

The Tory

By T.J. London

## CHAPTER 1

*October 1776, Manhattan*

Karma... the whore that always gets paid, but what is the price when there is so much blood on your hands?

John Carlisle already gave up his commission and his reputation, what was left?

*My body? My soul?*

Reaching for the bottle of rum, John Carlisle poured himself another drink, swirling it in the glass then downing it quickly. The sweet, spicy liquid burned a trail down his throat, making him wince. Too many shots to count, yet still, they stung just like the failure that ruined his once brilliant career. Looking around at the filthy walls of his office, he chuckled to himself, finding humor in his self-deprecation. Two years! Two years since he'd been banished by the court-martial, doomed to spend his days in purgatory, overseeing a damned, stinking military gaol, first in Boston, now in New York. For what? Had he not done the right thing? Yet still, he was being punished.

As the autumn breeze swept through the window, John could hear the faint sound of female voices calling his name, their breathy refrains taunting him, haunting him. Closing his eyes, he tried to shut them out, but they persisted, their sad lament crescendoing with each gust of wind. He knew what they wanted—they wanted him; they called for him every night, apparitions relentlessly haunting his dreams. *Justice... John... Justice.*

“Stop!” he yelled, grabbing the paperweight from his desk and hurling it against the wall, listening as it bounced off the stone and clanked on the wooden floor planks. “Stop, please.”

*Have mercy.*

John fisted his hair, trying to tear the memories from his brain like ripping an unwanted page from a book. But it was all for naught. They wouldn't stop, they never did.

Desperation turned to insanity, and John reached for the bottle again—sweet solace in a glass—but it was empty. *Damn.* Opening the top drawer of his desk, he pulled out a small leather pouch and unfastened it, the contents all the money he had left in the world save what was already spoken for by taverns, women, and everyone else he owed. Pouring it out on the desk, he counted: one... two... three pence. It was his lucky day; a three-penny bit, just enough to buy another bottle, but not enough to buy company for the night and drink his fill. So what would it be? Which master would he serve tonight? Venus or Bacchus? The decision was made in a split second—he had yet to find comfort in a woman's embrace that lasted beyond one blissful moment of release, so the bottle it would be. Anything to help him forget.

“Guard!” he yelled impatiently.

John grabbed one of the coins and bounced it on the table, watching as it landed in his glass with a resonating clink. He repeated the same process again. *Clink. Clink. Clink.* How had he managed to fall so far? Not three years prior he'd been promoted to a captain in the King's Regiment, a commission he had earned on merit, something very few men were able to do. Military commissions were traditionally reserved for the wealthy upper class, those with connections and the ability to pay the exorbitant amount of money required to purchase one. Now he had nothing—disgraced, demoted, his reputation in ruins. But who cared about the truth? No one wanted to hear his side of the story, it was dirty and messy, so they hid him as far away as they could, like a bastard child they wanted to forget. At the time, he was grateful he hadn't been decommissioned, but looking around the dirty stone walls of his office, with the smell of damned stinking prisoners permeating through the floor from the hell below, he wasn't so sure this was a better option.

Bouncing the last one of his coins on the desk, John watched as it rolled onto the floor and fell between the cracks in the floorboards. Getting down on his hands and knees, he fingered the wood, pulling at the panels, trying to pry them loose, but to no avail; the coin was gone. *Damn,* now he was short the money to buy a bottle of scotch. Leaning against the stone wall, he put his head in his hands, smoothing his hair out of his face, the left-over tallow sticking to his palms helping to further slick it back. Looking at his left hand, he pulled off his gold pinky ring, rolling

it between his fingers. He had no need for his family signet, they'd long since disowned him, but it would fetch a reasonable price.

Putting the ring in the pouch, he yelled again, "Lieutenant!"

His subordinate appeared at the door, his crimson coat and navy blue facings so perfectly arranged one would have thought he was serving for General Howe himself, and not in a military gaol. And why not? That's how it should be no matter where one served, gaol or battlefield. John did his duty to the best of his ability. Had he not always done his duty for King and country? King and country. He chuckled to himself again, so much hubris in those words, touted by proud soldiers who used them as an excuse for diabolical actions. But in truth, King George cared nothing about the cost of the war, only that the colonies remained obedient and firmly in his grasp. And John's conscience, well, that was his cross to bear. Yes, he craved honor and glory just like any soldier, yet for some reason, he lacked the ability to reconcile the atrocities inflicted on his fellow man in the name of the crown. It was his duty to serve his King and England, but could a man answer to his conscience *and* be a good soldier at a time of war?

Handing over the pouch, John nodded as the lieutenant took it. "Please get me the largest bottle of scotch or rum this will purchase. Go now, and bring back what's left over."

John walked over to the window, the moonlight shining in, casting silvery shadows on the floor. In the trees, he swore he saw the woman pointing at him, her jet-black hair blowing in the breeze while she chanted her breathy refrains, her song as familiar to him as *God Save the King*.

"I know what you want," he whispered to her. "But there is no justice to be had for either of us." Unlike the tenacious Karma, Justice was an elusive mistress, blind to his plight and forever just beyond his reach.