mast would still have swayed in the wind; with the ship under way at almost nine knots the mast

was a living thing. This time the officer cursed himself, as he knew better. Pausing to settle the churning in his stomach, he clutched the rope ladder hard.

"Get on with it, you idiot," he muttered.

Climbing well over a hundred feet to the top of the mainmast of a warship at sea was a terrifying experience and he knew it mattered not how many times you had done it before. Most sailors found it frightening, but he knew a few fools made light of it and usually ended up being dead fools. Anyone serving on a British Royal Navy warship with any sense soon learned one simple lesson. All tasks required absolute caution and respect, and paying attention to small details was essential. The officer shook his head; a warship held far too many ways for the unwary to get killed.

With effort he took several deep breaths and focused on the thick mast in front of him. The churning finally subsided and he resumed his climb, thankful yet again at learning to master the nausea touching at times even the most experienced sailors. The officer smiled as he resumed his climb, knowing he could still do it. The alternative was vomiting from his current perch, which would guarantee a wide splatter on the deck and people below. The wrath of his furious Captain wouldn't bear even thinking about.

Twenty-two year old Lieutenant Evan Ross already knew his wrath well, having borne the brunt of it on many occasions. A

rebellious spark deep inside kept the thought alive, though. Doing something to precipitate a way out of his current harsh situation was tempting. Evan had been ecstatic when word came he would replace the former third Lieutenant of HMS *Wind* three months ago after the man succumbed to fever, but the euphoria didn't last. Being assigned to a frigate, the swift hunters of the Royal Navy, should have been a dream posting. In reality they were the worst three months of his young life.

Right from the start the Captain seemed bent on venting his anger over anything going wrong with his ship on the new Lieutenant, and nothing Evan did worked to change his mind. The Captain's puzzling, irrational behaviour toward him was a frustrating mystery until the Second Lieutenant George Paxton took pity and pulled him aside for a quick moment after one manifestly unfair episode where Evan took the worst of the blame.

"You know, Mr. Ross, it may seem like it, but Captains don't always get their way."

Wary and alert, Evan risked a swift look around to ensure they were unheard before turning back to the Second Lieutenant.

"I take it that means the Captain was thwarted in some way recently, sir?"

Paxton took his own quick look about before replying.
"Hmm, you wouldn't know this, but our senior mid Walsh is the

son of our Captain's sister. The Flag didn't approve the Captain's request. Seems the Flag already had lots of unemployed Lieutenants around."

A brief, weary smile creased his face. "Thought you might want to know that." With a quick nod and one last look around he walked off to busy himself elsewhere before anyone noticed the two in deep conversation.

With the truth behind his situation much, much clearer Evan sighed as he considered the implications, knowing patronage was a huge part of advancement in the Navy. Midshipman Walsh was excellent at his duties and ready for greater challenges such as an acting Lieutenancy. Evan could see his Captain in a much different light as a result, because in putting Walsh forward for promotion the Captain was only doing what was expected of him, to find and promote talented people. No one would question the propriety of a family relationship being involved; Captain Woods was not the first and wouldn't be the last officer to push forward a relative for promotion. Making his new Lieutenant's life hell *wasn't* expected of him, but doing so was a backdoor way to get what he wanted. The Captain in reality wanted some excuse to clap him in chains or beach him and promote his favourite. The Captain owed Evan nothing.

And Evan could do nothing about it, knowing The Articles of War governing the lives and behaviour of people on board a Royal Navy warship gave the Captain enormous power over the ship and its people. His word was law.

Reaching the maintop with relief, Lieutenant Ross shoved aside his frustration. Eight years in the Royal Navy, serving since he was thirteen years old, had taught him patience was key to dealing with a demanding Captain. Bland responses and painstaking attention to duty was the only way to combat the abuse. This, and a firm resolve he wasn't going to be beaten.

Climbing onto the platform he squeezed his body in beside the seaman already sitting on the perch. The sailor gave him a quizzical look for a long moment, before a look of panic appeared on seeing the stony look he got in return.

"Sir," said the sailor, offering a hasty salute.

"Report, Smith," said Evan. "What have we got here?"

Another brief flicker of confusion crossed the sailor's face, but this time he responded quickly. "She's a Yankee, sir, like I called when I spotted her. You can see that from the trim of the ship. Sails, too. No one else has them cut like that. Pardon for asking, but is that what you came up to find out, sir?"

"Smith, you know bloody well why the Captain sent me up here is none of your concern," snarled Evan, although he quickly

relented and told himself it wasn't fair to take his frustration out on the sailor.

"I presume he wants to know as much as possible about the situation well in advance of getting there," said Evan as he pulled out his telescope.

But even as he turned attention to his task Evan knew the sailor was probably still curious and raising a skeptical eyebrow behind his back. The man was right, too; sending a ship's officer to the top of the mainmast to scout something was most often a waste of time, as an officer would be unlikely to see more than an experienced lookout. Evan knew too the man was smart enough to realize this was also the likely source of the Evan's gruff responses. But as a professional seaman Smith would never openly criticize an officer, let alone the Captain. Doing so would bring a swift and brutally harsh response.

Evan studied the situation as he trained his telescope on the ship they were fast bearing down on. The Captain had shifted course as soon as the hail from the lookout came, but gave no indication of what he was concerned about. The French and the Americans were still active all over the Caribbean, so breaking the ship's homeward voyage to check out what this strange sail was up to wasn't anything anyone on the ship would deem odd. The Treaty of Paris signed in September 1783 formally ended hostilities

between the combatants involved in the American Revolutionary War, but this certainly didn't mean the hard feelings and suspicion were gone.

The ship being in this place was indeed odd, though. The lookout did well to spot the strange ship, anchored in one of the many small bays dotting the coastline of the Caribbean island of Antigua. From a distance it would be challenging to see a ship against the background of palm trees and dense undergrowth.

"Pardon me for asking again, sir," said Smith. "What do you think she's up to? Maybe they're smuggling something, sir?"

Evan grunted in response, still peering hard through his telescope. "I'd say you're right, Smith. Looks to me like they've been offloading cargo on the beach. Yes, there's a big pile of stuff and a bunch of people around it. Looks like a sloop and they're Yankees all right. That's their flag. Hello, they've finally woke up and spotted us," he added with amusement. "There's a jolly boat pushing off from the beach like they've got the hounds of hell after them."

"Maybe the Captain will teach them to pay attention, sir," said Smith.

Evan took one final, close look at the American ship before glancing over to see a wolfish grin on the sailor's face.

"Could be," said Evan with a smile, allowing a hungry look to grow on his own face. "One last bit of action before we go home would be good."

Heeding the lesson the Americans were learning Evan gave the horizon a scan in all directions to make sure he wasn't missing anything, but the ocean was otherwise empty. He couldn't resist pausing for a few brief moments to drink in the view. Climbing to the masthead was unquestionably terrifying, but the reward was always an incredible view and a sense of exhilaration. Evan felt the same way every time; every cell in his body was keenly alive.

"Right. Carry on, Smith," said Evan, pocketing his telescope and swinging himself off the platform to begin the long descent back to the deck. A rush of top men climbing the mast to attend to the sails slowed his passage down.

Finally reaching the deck he straightened his uniform on his way to the quarterdeck where a knot of officers were clustered, all staring intently at the ship they had found. Captain Woods, as was his right, was standing by himself on the windward side, equally focused on the scene before him.

"Report," grunted John Harder, the ship's First Officer, not even bothering to glance in Evan's direction.

"Sir," he replied, saluting as he came to a stop. "Strange sail is definitely a Yankee. Appears to be a trading sloop. I think they may be smuggling—"

"You think, Mr. Ross?" said the Captain, his voice oozing sarcasm, as he came over to join the little group. "I had no idea you could. Of course, I didn't ask you to think, I asked you to check the situation and report back in a timely manner. You've dawdled so long about it what they're doing is already plain for everyone to see. It's obviously a trading sloop and they're obviously smugglers! Unless you actually have something else to report?"

"Sir, very little else, sir. There's a large pile of crates and goods stacked up on the beach. There are no other sail about, sir," replied Evan, maintaining a consciously bland look on his face.

"Sir, very little else, sir," mimicked the Captain, shaking his head. "Bloody useless."

"Captain," interrupted the First Officer, still training his telescope on their target. "From all the bustle on yonder sloop I'd say they are clearly thinking about getting underway."

Evan was grateful for the interruption as Captain Woods strode back to the windward side of the quarterdeck and turned his attention to the American ship.

"Mr. Harder," said the Captain with a grim snort of amusement moments later. "Explain to them they aren't going anywhere."

"Sir," replied the First Officer, turning to the waiting group of officers. "Mr. Ross, pass the word for the gunner to put a shot across his bow."

Evan found the gunner already working to obey the command. The ship's gunner Johnson, a warrant officer with over twenty years experience, had anticipated the order and wasn't about to be caught unprepared. He and the ship's bosun had already brought together a gun crew ready to leap into action when the order was given. A well-trained gun crew could load and fire a gun in less than three minutes, and it wasn't long before one of the forward six-pound chase cannons roared out. The round dropped into the bay and raised a geyser of spray less than a hundred feet in front of the American's bow, right off his starboard side.

"Well shot, Mr. Johnson!" called the First Officer. He studied the ship before him for a few moments before snapping his telescope closed. "They appear to be standing down, Captain. Orders, sir?"

The Captain paused a moment in thought before turning to offer another grim smile to his First Officer. "Well, we need to see what these buggers are up to, don't we? Take a boarding party and

check them out, Mr. Harder. I think they're trying to get around that Navigation Order in Council I mentioned when we spoke a while back."

"Bloody cheek smuggling in broad daylight, if that's what they're doing, sir."

"Greedy, grasping, arrogant shits. No respect for tradition. We gave them everything and they— Gah! Don't get me started. Right, any nonsense from them and you smile and tell them the July 2, 1783 Order in Council concerning Navigation says they're in trouble. They'll pretend to know nothing and want to keep their contraband, but that's not going to happen. While you're dealing with them I'll have Mr. Paxton here take a party to the beach to pick up everything they've offloaded. If we let it sit there too long I'm sure it'll all sprout legs and disappear."

"Uh, so I fully understand in case they argue some point I know nothing about could I get a little more background on this Order in Council, sir?" said the First Lieutenant.

"Hmm, yes, you should have a little background. Before the war the Yankees were thick as the goddamn mosquitos in these islands trading their goods. The greedy damn plantation owners on most of the islands out here are always in need of proper timber and food they can't get here, and especially things like salt fish, which they feed to their slaves."

The Captain paused to give a disapproving grunt and shake his head. "Slavery, I ask you. Anyway, the Yankees get goods like rum, sugar, coffee, spices, and coconuts in return. Well, you get the picture."

The Captain paused once more to let a savage smile crease his face while nodding his head in the direction of the ship awaiting them. "What these Yankee rebels are about to learn is they can't have it both ways, right? They can't expect we're going to let them continue trading to their hearts content because we had to kiss and make up. The Order in Council specifies all trade with the Americans to and from our islands must be on British registered ships with British crews. Of course, that also means our good King is able to collect the appropriate customs duties."

Instant understanding appeared on the faces of everyone listening. The duties were notoriously heavy and universally disliked by everyone involved in trade.

"I know what you're thinking, gentlemen, but make no mistake here. This may seem a bit beneath the regular duties of a King's ship, but that couldn't be further from the truth. I think the treasury, which pays the bills for all of us to be here and do our jobs, is seriously depleted. Enough, I'm sure you understand now so let's be about it, shall we?"

"Thank you, Captain. I think we all understand much better now. I may take who I want with me, sir?"

The Captain waved an indifferent hand. "As you see fit. And make sure you check everyone's papers on that ship. I won't be surprised if half of that damn crew is Royal Navy deserters. You know what to do. I'll be in my cabin."

He gazed about with disinterest. "It's too bloody hot out here today. Let's get this sorted and be on our way. Three years out here is long enough. I'd like to be home in Kent before the end of July."

"Amen to that, sir," nodded his First Officer in reply, before issuing a flurry of orders.

As the ship came to anchor Evan was commanded to join the party as backup for Harder. Squeezing into the cutter already lowered into the water was a party of eight Royal Marines and their commanding officer, Lieutenant Fulham. Another half dozen sailors rounded out the group. As soon as everyone was aboard they began rowing smartly toward the American ship.

Several angry looking faces lined the rails of the sloop. A few were more inscrutable, but they all shared one common feature. No one looked happy.

"Right," said Lieutenant Harder. "Everyone armed? Weapons loaded everyone? I don't think this lot is going to give us trouble, but we'd better be ready for it."

The cutter hooked on to the sloop at the boarding ladder and he looked at the waiting, tense faces around him one last time.

"Marines, follow me smartly."

By the time Evan reached the deck the First Officer was already in heated conversation with a grizzled, scruffy looking older man who was presumably the Captain. Evan took a quick look at his surroundings to assess the situation. The crew was mostly clustered behind the older man and looked as scruffy as their leader. Their ship, however, was decidedly not scruffy. A little touch up paint wouldn't hurt, but any ship in steady service always needed some touch up. Everything about it spoke of professional care and attention, certainly as good as any Royal Navy ship afloat.

"This is an outrage, I tell you!" shouted the old man. "You have no right to impede our passage, let alone board anybody you feel like. We're honest traders doing our job! Haven't you got some privateers you can go chase?"

"Oh, please," groaned the First Officer. "Sir, you are in British waters and are therefore subject to our laws. You are clearly flying an American flag and you are obviously smuggling goods to unknown parties resident on Antigua. You are in clear violation of the Order in Council concerning Navigation."

"But I've never heard of this damned Order of yours!"

"Not my problem," barked Lieutenant Harder, his patience gone. "Your cargo is forfeit. Right, I want to see your ship's papers and I want them *now*, sir."

The Captain of the sloop visibly deflated, knowing the pointlessness of continuing. "Damn you. Our families will go hungry because of you. Your consul in Boston shall be hearing about this outrage. This isn't over, because we'll sue if we have to. Come on, then, they're in my cabin."

Harder turned to Ross and the Marine officer Fulham. "Mr. Ross, take a party to search the ship thoroughly." He gestured with a flick of his hand towards the cluster of still visibly angry American sailors. "Mr. Fulham, have your men guard this lot and keep them from interfering. Check their papers while I deal with the Captain."

Evan turned and gestured to a tall and lanky, light brown skinned sailor standing nearby, one of the master's mates on the *Wind*. To find a black sailor on a Royal Navy warship was not unusual. The Navy was always in need of men due to attrition from death, desertion, or illness and as long as a man did his job, no one cared what he looked like.

"Mr. Wilton, you're with me. We'll search forward."

Turning, he looked at the bosun standing nearby. "Jackson, take Payne and search aft. Report back to Lieutenant Harder. Anything suspicious you call for help."

Ten minutes later Evan and the sailor Wilton compared notes on what they'd found once they worked their way back to the deck. The hold was mostly empty except for the usual stores a ship would have in place for a long voyage. The sailor's berths also held only the small personal effects one would expect. Unless something was found aft, Evan surmised they had caught the smuggler having already unloaded their cargo, but still in the process of loading for the return trip home.

Coming on deck they found the First Lieutenant deep in discussion with the Marine officer Fulham. The two sailors Evan had detailed to search aft were already back, standing a respectful distance away from the First Officer's side.

"Ah, Mr. Ross, here you are. Report, please."

It took only moments for Evan, with Wilton at his side, to detail the little they had found.

"Hmm, well, the two that searched aft found much the same, except this lot did in fact start loading goods for the homeward trip. A few casks of rum and some molasses were already stored away aft. Papers confirm they are who they say they are, traders out of Boston, so we've got them red handed. Lieutenant Fulham

has checked the paperwork on the crowd we found on deck and they all seem to be in order. If they're forgeries they are quite good ones. It seems they really are American born. On the other hand, Jackson and Payne didn't find only cargo aft. They found two more hands doing their best to stay out of sight."

Harder paused to grunt with annoyance at some papers he held up for Evan to see. "They claim to be innocent and swear they weren't trying to hide from us. Their papers don't look legitimate to me, but I can't put my finger on why."

"Could I take a look, sir?" said Evan. "I had to look over a lot of Yankee paperwork in my last ship."

Wordlessly the First Officer handed Evan the paperwork. After a few moments scrutinizing them, Evan looked up at Harder.

"Sir, it's the stamps of the town seals on their birth certificates, I think. Forgers won't have access to the real stamp, of course, so they have to try to either hand draw it or make their own forged stamps. The paper itself looks rather cheap, too. Some forgeries are better than others. Where are these two men? I'd like to question them."

"Over there, behind Jackson and Payne. Go ahead."

Turning, Evan walked toward the two sailors as they stood aside and pointed at the two men they had found. As they came

into view Evan's jaw dropped open. The two men reacted with equal surprise and shock on their faces.

"Cromwell? Anderson? You bloody— Sir, these men are deserters from my last ship!" shouted Evan.

The two men overcame their shock fast. Both punched the men guarding them and wrestled their weapons from their grasp.

"Back off, the lot of you! You bastards aren't taking us back!" shouted the one called Cromwell as he waved a sea pistol about.

Recovering from his shock Evan stepped forward, pulling out his own gun in turn. "Give it up you fools, there's nothing for it—"

The sharp report of Cromwell's gun galvanized the rest of the men on deck into action, paralyzed momentarily by how fast the situation had changed. Evan gasped in sudden pain and surprise, clutching his left arm. Blood was fast staining his uniform above his left elbow where the shot had struck.

The rest of the British crew was already rushing forward. A Marine wielding his musket like a bat hammered the sailor Cromwell hard on the head and he dropped to the deck bleeding from the force of the blow. The second deserter, Anderson, was aiming directly at Evan when the black sailor Wilton brushed past trying to enter the fray with his cutlass. Anderson's gun barked just as another Marine jostled his arm and deflected his aim.

Anderson's shot found a target in all the confusion. Wilton gasped in pain and fell clutching his right thigh as the blood began seeping through his fingers. A millisecond later Lieutenant Fulham shot Anderson point blank in the chest. A flash of surprise crossed his face as a dark red stain blossomed on his shirt and he crashed to the deck. The shock of being shot finally overcame Evan and he fell to one knee beside Wilton.

A few of the remaining American sailors were already involved in support of their mates, scuffling with several of the Marines. The fully galvanized Marines soon took command of the situation, using their muskets as clubs. Knowing they would lose the American Captain shouted for attention, loudly ordering his men to stand down. By the time they finally complied three of their number were crumpled on the deck, holding bruised and bleeding heads, while the remainder were clustered together. All of them were scowling in mute anger.

"Idiots," growled Harder as he shook his head, glaring at the two deserters on the deck.

"You call them idiots, you murdering shits?" shouted one of the American sailors, holding his side in obvious pain where a musket butt had been hammered into his ribs. "Maybe if you didn't flog people for bloody nothing they wouldn't desert!"

"We beat you buggers before and we could do it again," growled another American sailor.

"Shut your goddamn mouths, all of you, or they'll be shut for you!" growled Harder in obvious frustration. With a sigh, the First Officer frowned as he assessed what needed to be done.

Evan groaned in pain and shock as he and the sailor Wilton were tended to by one of the older and more experienced sailors. The man finished tying off tourniquets on both and looked up as the First Officer stalked over.

"Permission to get these two over to the ship for the surgeon right away, sir? They've already lost a fair bit of blood and need attention soon, sir."

Lieutenant Harder grunted agreement and signaled to a group of the remaining British sailors. "Get them to the ship and then get back here right away. Tell the Captain what happened and that I'll return on board shortly with a full report. Mr. Ross, Mr. Wilton, we'll get you some attention right away."

Evan grimaced, clutching his arm, and mumbled his thanks to Harder.

"What about the deserters, sir? Should we take them with us?" asked another of the sailors.

Harder turned and walked over to the two men still lying on the deck.

"No," he said, surveying the scene before him with a grim smile. "Mr. Fulham has ended any need for urgency over the one he shot. This other fool is still out cold. Better for him if he doesn't wake up. The Captain will probably have him dancing with a rope around his worthless neck real soon anyway. No, we'll bring him over with us once you return."

Harder surveyed the scene one last time and offered another bleak smile to the waiting men. "If I can find some chains I'll load him down with them while we're waiting. Now be off with you."

Evan and Wilton were already lapsing in and out of consciousness from shock and blood loss as they were manhandled into the boat and rowed quickly across to the *Wind*. Captain Woods waited, drawn on deck from the sound of the gunshots. He wore an inscrutable look on his face as Evan was helped past on his way to the surgeon.

"Sir," gasped Evan, unable to salute as he was still holding his shattered and bleeding arm. The Captain's expression didn't change as he watched the two men disappear below, listening to the report of what happened on the American ship.

By the time they were dropped onto the surgeon's tables in his space on the orlop deck the two men were groggy, but still conscious from the painful jostling endured in getting there. The surgeon, a grizzled older man, looked them over with a

professional eye. Evan was conscious enough to realize where he was and what was about to happen.

"Mr. Manley," said Evan, in what was a bare whisper with his strength fast disappearing. "I beg of you, sir. Please don't take it off."

The surgeon paused a few moments more before responding with a sigh. "I wish I could agree to that, Mr. Ross. I think the ball may have shattered the bone of your arm beyond hope and if I don't deal with this I fear you will lose more than your arm. I will assess you carefully, but I will also do what is necessary, sir. Be happy I am as skilled a surgeon as I am and that there are few in the Royal Navy better than I. Now drink this rum my surgeon's mate has for you and I will be back to you shortly."

As the surgeon moved to look over his other patient his assistant stepped forward without asking and insistently made Evan drink a large dose of rum. Rough and heady, the standard issue Navy rum on Royal Navy warships packed a heavy punch. As shock and the strong rum overcame him Evan still retained enough focus to realize the surgeon was talking about the unconscious, injured black sailor lying on the other table beside Evan in the surgery.

"Hmm, well, this one is lucky. The shot went right though his thigh and how that missed a major artery I'll never understand.

Looks like a clean wound, too. He doesn't seem to have anything inside his wound to fester. Right, he won't be much of a problem. We'll come back to him in a bit. Blackwell, help Mr. Wilton enjoy another nice big tot of rum. That should make him oblivious while I deal with Mr. Ross."

As the rum continued to carry him into his own oblivion Evan retained enough awareness to realize the surgeon was back at his table and probing the wound, enough to give him twinges of pain even through his drunken stupor.

"Sorry lad, I had to do that to be sure. Don't want to do this, but there is no choice. Blackwell, give him a little dose of that laudanum I've been hoarding. He's going to need it."

Manley busied himself organizing his tools, waiting several minutes to ensure the drug was taking effect. He knew Evan was doubly fortunate to have both a surgeon good at his job and to have one with some of the most precious, effective pain killing medicine available anywhere on hand. As Manley waited he let his thoughts drift and he shook his head, marveling for the thousandth time at his personal downfall. But he knew if it had not happened he never would have joined the Navy and come to appreciate life at sea.

A successful practice serving London's high society had once been his reality. Manley knew his undoing had been naively

thinking people would understand his desire to help the poor on the side through political advocacy and action. A newsman with unsympathetic political leanings noticed his work helping prostitutes unable to afford skilled services when their precautions didn't work. Soon, clever stories implying his relationship with the underworld of London involved far more nefarious activity began appearing. The ensuing scandal and attention was crushing.

Manley shrugged it off, knowing he was far too late to be complaining about fleeing to service in the Navy in order to save himself. Turning his attention back to his patient, a quick check showed Lieutenant Ross had slipped into complete unconsciousness. With a sigh he shook his head and turned to his assistant.

"Blackwell, bring my saw over here, please. I'm afraid it's time to put it to use again."