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FOLKS

BOOK ONE ★ HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

ADAM UMAK

Spectacular tales of American history told with its biggest legends!

When the settlement of Roanoke, Virginia and its citizens mysteriously vanish, elder statesman Benjamin Franklin assembles a team of extraordinarily gifted and talented individuals to solve the disappearance of the lost city. The world's most antisocial giant lumberjack, Paul Bunyan, joins former slave and invulnerable steel drivin' man, John Henry, on an adventure across the purple mountain's majesty and fruited plains of America to discover who or what is causing it all to disappear. But, these two would-be heroes have a perilous road ahead of them.

While on the trail for clues, Paul and John Henry are met with a legion of honorable and infamous Americans lost in time adding more intrigue to the secret of Roanoke than they ever thought possible. Along the way they'll fight corrupt clergy at the Salem Witch Trials, hazard fine dining with the Donner Party, and hug trees with Johnny Appleseed.

Join Paul Bunyan and John Henry on their ridiculous romp through America's secret past in this captivating and historical whodunnit.

FOLKS – BOOK ONE: HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

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FIRST EDITION PUBLISHED IN 2012.

Designed by Jamie Umak www.jamieumak.com

Cover illustration by Super Ugly www.thesuperugly.com

Cover designed by Adam Umak and Jamie Umak

ISBN: 978-1-105-18504-5

*For Mom and Dad,
my folks.*

CHAPTER ONE
GRASSROOTS

Roanoke, Virginia
June 20, 1789

The cherry trees of Roanoke, Virginia stood tall in the sun. Keeping fast vigilance like ardent soldiers, their meandering branches arched upward to the heavens as their roots poured into the musky earth. Steadily in unison, the tree trunks were brushed with a light dust of dirt specks picked up by the wind. Agreeing to bend and flex, the branches swayed in the steady afternoon. From the branches, the beginnings of blossoms peaked out from the dark wood ready to burst into new life.

Separated several paces apart by design of the city's founders, the cherry cultivars lined the perimeter of the Roanoke River and in turn the settlement. The trees ostensibly provided the town of Roanoke a long and winding place for communal harvest each March when the blossoms reached full bloom. Otherwise, they were ignored and were relegated to being fed upon by unseen caterpillars and insects. And so they grew in quiet desperation left alone and without thought for the remaining months of the year.

It was a solemn place and bereft of sign or totem of robust life.

The nearby river's reputation added to that notion. As was now an understood tradition, the Roanoke River's waters brimmed during this time of the season. Accustomed and perhaps resigned to this inarguable fact, the citizenry remained poised for another session of their existence on hold due to flooding. Fauna-smearing storage rooms would slosh with backwater. Barn doors would be replaced from unexpected current surges. Horses would be tanned with clumped mud knee-high from the thoroughfare's swampy state. But the floods never came this year. Quite the opposite was true. Reports from as low as the Albemarle Settlements in the mid-state told tales of the river level's degradation. Other reports from visiting fur traders from up north a-ways said the same. Between the yearly flooding and now a near drought, Virginians quickly picked up on nicknaming it the "River of Death," increasing paranoia and whispered fears tenfold.

From Lafayette in the southwestern corridor of the Virginian side of the Blue Ridge Mountains the river deviates into two paths north and south. As the crow flies, the North Fork flows in a serpentine loop from the southwest to the northeast. Its counterpart, the South Fork ambles on a much shorter twenty-mile jaunt but joining with much more streams and later joins up again with the main waters. The river itself, emboldened with its two sections merged, pushes along through the mountainous ridges of the Roanoke Valley past the gorge and then pressing south toward the Piedmont.

Far away from the western locale of Albemarle Sound and then past the distant lakes in Leesville and Smith Mountain the river was low. Fishermen from the western shores waited in vain for a tug from striped bass on their rods. Although spawning season produced an abundance of eggs, the low waters contributed to the higher tempera-

tures in the brackish clime. The stripers were in a state of pure survival. With low waters nearly covering the formerly submerged rocks, they swam clear of the oncoming boats and lures with a newfound sense of expectant fear.

Silt sat upon the banks of the shoreline from weeks ago. If it were any other year it would be brought inland and washed alongside the fence posts, carriage wheels, and pant legs of passersby. Instead, the river denied the villagers of this inconvenience and brought another problem instead. The water's recession had caused statewide unease. In doing so, the residents of Roanoke felt tricked by some unseen force plotting against them. For years they silently dreaded flooding and now they were left with a feeling of unsolicited reversal. Instead, they worried about drought. Through all of this concern, the town's gathering of cherry trees flourished growing taller and thicker.

With increasing awkwardness, the trees sprawled from their predetermined placements along the line. Once fatted root balls, they now grew beyond their once-limited means. With the appearance of an unseasonal budding approaching, the branches appeared to tire from the added weight. Some branches mingled within individual crowns. Others leaned their fruiting heads toward the nearby town. Branchlets flayed wildly under the canopies; all contributing to the overwhelming forest of dark timber stumbling toward the grassy floor were the surface roots ended mere paces from the shore and town. They had weathered the yearly flooding for decades in solemnity and gave no indication of relenting from their vigil of overlooking Roanoke.

It was a rarity to find wandering townfolk streaming far from the town. Its inhabitants were used to being cloistered and barging doors shut from the Revolutionary War months earlier. Still, the eerie

spectacle of the dipping trees was somehow comforting and familiar to the locals. It was as if the expansive wooded barrier was a protector to them so as to keep out unwanted travelers or road agents. It was a calming influence to see them flower during blossoming season and wilt later in the year. They were reminders of the changing of the seasons. With the far-off mountains hardly visible from the sunken valley, it was the trees and river that gave the town's citizenry a visual calendar for the passage of time.

The cherries were always bitter. There was no immediate practical use for such tart fruit. The yearly communal harvest was more of a tradition than necessity. Roanoke's residents celebrated the season by tying clipped blossoms to the black lampposts and sconces along the main thoroughfare in town. The wealthy men in town adorned them to their close-cut knee-length coats while their wives affixed them to their lace kerchiefs or gowns. Others were content with pinning them to their yellowed shirts and dresses. But, the blossoms were quick to spoil and wilt. Some of the blossoms would be snatched from the branches by visiting purple finches and grackles. The river-bound starlings overlooked them because of their deep red pigment as if warded off by instinct. The cherry trees, for all their foibles, gave comfort to the cozy town, forming a makeshift wall to protect the civilization housed at their very roots. The townsfolk were willing to overlook the snubs of others, be it man or beast. They patronizingly listened to their town elders as they spoke words of community and unity and culture. Secretly, past the hokey tradition and needless celebration, the locals understood that they, along with the imperfect trees that watched over them, were now all a part of the great new experiment that was America.

The townsfolk were accustomed to their remoteness and relative

isolation from the rest of Virginia. Living in the sprawl of the expansive valley seemed a contradiction in terms. Here, they laid their heads to rest between the welcoming arms of the mountains and river and yet there was an unsaid air of isolationism in their rural mindset. Perhaps it was their newfound liberty from British rule, but Roanoke ever-increasingly became a place of progressivism.

For years, the early founders and settlers were content with calling the area near the valley The Big Lick. Deer, wild horses, and curious animals of all kind sojourned from their hidden holes and dens to the valley to eat at the large outcroppings of salt deposits resting alongside the river. As the animals gathered, hunters and traders soon followed. They mined the salt and used it for curing meats and preserving food-stuffs. Foot traffic was heavy in the woods. With a strong sense of foresight, further narrowed by anticipation, the founders began small construction projects leading to The Big Lick. Less than a decade later Roanoke was considered a hub of mountain trails and formal roads. Heavy foot and wagon traffic came soon after. The settlement expanded. The threat of British involvement loomed. The salt was licked away and the animals retreated into the quivering forest once again.

Ambling out of the town's center were two roads, diverging in a green leafed wood. As the building of America pressed forth, so did the connecting of America by The Great Wagon Road. Neighbors to the north in Philadelphia conceptualized a road that would link the colonies from Philadelphia through Shenandoah Valley to the future location of the city's hub. Quick to find eager merchants and traders, the elders met with the road's planning committee at Roanoke Gap and steered them to town. Obligated, as they equally wanted traffic to get to Philadelphia, plans were made.

Every town or unincorporated village was a speck on primitive maps. Roanoke was in the valley. The valley was in the gap. The gap was in the mountains. The mountains were in Virginia. As the trails became roads and clusters of stores became towns, the inclusion of larger titles and maps became fixed. The work on The Great Wagon Road did much to formalize Roanoke. Through the steady drag of travel from Pennsylvania to North Carolina, it was backcountry towns like this that flourished. The road provided a nascent promise for interest, for newness, for legacy. As settlement became more apparent, the road's purpose was put to use. Almost annexing the southern colonies, the road's main travelers were immigrants from Germany, Scotland, and Ireland. Many of them would be the last crop coming to America from England before the Revolutionary War.

Many came from Philadelphia. Others, even as far away as Boston and Baltimore, inevitably found themselves on the road. They purchased timber, horses, oxen, and dry goods from port quartermasters. Hours from Philadelphia, they would snake around Lancaster and York. Miles later the road's southern crawl led to the Potomac River and the Shenandoah. However, one could not make passage to Roanoke without traversing the long-established Great Warrior's Trail of the Iroquois Nation.

Many tried unsuccessfully to hazard the journey. They would get lost on the side roads and wander for days, or veer into the forest to stay off of the trail for an indefinite amount of time until things seemed safe only to be lost forever, or worse yet fall prey to attacks from the Natives.

Via the adept politicking of the colonists in Virginia and Maryland, the Six Nations met with colonial representatives later in 1744

for seven days in Lancaster at the town courthouse to discuss safe passage for colonists. With a few skirmishes against intruding colonists east of the Blue Ridge, the Iroquois were poised to declare war against the Virginian delegation. The much-lauded Covenant Chain, held in good standing for over two decades, would be undone. It was only the purse of the governor that saved them. By proxy, he offered them pounds of gold for all remaining claims of which they cited ownership in the area. Colonists were now free to move about the road and, finally, the valley's road was able to reach The Big Lick.

Still further southwest, branching out of town immediately, the road continued on for tens of miles leading to the Tennessee Valley. Unlike their neighbors to the north, residents of the Carolinas were much more territorial and less enthusiastic about the many concessions made at their detriment when declaring independence from Britain. They took to calling it the Carolina Road. Their enthusiasm and leeriness in trust of government leaked into Virginia's lower counties. Despite this smattering of skepticism, the road moved ever on through the gap and ridge south to the Piedmont. With the air of tobacco stiff in the air, the road marched on to the state's crescent: Charlotte, Salisbury, and Winston-Salem. Reaching Augusta gifted travelers to the road's end.

Strangely, despite the clamor for namesakes and labels, the Great Wagon Road was a unifying element for the colonies. Prior to the 1750's, it was nearly impossible to travel. Some decided to forgo the trip to the southern colonies because of its ridiculously unfinished condition. Wagons could only move soundly and without much incident north of Winchester. Travelers favored the Wilderness Road or the Indian Trading Path in lieu of hazarding a journey into the relative

unknown. Through the revolution it maintained its importance; its rocky ridges found themselves traversed by ally and enemy alike. Now, in the infancy of the country, it was the one of the first true collaborative efforts between the States. From this, Roanoke quietly flourished.

In a twist of coincidence, The Big Lick's transformation into Roanoke was non-too-subtle. Algonquins from beyond the ridge became increasingly confident as the road took shape. Understanding that the treaty was still a theory to be tested, they would stalk the road's travelers for miles trailing them in the dense woodland. Upon mentally tabulating the inventory of the cargo, they would approach a sidelined traveler during rest for trade. Understandably surprised by approaching Natives, the colonists would usually fight or flee. This left quite an undesirable result and so the Natives moved onto the road traveling alongside the colonists instead of any covert maneuvering behind the forest wall.

Well-informed colonists carried a stash of shells for trading. For those that didn't inevitably their hired guide made due with his own supply. The shells were money. The Natives' word for it them was *rawrenoke*. Others heard *obanoak* used in just the same manner.

Through the continued polishing of rawrenoke, the shell took on a shiny façade. A similar method was used for peak and wampum beads. The shells would be fashioned into gorgets for war or ceremonial adornment. Otherwise, they were used for trading buckskins, tools, and goods. The colonists did not quite understand the price structure of rawrenoke. From what local folklorists and translators discerned, different colored wampum were valued more than others. Beads of deep purple and black were apparently worth much more than the standard white ones. The most rare color was that of the deep red shells found along the banks of the river near town.

As the road eventually led to town, the Natives followed it. At first, the townsfolk were aghast at the sight of the deep-hued forest walkers. Through their willingness to trade and instruct the locals in orienteering through the woods, they were able to win over the majority of townsfolk. It was a novelty for travelers to see the colonists mingle with the Natives, even if it was for fleeting minutes in the grocer's garden or standing on the butcher's porch. Word of mouth carried the news via the road across the landscape of Virginia that The Big Lick had gone savage. Hearing this, rumor spread that the colonists were scheming to make a fortune in rawrenoke and wampum off of the Natives as though the entire town was surreptitiously bound by an elaborate scheme. Others felt it a deathtrap.

Roanoke's continued tolerance of the Natives was truly a unique occurrence. Other cities in the colonies like Jamestown and Williamsburg were incredulous toward them, scoffing at the mere thought of harmony, let alone semi-integration.

Centuries earlier in 1584, in North Carolina, England began its first colony on Roanoke Island near its outer banks. At the request of the Queen, it was the goal of the British military to research the methods in which the Natives smelted copper. The intention here was so their new knowledgebase would speed up the British process of building weapons more efficiently. Likewise, they would be within striking distance of the Spanish settlements to the south for raiding and pillaging. The British, as was their custom at the time, succeeded.

Years later another group of settlers were dispatched from England. Their leader, Governor John White, had the benefit of being the grandfather of the first child born in the Americas, Virginia Dare. Just as life was created on Roanoke Island, it was taken away just as easily.

Of the one hundred or so settlers a handful were promptly killed by the neighboring Croatoans without provocation. A group of young men would go fishing early in the morning and none would return by midday. An old duffer would try his hand at crabbing on the shore and be disemboweled on the beach. At the request of his citizenry, White, leaving his family and his newborn grandbaby, traveled back across the ocean to seek aid from the Crown.

His plea would go unanswered for three years.

The continuing skirmishes between Spain amounted to formalizing the Anglo-Spanish War. It wasn't until 1590 that White could procure safe passage to the island. Upon his return the colony was deserted. There was no indication of struggle. It appeared as though the colonists simply disappeared. Once White brought word of this back to England, Roanoke was called The Lost Colony.

Jamestown was first to pick up on this. Williamsburg soon followed suit. The combination of the interspersed Natives combined with the perception of the grab for wealth created the perfect analogy between Roanoke Island and The Big Lick. Feeding off the paranoia of the already shaky constitutions of the colonists, outsiders took to calling the small valley town *Roanoke*. It was a crude joke with eyes on deflecting foot traffic and settlement from the growing hub. As a word of mouth campaign, it worked brilliantly for a time to much avail. But, as America grew, the spirit of the town would not be denied its rebirth and although in a different place and time, Roanoke was back on the map of America.



“Right here, father,” a young girl giggled. “I’ve it here!”

“Very goodly then, my child. Let us take in the brilliant day together,” a man replied back smiling.

“Won’t mother worry for us?”

“Ah, she knows our duty and it would worry her infinitely more if we should stray from our purpose. Let us away.”

Nathaniel Dyer scooped up his daughter with his arms and lovingly rubbed his nose against hers before setting her down on the planks of their earnest homestead. She continued her innocent laughter and pecked a kiss on his cheek. Holding hands, the two began walking into town.

The Dyer homestead and sign shop was set a few hundred feet from the road. It was beyond convenient for the family to live so close to town. Many of their neighbors and friends were scattered throughout the valley away from the industry of the popular city as they had a modest one-story home logged and built in Roanoke the previous summer. The farmhouse was small but the Dyers consisted only of Nathaniel, his wife, Rose, and daughter, Charlotte.

Bounding down the stone steps of the house, Charlotte turned back to see her father. She waved for him to hurry as she took to running to the fence near the road.

“Not too fast, now. Your energy already diminishes me,” he said.

“Come, father,” she replied.

Nathaniel’s last year was spent mostly alone. As he scouted Roanoke from the local newspapers in Philadelphia he saw the advertising of new road construction and curiosity piqued his interest. With a visit to town eyed as speculation on his part, he sent word to his wife and daughter back east that he would build them a marvelous house. After acquiring the writs and permits from the town hall, he took to

constructing the family home as promised. For the most part, he was a self-starter. It was only when the oxen would no longer suffice as co-workers that he hired men from town in need of work to assist him in his pursuit. Within the year the house was completed to the best of his ability. Sending notice to his wife, the two female Dyers joined him four months later via caravan from Baltimore.

He filled his lonely hours with his beloved hobby that was also his trade. Nathaniel was fortunate in that he was fully literate and could write and spell with ease. He would read newspapers and pamphlets old and new for hours at night. While in the stores of Roanoke, he would take his time walking around shops making sure to read any content that crossed his eyes. In town he would immediately recognize his own handwriting that adorned many of the storefronts for he was a sign maker and Roanoke was his success story.

Upon his arrival into town he saw an immediate need for signage. The stores were drab and uncolored. To help pay for his supplies for homebuilding, he took to cutting the nearby elms and fashioning them into neat planks and then painted them with delight. One of his salesmanship tricks was to create the sign and then bring it to the shopkeeper for some unexpected enticement. It was a calculated risk but more often than not, they would eagerly buy it from him. As others intervened in the competition for customers, Nathaniel's home-brewed business quickly became a small industry.

He stayed in The Grand Roanoke Hotel before fully moving into his house. The owner would curse him for leaving wood scraps on the bed and floor. It was of no true consequence, though, as Nathaniel created two marvelously scripted signs for the hotel's front and side entrances. His style was clean with bold lines jutting in fanciful direc-

tions. Although his eye was untrained in the arts of coloring, he took to mixing and matching variations of colors with what he hoped were complimentary ones. Art was hardly his forte but reading and writing were his passions.

Like many, Nathaniel fell in love with the valley. The ports of Baltimore and the Eastern Shore were plagued with the fuss of city life. As an alternative, Roanoke seemed more than an even trade.

"Verily we go, my dear. Verily, indeed."

"You never told me, father, what does the council want you to do?" Charlotte questioned.

"That is entirely a secret, sweet. I was sworn to secrecy of the highest order," he said jokingly while tickling her back.

"You must tell me!"

"All in good time, my dear. Patience. Patience," he trailed.

The two set off down the road and headed to town. Wagons drawn by oxen could be seen in the distance steadily marching toward town. Already, the two could see the main drag of town framed by the wooden entrance posts. To its left and right stood the post office and the binder's store. Beset by fluttering in the woods to their sides, the two crossed the threshold of the silent wood and into the audible landscape of town. It was a sight to behold. The busyness of the town was palatable, but not overbearing as Baltimore or others. Roanoke had the smack of ingenuity and providence about it. Nathaniel and Charlotte grasped each other's hands tightly in expectation of entering the busy fray so as not to lose one another.

The milliner's store was under construction. Owner Archibald Crowley gave a knowing dip of his hat to the Dyers as they trotted past. The store's back lot was being annexed so as to add another few

hundred square feet for inventory, the show room, and work stations. It was a symbol of the largesse of the town. Though folks were silly in their doddering fair-weather politics and commitments, it could not be denied that the town was steadily on the road to prosperity.

The self-reliant apothecary returned from lunch opening his office door shared with the town physician. Some of the younger boys from Mill Mountain across the river were itching their thin legs as they stood under the overhang.

“I got the poison doc,” one said feverishly.

“Bless me! Ivy all over you the lot of you! We’ll fix you boys up,” he replied and welcomed them inside with a sheltering arm.

While the scents of the baker’s bread wafted through the town, Nathaniel stopped momentarily and looked down at his shoes. The thoroughfare was unusually dry. Even leading up to the yearly flood, a daily stroll through town was sure to dirty anyone’s shoes. But the slight dusting on his black buckled pair of shoes was an oddity.

“Couldn’t imagine thinking that there’d be no flooding at all,” he muttered to himself.

Nathaniel eyed the shoemaker across the way that cobbled his pair for him last summer. A sign of his own handiwork in the storefront offered re-soling with new hobnails all this week. Nathaniel considered stopping after he completed his duty. The overly polite cordwainer had fitted both of his feet and fastened them on spec so as to measure them out for the final product. Having no right or left to distinguish them between one another, they were a likable but an acquired fit for Nathaniel. He spun on the iron heel turning to Charlotte. Waving her forward, the two continued their direct line through town.

They passed through all manner of tradesmen working the streets.

The basket maker, the cabinet maker, the silversmith all were working steadily in the open air market. Crafting hardware, the blacksmith fanned the outdoor forge. Embers from it flew into the bright sky only to disappear seconds later. The pair continued on through the brick maker’s gate.

“I’ll be picking up my order tomorrow then, Mister Ashton.”

“Very good. Very good, Mister Dyer. They are being fired by my sons as we speak.”

“Going to make a nice pit outdoors then?”

“Without a doubt. I guarantee it. As promised, you are welcome to return them if left insatiate or find them to be in less than stellar composition.”

“Oh, I am not one to brood on such trivial details, sir. I could only imagine your work is as solid as your character and that of your good sons.”

“I would be gifted in that regard, be it true that they were as polite and shining as your darling daughter.”

“Charlotte, my dear, thank the man,” Nathaniel nudged.

“Thank you sir,” she said on command.

“We shall see you tomorrow before sundown?”

“Indeed,” said Nathaniel. “I very much look forward to it. Good day.”

Speedily, they bypassed the town hall and headed for the river. Away from the hub of town, a quiet took over the surround. The dull sound of a carpenter’s vise tightening repeated throughout the backs of the shops and houses. Thick billows of white smoke drifted from the tops of the buildings. Nathaniel quietly mapped where the gunsmith’s foundry was based on their current path. Charlotte, on the other hand, was much more entertained by the sight of the wild rabbits lounging aside the path in the summer heat. As the two neared

them, they scattered to unseen holes in near the tree line for safety.

“We’ve made it, dearheart.”

“And now will you tell me your secret, father?”

Her father took a deep breath and shielded his eyes from the sun. Scanning the scene in front of him, he surmised that the town was no more than fifty yards from the riverbed. Facing the backs of the store, he counted the wheelwright’s many fellies leaning up against the side of the store being readied for assembly. With no one in sight, he unloaded the gray blanket and woven pack basket from his shoulders.

“Indeed. It is the appointed hour,” he said.

The blanket was unrolled and laid onto the dry ground. Charlotte expectantly sat down. She squirmed endlessly. The roots of the trees vaulted from the ground so much that she could not find a balanced place for comfort. Lifting the pack in front of her, she folded her dress under her legs and placed it down on the uneven blanket. Her father knelt down next to her on bended knee. They began unpacking together. She saw an unfamiliar long board wrapped in cloth and suspected that it was the cause of their trip. Nathaniel dug his hands into the pack. He placed a small brown jug on the blanket.

“That—er—is not for you, dear,” he winced and moved it aside.

A hemp cord was unloaded, a tinderbox, some flint and steel, and then a small ax came next.

“Listen then,” he started.

“Yes, father?”

“The town council, in their great wisdom, sees much opportunity in this land. Roanoke is a place of progress and opportunity that has no equal in Virginia. As such they see it fit to enhance the beauty and bounty of the town so that all corners are both welcoming and warm-

ing. They have tasked me, your loving father, with the beginnings of this wide-reaching plan,” he said delightfully and touched Charlotte on the tip of her nose.

“You’re being silly,” she laughed.

He stood up with the covered board and began walking around the blanket. She joyfully followed his theatrics.

“As such, I was deeply honored and wanted to oblige their great request to beautify the town that has been ever so good to our family. Now, my dear, it is with great honor and privilege that I present to you, from the very hands of the Dyer Family itself, the Roanoke Community Grove.”

Nathaniel turned his back and threw away the cloth. Charlotte recognized it from her mother’s kitchen and knew she would be upset with it’s landing among the dirt. Refocusing back on her father, he was holding a sign with the very words he spoke scripted on it in a deep black with a cherry red background and green frame.

“Read it for me, father,” she asked.

“This, my little dear, is a marking sign that tells all who come to this very special place that they are welcome and among friends. Travelers and townfolk alike will see this sign and be soothed by its letters and colors. They will come to this place to simply abide in nature’s wonder. And, it is you and I who will help welcome them.”

“What do you mean?” she inquired, “I have school in the morning. I cannot stay here forever.”

“Silly girl. We are going to post this sign together and leave it to welcome all who come here,” he said coyly.

“Oh, that is a great duty, father!” she exclaimed.

“Yes it is. The council has asked me to create a series of these signs

for all corners of the town. I need to make one for the entrances and exits from the great road, the east river bank, and then for the west end near Mister Jamison's house."

"My. Your letters will be all over our town," she said.

"Indeed. I will need a lengthy break after all of this work. Come, let us post this quickly so that they may be welcomed post-haste!"

Nathaniel girded himself at his daughter's feet and helped Charlotte up from the blanket with ease. Ax in hand, the two began scouting for a suitable location for the sign. The two kicked up some grass near the pathway from town. Nathaniel began knocking the dirt with his buckled shoes. The dry land faithfully caved to the force of his strength and quickly spread to the size of a post. He would need to find a post.

"No," he muttered under his breath, "It would be wrong to take from another."

His eyes darted immediately from the backside wheelwright's store and eyed the spokes and elm boards.

"This won't do at all," he said aloud, "The earth is too loose here. It would cause the sign to fall over the moment we left it here."

Charlotte walked toward the trees. She found herself calmed by the trickling sound of the faint river. She looked around and found herself snug between the trees nearly perpendicular with the bordering town.

"What bout right here, father?"

Nathaniel turned his head and saw his daughter. She was a thing of innocent beauty. Her rosy cheeks stood out among the greenery. Her blue and white striped dress caught the wind. Her petticoat inched outward ever so slightly in the breeze. He paused at the sight

of her completely fascinated.

"My dear, your keen eye has helped the greater purpose of the town. You are both wise and beautiful in your young age," he remarked.

Stepping forward he found his foot was caught in the dirt. Part of it has sunk in the hole he was digging. With a tug, he removed it. Walking past the blanket, he lifted his canteen and took a wild swig of water. Nathaniel picked up his ax. He soon met Charlotte and lifted her into the air.

"Surely the town council will have a parade for you for picking such a wondrous place for the sign," he said and kissed her on the cheek.

He handed her the sign. She rested it gingerly on her shoes as she balanced her fingers on top of it rocking it back and forth. Nathaniel grabbed the haversack under his left arm. It was linen and of his wife's making. He had soldiers and a fair amount of militiamen carry these and asked his wife to create one from a sketch he drew. It carried odds and ends for him that would otherwise be lost in his pack. As he fingered its contents, he moved over them dissatisfying and fast. A screwdriver, flint and steel, his pipe tobacco, a pocketknife all rumbled between the yellowing bag. Then, he removed a small wrapped cloth. Unraveling the fabric swatch revealed a handful of nails.

Eyeing Charlotte's designated tree, he approximated the sign's hanging height and put a nick in the trunk. His legs moved beneath him unsteadily.

"That should do the job," he said, "Now I am going to need you to steady the sign, dear."

She hurried toward him, although she was mere feet away to start, carrying the sign below her chin. She held the sign up to the tree. Nathaniel straightened it aright. He placed the nail at its top making

sure to center and straighten it. He flipped the hand ax around so as to use the butt as a hammer. He firmed his choke on the handle and swung it onto the nail. The ground quaked.

Nathaniel paused as the tremors continued. He looked at the ax as though it was enchanted by some otherworldly power. Charlotte released her grip on the sign and grabbed her father's leg. Neither had experienced this sensation before, although both were feeling the same unease. He looked out to the town and saw no sign of disturbance. Smoke was still pouring from the chimneys and foundries and yet the rumble beneath their feet continued.

"Just the valley settling," he said and patted Charlotte on her cap. It wasn't.

Nathaniel swung the ax again landing a hard blow upon the nail sinking it deeply into the tree. The Roanoke Valley erupted in thunderous booming as the land around them shook.

At first, Nathaniel thought the British were firing canons at them. But, he reasoned that would not account for the earth moving by itself. Frantic he looked to be sure Charlotte was near him and for the wherewithal to keep them both safe. The unseen mountains of the Blue Ridge, he thought, were avalanching. Rocks and stones of epic proportions must be falling down upon the ground. But, nothing of that sort was happening in front of their eyes.

A hole, no larger than that of a fox's, appeared before their eyes midpoint between the river and the town. Still feeling the undulating ground below him, Nathaniel, shielding his daughter behind his back, rose to his tip-toes to peer closer at it without leaving his place. A puff of dirt flew twenty feet in the air from the hole as it began to widen on its broad side toward town. First the hole grew to two feet

in diameter, then five feet as it widened. In syncopation a dozen other holes formed and belched dirt. The ground facing northward to the wheelwright's was rising up and down in front of the Dyers. Small and large mounds of grassy sod lifted from the ground.

With a jolt that rocked the two to the ground, the store's siding cracked open revealing the contents of its inside. Wheels and unassembled parts were flung through the air as a great hole formed behind the town's exterior. The smaller holes had grown into one another, creating a cavernous sinkhole. It again widened and the shop toppled into its mouth. Facing the thoroughfare of the town, the Dyers witnessed from their jostled positions the sinkhole spreading. The town was in panic.

Roanoke's citizens ran in all directions. Some on horseback galloped out of sight, presumably to the east and west entrances to town but were obscured by the rise and fall of the storefronts. The terror was palpable. Men and women were running in reckless abandon, screaming as though the End Times were upon them. Successive shops followed suit with the wheel shop. They would collapse to much excitement and be downed in seconds only to vanish from the growth of the sinkhole. The road was first bisected and then swallowed and the hole continued on its steady churn toward the center of town.

With increasing intensity Nathaniel squinted to see the havoc unfold in front of him. With the back row of shops now demolished and consumed by the earth, he and his crying daughter were now witness to the entire town's destruction spread before them. People were now running from the sinkhole. One man lost his footing as the street underneath him gave way to the void of nothingness below. He fell, about to hit the ground, but instead vanished below the horizon line.

Repeating this scene, dozens of other men, women, children, young people, elderly people, Natives, and travelers were lost to the quickly disappearing terrain. The town hall fell. Livestock was swallowed whole. The town was being cut out of existence.

Cradling Charlotte into his waistcoat, Nathaniel saw the cascade of soil emptying from ground level into the endless sinkhole. The ridge of the town and now its center was wiped clean from the earth and spotting the fenceposts marking the northern entrance at a distance, he saw them drop into the pit, knowing his family's house with his wife inside would be next.

"Rose!" he screamed and sprang up from the knotty ground.

Across town, his homestead stood quiet as the insatiable hole fed off of the remaining buildings lining the northern facade

"Where's mother?" cried Charlotte.

Nathaniel ran toward the sinkhole. He reached the blanket with the unloaded sack. It was covered in dirt clumps from the high-spraying gusts.

"Lord above, help my wi—," he began but was swallowed as the crumbling edge of the hole took him downward.

Charlotte let out a storied cry as the booming subsided. The Dyer's house was the last standing structure. It slid out of existence as her scream echoed downward into the sinkhole.

Charlotte was alone. Her cries went unheard. No man or animal was within its audibility for they had all perished in the sudden disaster. She could not piece together the reasons or causalities of the recent few minutes of her life. She begged and pleaded for the death of her parents and the loss of her home and town to be some lousy fiction and she cried through the day and into the black night by the

riverside with no one to hear her pleas.

No sign of humankind marked the valley, save for Charlotte Dyer, a discarded hand ax, and a hanging sign reading *Roanoke Community Grove*. The rest was buried in the maddening depths.

For the second time in America's history, Roanoke had vanished.

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