J C Fremont
Congress Square, Boston
March 3, 1853
42°21'28.73"N 71° 3'25.75"W

The boy came up the hill alone, albeit thickly surrounded by people. It was as though he were all pulled in at the edges and didn't touch this world. At first it amused the loitering toughs, the way he slogged on right through the slush and mud and the droppings of the cart mares. And then it grated: he was oblivious even to them. The men in their top hats and certainly the women in their crinolines gave them wide clearance. But the boy just came on steadily by.

Without a word -- a Portuguese-man-of-war riding the slack tide: thousands of stings but only one mind -- the toughs came at him. They had two surprises. First, that he was so young, it was like hammering a baby. And second, that he wasn't oblivious at all. He elbowed one tough in the throat, grabbed a loose cobblestone and blinded another, and did something to the third that made him screech and fall down on his knees. And then kept walking, his lips ever so faintly moving. Was he cursing? Was he laughing? No, Fremont suddenly realized the child was counting. And as he sat watching it all from the second floor of the coffee house, he knew this boy would be the one.

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The major domo brought him up, clutching his sleeve, carefully inventorying the nearby silver. "My Colonel, he *says* he has an appointment."

Fremont lightened inside at the title and then pushed out a frown. "Cleveland, I am Colonel no more. Coffee for two." He pointed to the chair across from him. Then he took his time lighting his pipe. He would have preferred a cigar but Jessie had been on him about his coughing. He didn't look at the boy who remained silent, on his feet.

Fremont murmured, "Could you draw it? The hill?"

"I could."

"But?"

"I should need a pencil and paper."

"And if you had none?"

"I could make them. But this place would frown on what I did to their cloths."

Fremont placed his own notebook on the table. Placed one of the new Thoreau plumbago pencils beside it. Even in the ferment of this house, the steam rising, the coffee grinding, he could feel the boy tremble. "Sir, I cannot write in your book."

"You can and you will." The boy just gaped and Fremont who needed worship, but even more needed evidence, tapped the table brusquely. "Sit and do as I say!"

And the boy sat as though his legs had suddenly gone liquid beneath him. He stared at the notebook, breathing harder than the street assault had ever made him breathe. Finally, fearfully, he opened the book. Studied the writing as though it were Testament. Touched the last word as Fremont struggled to remember what he had writ there. And then turned the page, took up the pencil and in a few lovely strokes, some shading and some hatching, had the whole route from the wharves, past the Custom House up to the Merchant Exchange, all in nice and accurate proportion. It was like magic how, on the small page, the whole city came alive.

"What is your name, boy?" he asked.

"Lewis, sir."

"What is your whole name?"

"Just Lewis, sir."

"What was your father's name?"

"I was told Lewis."

"Then what was your given name?"

"I wasn't, sir. I wasn't ever given one. My mother went to God but I remained."

"Ah," Fremont said. And examined the boy and saw the grayness of his cheeks wasn't dirt. It was starvation. "You were a foundling."

"That sounds a bit more cherished than I was."

"You were put to work."

"At four."

"Drawing maps?"

"No, sir. I was a slave. I cleaned the cod and haddock. Drawing maps became my only comfort."

"How a comfort?"

"I was plotting the way to my escape."

"And here you are."

"Yes, sir."

"And there is nothing in this world to stop you from coming with me."

"Only your say-so."

Fremont extended his hand. He thought of it as rugged. It had clawed its way up savage unnamed mountains. But the boy's inside his own felt as hard as naked bone. Or more like flint and steel, like within it a fearful fire could be ignited. Fremont craved that fire. He needed it for the cold that was going to come.

The boy took it, clung to it, and then released it.

"You will start by doing reductions."

And the boy's face went blank, shuddering as he tried to turn it to something hopeful.

Fremont deliberately made his voice a blade. "You don't know what that is! Which is why you have never have escaped from your chains and your fish stink. You need the stars to take you beyond what you can see."

Again the brief flutter of a page struggling against a high wind. The blasts off the Sierras would blow this boy right down.

But he would get up again. "Sir, I will learn."

Fremont rose. His chair scraped a mere half-inch before good Cleveland had it. He was glad the boy would see how attentive he must be. And then he chastised himself. This boy was already his. It was *he* who must be worthy.

"Learn quickly then. We leave for New York at dawn."

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He had not got the boy a room. It had not occurred to him he would require one. This place had been his home for maybe a dozen years. Though "home," Fremont supposed, might be stretching it. Still, when he glanced at the sky, his room facing east by request so his heart could rise with the moon over Boston harbor, he was startled to find the boy silhouetted upon the rooftop opposite. The small face tilted upward, the white light pouring down, as if it were a kind of milk to nourish him. Well, it had nourished Fremont himself when he was young. But then, even at the distance, he could see the boy was shaking. From cold? From hunger? From terror of his ignorance? Fremont truly didn't know. But he did recall his own studies had begun under warm Carolina skies, in the comfortable library of his mentor and within walking distance of his loving mother. And Fremont was briefly stricken and ashamed.

He did not like the feeling. For a moment he let himself believe taking the boy would be a folly. And then he thought again of the Sierras where almost a dozen grown men had perished and he decided this willingness to suffer was no vice.

And in the morning, he greeted the boy with soft rolls and hot coffee. But the boy rejected his gifts, his face wretched with despair.

"I am not worthy, sir. I have learned nothing."

"Lewis, I doubt that truly." The gentle words in his mouth gave Fremont a start. *Where* had he learned to be kind? And, more important, would the kindness kill him? "Tell me just what you saw. No, wait. You will tell me once we are *en route*..."

There then followed the normal rigmarole of farewells and payments and warrants and the careful loading of the chronometers, and all that time he noticed the boy touched neither bread nor beverage. But on a large discarded handbill, he drew and he drew.

And then they were off to the station and the boy gazed hopeless at his sketches. And then he fell weakly against the side of the coach. And Fremont thought he saw tears but the boy quickly looked away to the iron wheels striking sparks from the cobbles with every revolution.

"Will you slow at all before you throw me out?"

There was fear but also weary acceptance in the statement. He had been thrown before. He'd been hurt but he'd survived. He assumed he'd survive again but he was getting to the point where he wasn't sure he wanted to.

"I want you to drink the coffee and eat the rolls. There is milk in the coffee and sugar. You surely need them. You were watching on the roof in the cold all night."

And still the boy just stared, gutted as one of his haddocks.

"I will not throw you out. I will teach you what you need."

He passed him the mug. The boy finally took it and managed one sip from it. And then, of a sudden, he began to sob. Fremont let his eyes just rest on the boy as though this were not in any way unusual. All laden clouds at some point must release their rain.

And then it was done. Fremont was stunned at the briefness of the torrent. A lifetime of pain had to be summed up in those tears. But also a lifetime of restraint and even delicacy. The boy took one more sip and then held the handbill out.

And Fremont saw before him the entire procession of the heavens. The night-time wheeling of the brightest stars. At first there was only Sirius, then Betelgeuse and Rigel rolling indolently higher. And then came Procyon. And then... for hours on end... nothing at all. He wondered what the boy had made of it, eyes forced wide into the deep and empty darkness. For surely he could not distinguish the steady swinging progression of the Lion and the Bear and the Crab in their long arcs. It must have felt to him like a cruel torment deliberately inflicted. What was he supposed to *see*?

And then suddenly, at two, unwinking Jupiter springing from the horizon, the cold moon rising reluctantly behind. And finally Venus -- like another fish on a hand line -- dragged slowly slowly out of the ocean... And then blazing dawn: the voracious sun seething upward, consuming Venus, moon, Jupiter and all. And the progression ended and the boy, in confusion, did likewise and yet Fremont stared at his work and was stunned at what he had done.

Without names for the stars or planets, he had them all down perfectly. Without sextant or scope, he had the dance exactly limned. The altitudes and azimuths were drawn as though lifted from some star chart. Fremont fancied he could reduce the latitude from just this flapping paper in his hand.

He placed it on his knees between them. "How did you do this?"

The boy lifted his head, Arcturus rising. He had missed that. He would have to learn it. But... "You have *times* here."

"Yes."

"You have a watch?"

"I could hear church bells chime."

"That could only give you the hours. Maybe the half hours."

"There are so many of them. And none of them are right."

"How not right?"

"Noon is supposed to mean lunch. When the sun is straight up, you are supposed to be given something finally. Something. But not a single blasted clock rings it out correct. You quickly notice that. And that the one that rings out first, the Christ Church peal, is just a taunting. As is King's Chapel after that. And Park Street after that. And when they finally throw you your crust you know, from counting, that the Baptist Tabernacle is sometimes twenty-five minutes off the hour. And that in a minute, Christ Church will ring again."

"So you have minutes. Your cramping stomach gives you minutes."

"It is not cramps. That comes *after*, when the food is spoiled. No, it is just... sadness."

"That no one cares enough to feed you... But truly no hunger pangs?"

"They would be of little use for telling the minutes. They are always there. They neither wax nor wane."

Fremont considered, then opened his chest and took out some chocolate he had been saving. The boy regarded it attentively but he didn't know what it was.

"Is it to draw with?"

"It is to eat." He placed it in the graphite-smudged fingers.

The boy touched it with his tongue. And smelled. And then, with wonder, took the smallest bite of it, and let it melt luxuriously in his mouth.

"It is called Xocolatl. The ancient Aztecs thought it holy."

"If this is their communion, I will be an Aztec now."

The boy didn't smile; he was grave. But somehow Fremont still knew that he was joking. And it filled him with such relief that humor had not entirely fled this child.

"No more for now. It will be too rich from what you are used to." The boy carefully folded it in a scrap of the paper and placed it in his pants.

"And now this..." He took the boy's sky map. "You will see your masters were not being deliberately cruel to you."

The boy's shoulders drew up but his mouth was too full of sweet to voice doubt.

"At least when it came to determining true noon... You have drawn the movement of the stars. You have done it all correctly. You saw them rising in the east and then falling in the west. Last of all the sun which was so bright it burned out all the others and would have burned your eyes too if you had traced it out too long."

"Wait. The sun is a star?"

"The brightest star. Because it is the closest. And you believe full well it also rises and then falls."

"It is not a belief but fact."

"No child, it is an illusion. The sun is a fixed body. It doesn't move at all. Nor do all these you have traced in their apparent rotation. It is we who rotate on our tumultuous world."

"No."

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Well, there is a long story and a short story. Someday I will tell you the long one. You will find it very interesting. People are burned at the stake in it. Powerful men with torches were once as dubious as you. But you have been up all night and it will keep. The short story involves your movable lunch hour. And why it was always and everlastingly wrong."

He rummaged again in his chest.

"You *know* the earth is round."

"If you say so."

"I do. It is as round as an orange. Which I have. We are extremely lucky in our provisions. It would not be so easy to explain this with an egg."

He spun the orange on his knee. The boy's eyes locked on it as inexorably as a magnetic needle finding true north. "You may eat it later but for now I need it whole. We will call this the earth. It turns and turns. Where it faces the sun, it is day. Where it faces away, it is night-time. Every twenty-four hours: one complete rotation in geometry."

"What is geometry?"

"It will be your religion now."

"With chocolate for communion."

"Yes. And this..."

With a quick slice of his penknife, Fremont bisected the orange. It fell into two halves, each a starburst of sections.

"This is the first and most important commandment: a circle is 360 degrees around."

"Three hundred and sixty?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Another long story. And in the end only a convention. Why eight notes in the scale? Why seven days in the week? But because, in our religion, *time* equals place it is useful to know that the number came from the same people who gave us sixty seconds in a minute. And of course sixty minutes in an hour."

"They liked sixties."

They did, the ancient Sumerians. And they watched the heavens just as you did last night. But they watched it for years. And they noticed the sun rose and set every day in a slightly different position and took 360 days to get back to where it started again.

The boy regarded the orange and then drew an imaginary circle around it. "Three hundred sixty days to travel three hundred sixty degrees."

"To *appear* to travel. But yes, you take my meaning."

"Only I still don't understand what it *means*."

"It means that the earth does two things: It *rotates*, which gives us the length of an earth day. It simultaneously *revolves* around the sun, which gives us the length of our year. "

Lewis frowned. "They were five days off."

"Plus some. But over three thousand years ago, that was close enough. And it spared you from working with circles of 365.24 degrees."

"Spared *me*, sir?"

"How many degrees does this earth rotate every hour?"

The boy hesitated. "I don't believe I know, sir..."

"*Belief* has nothing to do with it. How far does it rotate in twenty-four?"

"Oh, three-sixty. Then fifteen in one."

Fremont felt bizarrely transported by Lewis' instant calculus. "You have division."

"Spoons per table. It came with the job."

"Then tell me this. If it is noon here..." and Fremont re-assembled the orange and pointed to a spot on its lanced equator... "What time would it be on the exact opposite side?"

"I would say midnight, sir."

Fremont sat back. The boy was quick but suddenly, desperately, he needed more than quickness. Young Benton had died on the Missouri at the start of his last expedition. The children of his loins would go traveling with him no more. His remaining boy was still unformed. He had no way to know what would become of him. He was pretty sure he would be a military man. But he would not be an explorer. By the time

he was grown, the West would have given up all its mysteries. It was this boy who could be his son of the road.

"And say you were standing in this same spot, let us call it London, and you held one of those fine chronometers we packed this morning in your hands. And it read precisely noon and the arc of the sun conformed to that; and then you carried that chronometer out into the middle of some yet uncharted wilderness. How would you use it to determine the longitude where you were?"

"The longitude, sir?"

"The degrees away from London."

The boy took a single shaky breath. "If I could just see it, sir..."

"You can. You have the whole earth right in front of you."

The boy stared at the orange and then into Fremont's eyes. And felt Fremont somehow pass through those portals right inside of him. And felt the orange between them grow. And grow. Until its fragrant cobbled surface curved away beneath him, a savage sun blazing overhead. And the boy blinked. Blinked at the sun, blinked at the thought that the Great Man had put into him...

"I would wait until the sun was precisely overhead," he said. "And compare it to the time on the chronometer. If it read twelve, I would know the... the longitude... was exactly one-eighty.

"And if it read, say, four twenty?"

Lewis envisioned a cloth-napped table gleaming with spoons, a clockwork gear. It spun out the answer.

"I would be sixty-five degrees from London, sir."

Fremont barely nodded. It was all he could manage, his vocal chords tangled up with his heart strings. How long had he yearned for a true companion at his side? "And what does this mean," he whispered, "for the work we will be doing?"

"We, sir?"

"We."

But Lewis just wavered. To have thought so hard and still to have fallen somehow short of the finish. "I do not know, sir." His shoulders rose, imagining the blow.

"No, you *do* know, Lewis. This is easy. This is so easy."

But still the boy looked helpless to the window, already tracing the dreary steps back to his prison. And then suddenly he looked up at Fremont with stunned dawning of his own power. "It means I will not have to *count* my way across the country! The sun and a clock will always tell us where we are."

"Yes," he said. "To a point. You will have longitude. Until the clock breaks or the sun refuses to emerge from storm clouds. Plus there is altitude and latitude and much else you must learn. But this, for the first day, is a very good beginning."

"But what about lunch, sir?"

"You still have, uneaten in your lap, your breakfast."

"I mean, you were going to explain why my lunch was always late."

And like that, a strong sure peace flowed into Fremont. He remembered himself reading through the long night's darkness only because he wanted to *learn*. He was also fatherless. It left a hunger that had nothing to do with mealtimes. He would fill this starving, sleepless orphan up. And he took the orange and he tilted it at just the right angle. "Ah, that is because everything I have told you so far is a lie."

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Fremont had taken the train into Boston without paying the city much attention. His body was here but his mind was already far to the West. Still he had heard the last few miles were totally insupportable in summer. The Mill Dam, intended to harness the tides and provide a new source of power for the growing metropolis, had instead left no seaward exit for its reeking sewage. Those who had the means escaped to the North when it got hot.

So he'd come in March. A dusting of snow had obscured the sordid nature of the Basin on which the rails lay. And he had been focused on reports of the Bond chronograph he had come specifically to see. But now he was curious to know what Lewis made of this last vast stinking skirt of his birth town. The boy's nose was pressed to the window. He seemed totally enthralled.

"What do you see, boy?"

"So much space!"

"After the docks and the infinite ocean beyond them?"

The boy glanced at him, startled.

"I never saw ocean. I only saw decks and fish and masts."

"You looked too low. It is surely your most egregious failing. You learned the mundane streets but never learned the stars."

The boy fell silent. And again Fremont wondered whether taking him on might be a madness. If a few unthinking words could stifle Lewis so thoroughly, would the unrelenting cruelty of the road make him break?

"I never saw the stars because they never let me out at night, sir."

And now it was Fremont's turn to be stifled.

"But… you were out last night!"

"That is a long story. Or a short."

"We have time for the long. It is eight hours more to Manhattan."

The boy looked uncertain, ran one hand along the velvet seat and then leant back against it carefully. "It is not so long as that."

"I shouldn't think so. You haven't lived that long."

"I am almost fifteen."

"I would say rather twelve, at the maximum."

"I am small and thin but I am not child."

"And yet you were not let out at night."

"That was not to protect *me*."

"Ah. That was to be certain you didn't run away."

"Yes, sir."

"So tell me: why didn't you run away in the daytime?"

"I was not let out in the daytime until just this past June. And then only to the docks. To protect what the cooks selected and purchased. I sat on the fish so no Paddy could steal them away."

"Your manacles by then forged in your mind…"

"Come the following June, I would have worked off my indenture."

"They could never have signed a contract with a child!"

"It was my mother who signed it, sir. She apprenticed me to the kitchen."

"She apprenticed you at the moment of your birth?"

"Yes, sir. She knew that she was dying. She felt grateful that the place she worked would take me."

"And did you feel grateful?"

Lewis stared out at what had become the dense green of a spruce woods.

"I know she did her best by me. And in truth, sir, I didn't know any life different. But being in that place was hard."

"You were deprived of the freedom to wander. Being outdoors is as needful to me as breathing oxygen."

"It wasn't just the not going outside. I never left the basement. I worked there and I slept there, in one dark corner of the scullery. That corner was my entire world."

For some strange reason Fremont found himself thinking of a wretched tribe called the Root-Diggers. They were regarded with contempt by all the other bands. They knew neither the horse nor the hunt. They lived almost naked on insects and roots they dug from the hard ground. And yet they were, so far as he saw, content.

"If you never knew anything else, why did you find your lot miserable?"

"It was cold. It was wet. And in general I starved."

"It sounds *exactly* like my Expeditions. Are you sure you want to go with me?"

"I could have borne it, sir, if only I could *see*. "

"I promise you will do that. But I wonder that you never even tried to."

There was silence then. The boy was there and yet was gone. At first Fremont was annoyed, believing that once again a mild rebuke had sent him fleeing... and then suddenly, how?, he understood that, no, he had fled *to* something crueler. "You *did* try..."

"One night there was a fire, a huge fire, down in the next square. I was six and the smoke was rolling around my knees."

"You were in the basement. Smoke sinks."

"Yes, but heat rises. I have never understood that paradox."

"That you understand the word paradox is paradox to me."

"I have always read. The papers were sent down for trash and I learned from them. But that night the grownups woke me by shouting and running around. They were afraid the fire might spread. They had unlocked the doors and were carrying out the silver. And so I slipped away and I crept up the back stairs used by the serving girls. And I got

at last to the very top floor. And there was a window. Low enough for me! And through it I saw the fire, seething red and yellow in the darkness. And the city! It was the most glorious expanse. And then my master found me and beat me so hard. He said I would never climb a stair again in my lifetime. And in fact I couldn't walk for most of a year. One of the men made me a low bench so I could do the gutting sitting."

Fremont suddenly understood the expression "bloody rage." His vision was entirely red. He was sure he'd broken some ocular vessel. "You were a child of *six*?!" His Lily was ten but he remembered her at six. And the notion of someone striking her, of deliberately and brutally using his strength to cripple her... And then he saw the evil word as though imprinted on his retina: "cripple." And he realized he had only seen the boy walking any distance from afar.

"Lewis, can you yet climb? Because that is what you will have to do. We climb tall mountains."

"I will learn to do it. And I will learn to read the stars."

The voice was determined. Still Fremont could not forbid his eyes from dropping to the boy's legs. Glimpsed through holes in the tattered trousers, they were horribly twisted things.

Fremont looked up at the boy with a pang. But now the young face was as shakingly furious as his voice was. "Sir, I have got this far, have I not?! I have got this far after fourteen years buried in a cellar. I drew that hill -- as you asked -- from only walking it, with no tools. I read your report. It came down for kindling but I kept it and hid it and learned it. It was my salvation! You talk of religion: that was my *Bible*, sir! And I searched out stories about you in the papers. I know you were court-martialed. I know ten men starved and froze to death on your last expedition. And I will go with you. And if I must starve and freeze, I will do it gladly. And I will walk as hard and fast as you!"

By now the tears were back in his eyes but it was Fremont who had to look away to compose himself. He forced the surging gratitude to still. "How did you know I was at the hotel?"

"A serving girl knows my obsession. She heard your name and she told me."

"Was it she who hid your drawings with my breakfast?"

"No, sir. I did that. But she brought them up and pretended not to see."

"And when word came down to the kitchen that I wished to meet with whomever had done them... was the man who beat you still working there?"

"Yes."

"Did he finally show you respect?"

"No, sir. He fired me immediately. He said I had violated the privacy of the clientele. And I had thereby forfeited the nest-egg I'd be due."

"That is why I saw you on the roof last night."

"I would have been there in any case, don't you understand that? Once you said I could come and shook my hand?"

"But you lost your nest-egg. And just to be clear, I cannot pay you a single penny. I have not as yet received my government commission. I will feed you but that is all that I can do."

But the boy just regarded him as though he, with all his military ranks, were some sort of imbecile. And he spoke softly as though to a child who must be taught. "Until last June, I had never seen the sky. Never felt the sun. Never heard the wind sigh. And then that day, they unlocked the door and let me out. Out! And I went blind and deaf and numb with the shock of it. And before I knew, they were locking me in again. And it was at that moment, with the thud of the door at my back and the rankness of the scullery once more clogging my nostrils, that I formed my decision. I would never willingly live inside again. But I was so ignorant. I had only your book. You wrote of Jupiter. What was Jupiter? You wrote of quartzite. What was quartzite? But you also had maps. And I thought: I can surely do that. And the next day when I was taken back to the wharf to be the fish guard, I counted every single step. And every evening I drew. And every day I counted again and drew again."

"Nine months of drawing."

"The serving girl said it was like I was making a baby. But in the end my map expanded to every thing I could see."

"And that is what you sent to my room."

"Yes, sir. Your coming to the American House was as though God had finally bothered to notice me. My sitting in this car with you is the answer to my prayers. It is not about money or fame. It is about being outside and knowing the nature of *everything* around me."

And Fremont laughed. "That is precisely what motivates me."

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The one thing he had not foreseen was that the boy was true to his word: he would not be inside willingly. A hotel room, even on a high floor, was anathema to him. And yet it was early March and there was sleet in the wind off the river.

"There is a park right over there. I will sleep beneath the trees."

"There may be cut-throats in that park."

"I have nothing to steal."

"Then they will hurt you for the sport of it."

"I was chosen to be fish guard because I know well how to fight."

"Yes, I observed you on State Street, but how did you learn that from the fish scales and potato peels?"

"There were other boys in the kitchen, most far bigger and older than me. Mealtimes were a scrum. That was the master's word: "scrum." If you couldn't fight you didn't eat. He liked to watch us fighting."

"What about that year you couldn't even walk?"

"I had a friend. A good friend. He used to save some food for me. Without his help, I surely would have died."

"Where is he now?"

And Lewis suddenly seemed to collapse entirely into himself. He was a burnt-out log, touched by the poker and turned to ash.

"Where is he now?"

"I do not know..."

But the voice was low and it trembled. "If you are to be of use, you must answer all my questions truthfully."

"I killed him."

Fremont could not stop himself from jerking away.

"The good friend who fed you?!"

"It was an accident, sir, but I did kill him. The cistern needed cleaning so they threw Timothy in."

"Tim was your friend."

"Yes. You talk of hurting for sport. That was our master. He knew full well Timothy couldn't swim. And the cistern was wide and deep. And Tim was crying and flailing and choking and I tried to grab onto him to save him and like *that* he pulled me in! And he was so frantic he just scrambled up on top of me and pushed me under. And I couldn't breathe. My lungs were bursting. I just couldn't breathe. I didn't mean to hurt him. But I had to get free. So I kicked hard. I kicked him, I kicked my one friend Timothy... and he let go of me... and... and... and he died."

"There were others there. Your master. He could have pulled Tim out. His death should not be on your conscience."

"They said they intended to but I had fractured his skull. They said if I hadn't tried to interfere, they would have had a good laugh and had him out of there. It took him five days to die. And he cried my name for every one of them. He cried it but he never cursed me. I wished he had."

"The poor boy *knew* that you had only tried to help him."

"I suppose so. But I will never help a friend again."

"And what about me?" The eyes flew up. Were they gray or were they green? The gloom by the window made it impossible to be certain. "If you are coming with me, then you must help me daily. And I hope you will consider me... something like a friend."

"That's not the same. Because I could never hurt you, sir. You are too..."

"Big? Yes, kicking me in the head could be somewhat difficult."

"No, I meant wise. Experienced and wise."

"And yet a single error in your work could doom the lot of us."

"No, sir! Don't say that, even in jest."

"But it is the truth. We will be looking once again for a pass through the mountains. You know what happened the last time, when we failed. We will be trying a different route. But if your observations and calculations should, by some mishap, lead us into the old trails... then many more than your Timothy might die."

"Please, sir, I will only be your most humble assistant. The observations and calculations will be *yours*."

"No, I am losing the taste for freezing in chest-deep snow, waiting for transits. You will do the work or you will not come."

The boy just sat there shuddering, the icy hands of Timothy upon him. "Sir, I am sorry but I don't think I can."

"*I* do, Lewis. I wouldn't ask otherwise."

Another long silence. "Then I will try."

"Trying is not enough. Will you do it?"

"Yes." The word was barely a whisper.

"Speak up, Lewis. I need to know that I can count on you in extremis. Because there will be *plenty* of extremis."

The boy considered this; then took a breath and seemed to inhale all the vaunted "extremis". Took it into him, tasted its bile, felt its every brutal contour, and found nothing there that he had not survived already. "Sir, you can count on me..."

* * * * *

It was the middle of the night and they had reached a compromise: Lewis was sleeping outside, but on the balcony. The sleet had thickened to snow and so no observations were possible; and yet when Fremont awoke and went to the window to make sure the boy hadn't frozen, he found him sitting and staring at the clotted sky.

Fremont opened the window a hair and recoiled as the icy air entwined itself around him. He should be sleeping out there himself! He was getting too soft!

"Lewis, do you need another blanket?"

"No, sir."

"What are you watching so intently?"

"The moon, sir."

"It is snowing. There's no moon for you to see."

"No, sir. But it *is* there. There is no way this snow could keep it from rising, could it? And... there. There! Can't you see its glow?"

"I see nothing but clouds. And if you are seeing anything, it is because you are unfamiliar with the lights of Manhattan."

"No, sir..." His voice was firm. "The moon *is* rising. But that clock over there must be wrong."

Fremont stepped out, wishing desperately he had brought the blanket for his own sake. Was he really getting too old for this work? Through the spinning flakes, he peered across Vesey and could just make out the octagonal tower of St Paul's Chapel. George Washington had made his devotions there before his Inauguration. If there was a correct clock in the city, it was bound to be this one.

"What makes you so sure it's wrong?"

"The moon rose just past three yesterday morning in Boston. By that clock today it was just past four. New York can not be 15 degrees away."

"No, that would be more nearly St. Louis..." *where little Benton died, his heart's voice murmured...* "But the clock is right. It is your reasoning that is wrong."

"But you said..."

"I spoke of the *sun*. The moon is entirely different. It orbits this earth and its rhythms are its own. Surely you've seen..."

And then he stopped. This boy knew absolutely nothing of the night sky. And yet... in the coach to the station he had said: "wax and wane."

"You know the moon has its phases. How so?"

"The same as I knew when the sun was straight up, by the shadows. I could not see the sky but still its light crept in."

"There were windows in the basement..."

"Yes. But they gave out onto a narrow court with the hotel walls around it. It was a rare day when the sun could clear them at all."

"How rare?"

The boy hesitated and Fremont could see him recalling those fleeting glimmers hoarded like treasure.

"Fourteen out of the whole year. And all of them in June."

"And did you see the moon as rarely?"

"The moon! The moon never showed its face at all to me. Except this last Christmas. Near midnight it came, glorious and full. It was my present! And then it came the next two nights, at the very end its

fullness just beginning to falter. I had heard people speak of the dark of the moon and there it was!"

The boy's face was radiant -- he himself as luminous as a full moon -- with the glory of discovery even in his hole.

"And you never spied it since?"

"Not until last night. But after that first time, I always watched for it. And I began to extrapolate from almanacs to what I could see. After a few months, I could tell just by the light -- and perhaps by the shadows cast against the high walls --, whether it was quartered or halved or full or in dark shadow. And I felt... how can I explain this, sir?... *delivered*. As though a part of me lived with it up in the firmament. And I felt my blood begin to move with its rhythms. And I was free and I wasn't a prisoner anymore."

Fremont just stared at him, dimly aware that his hand had frozen onto the doorknob. With a jerk he pulled it away and left some skin behind.

"Come in, come in! We cannot talk out here. Neither one of us is dressed for it."

"But the moon *has* risen, sir. I am absolutely sure."

And despite himself Fremont found himself inclined to believe whatever fantasy this tiny Merlin told him. But he was a *scientist*. "It is impossible with these clouds that you could be certain of anything. Come in and I will calculate the correct minute of its rise."

Chastened, the boy abandoned his snow-shrouded nest. The hand wasn't bleeding yet but it would, so Fremont washed it and bandaged it before fetching the Nautical Almanac from his luggage. In the past he would have known the moon's phase as surely as he would have known if he had put on shoes. But the months in Europe... the limbo and horror of his jail cell... seemed to have severed his connection with the sky.

In fact as he leafed through the Ephemeris, he ransacked his brain for any memory of the moon's shape the previous morning. But all he could recall was Lewis' quiet face upturned on that roof. And then of course the triumphant crescent bolting from the ocean in his drawing. But a crescent was the moon-shape anyone would have drawn.

His finger alighted on the March phase table. It read: Last Quarter 2 d 1 h 39.6 m; so it *had* been a crescent. And starting to perform the rough math in his head, he knew before knowing that the boy did just see the waning sliver emerging. Or rather sensed it, felt the moonrise in his blood. Because behind these thick nimbostrati even a blazing sun would be invisible...

Or did he just read it somewhere? It was a cynical thought but also logical. The boy seemed to memorize everything he saw.

"You spoke of almanacs. Did they happen to show today's moonrise?"

"No, sir. I only managed to seize them and horde them when they were trash. Months old. Sometimes years. But still, within them, such beautiful mysteries. How the sun stretched and shrank its presence over four long seasons while the frantic moon did so every twenty-eight days. But so erratically. Oh fickle moon, I hardly could predict it."

"You said 'hardly'. You *did* see patterns then."

"I observed that the full moon always rose just as the sun set, while the half moons always rose about midnight and noon. By simple math, I deduced each moonrise should be about fifty minutes later than the one previous. Except that – on that – the almanacs did not agree."

"Agree with you?"

"Or, sir, even with each other! I once had a page from the Boston Almanac and the American Almanac for the same month. The times of moonrise did not at all jibe. "

"Well, they are complicated calculations; and easily prone to error..."

"But those men could *see* it, sir!"

"Yes, as you now have done. What time did you perceive that the moon rose yesterday morning?"

"I put it at two minutes after three."

"And so today..."

"...it should have risen well before four. And when that clock reached quarter to, I began watching the eastern sky as hard as I was able. But even at four, it was still perfectly dark. And I kept watching and watching and watching, and that's where you found me. It was four

seventeen by that clock when the moon finally appeared, sir. Which is why I called it wrong."

The boy sounded disgusted. Such a fine clock in such a fine city and yet still unreliable. But Fremont was preoccupied by the sensation of the small hairs stiffening on the back of his neck. If he were a dog, his fur would be rising up in a thick ruff. But would a dog understand what Lewis had seen?

"I never explained your changing lunch-hour."

"No, sir. You were going to but then we got to the station and had to transfer ourselves and your delicate purchases to the railroad. And then we spoke of other things..."

"Why didn't you remind me?"

"You said you had told me a lie..." the boy faltered... "and I preferred not invoke that."

"Ah, well not really a *lie* so much as a simplification. But now I see you are ready for the difficult truth."

"Yes, sir."

"You must return to the kitchen..."

"No!" The word was a gasp. Of horror. Of protest. Of misery.

"If you would come with me, Lewis, you must do what I ask."

The boy just stared at him, confused, trying to reconcile "come" with "return to the kitchen."

"...I need you to obtain for me any round things you can find: oranges, grapefruit, grapes. We need to talk about noon now."

The boy twitched once with relief and left. And Fremont was vaguely befuddled that he simply hadn't grasped what he was asking. To go back to the place whose very smells filled Lewis with dread. Whose sweating walls were those of a living interment. The boy's skin was strangely translucent when he returned. But he carried with him a large cabbage and several enormous Maine potatoes. Fremont regarded the brown and knobby spuds with dismay.

"You call these *round*!?"

"I thought, sir, celestial spheres should be proportionate. With your knife, I can cut the potatoes into any size you require."

It wasn't so much the words as the matter-of-fact way the boy explained himself. There had been -- for the very first time -- no flinch

of fear. But Fremont himself was afraid. He was unused to anyone being so many steps ahead of him. He felt the old mean snake uncoiling within.

"What did you see in the kitchen?"

"The world I knew."

"How did it make you feel?"

The gray-green eyes rose to meet his. "Very glad to leave it."

"Did you count the steps?"

"Down and back. I did."

"How many were there?"

"Down, one hundred and thirty-three."

"And back?"

A pause. "One hundred and seven."

Fremont just regarded him. "This hotel suddenly lost a story and a half?"

"I was running, I was scared and I skipped some." Another pause. "You told me I must be honest."

"You also must be accurate. Go back and do it again."

The boy wavered. "They will not believe me. They tried to seize me down there as a runaway. Could you write a note says I belong to you?"

"You don't belong to anyone, Lewis. Now you are a free man."

"Sir, they know my scars. They know what I have been."

"If they seize you, I will reclaim you. Just as, in the wilderness, if you are taken by the Indians, I will redeem you. I will not abandon you; I will hunt you down. And you must not abandon faith in that. You surely read in my report of such endeavors."

"What I read... "The words were faint. " …was that *everybody* taken, sir, was murdered."

"Well, yes... and quite horrifically too. So are they now performing scalpings in the Astor House kitchen?"

The boy managed a small smile. "No, sir. Not that I noticed."

"Then off with you. I need an accurate count."

* * * * *

And the boy trotted off as Fremont contemplated his reflection in the snow-darkened window. In the military, the troops were drilled to follow orders and not think. And his teamsters, when ordered to transport his books and equipment through neck-deep snow, they did it. They marched and starved and watched their flesh turn black without complaining. And then raving or in absolute silence, they died.

And this boy had avowed he was of similar inclination. But he was a twig and could yet be bent. And now Fremont had to decide which way he wished to shape him. It was to him at once an alien and uncomfortable burden. He had left it to Jessie to raise their daughter and sons. And they were good children. He knew they were. But absolute strangers. How could they be otherwise with him so much away? But... he needed this boy to be faithful. And he needed -- if he wanted him to survive -- to be obedient. But he also needed his untethered mind.

And he pondered how to accomplish that as he imagined the boy slowly descending the hotel stairs as though to Hades... 133 steps because he knew the downward count had been accurate. And then upward again on tortured legs whose sinews were surely protesting at so much unaccustomed use... And then suddenly Fremont realized his job had already been done. A lifetime of brutality had trained Lewis to do whatever drudgery he'd been given. A lifetime chained to mindlessness had allowed his mind to soar. It was as though he were split in two. His body on earth and his mind adrift in the swirling cosmos. And if Fremont lashed himself to the boy ... and the boy to himself with the same tight bonds of loyalty... loyalty, yes, loyalty was the key thing... then the two of them would fly!