

FADE IN:

TEASER

EXT. BOSTON HARBOR-NIGHT-DECEMBER 16, 1773

Black water. A forest of ship's masts against a bruised sky.

Somewhere a church bell counts the hour and gives up.

SUPER: "BOSTON. THE BRITISH COLONY OF MASSACHUSETTS. 1773."

A single lantern moves along the waterfront, low and careful, like a secret being carried.

INT. HALE & SONS PRINTWORKS-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

The lantern belongs to **THOMAS HALE** (19), lean, ink under his nails, eyes that never stop reading. He moves through a cramped print shop: a great wooden press, racks of lead type, paper stacked to the rafters.

He sets a single sheet on the composing stone and leans close, studying it the way other men study scripture.

INSERT-THE PAMPHLET

Dense columns of type.

Title: ON THE NECESSARY LIMITS OF TYRANNY.

BACK TO SCENE

Thomas drags one inky finger down the right-hand margin, not reading the words, reading the EDGES of them. The first letters of certain lines.

THOMAS
(under his breath)
H... L... M... C...

He grabs a scrap and writes as he goes. His lips move. His hand stops.

INSERT-THE SCRAP

Block capitals, freshly scrawled:

THE EYE WATCHES. MEETINGS WITHIN MEETINGS.

BACK TO SCENE

EXT. BOSTON HARBOR-NIGHT-DECEMBER 16, 1773

Thomas sits back. The candle throws his shadow huge across the wall.

Behind him, unheard, the shop door opens.

A gloved hand. A gold SIGNET RING catching the light: a circle within a circle, an eye, or a keyhole.

ELIAS WENTWORTH (50s) steps out of the dark. Dark coat, unhurried, absurdly clean for this filthy town. He speaks before Thomas can hide the scrap.

ELIAS

Words are tools, Mr. Hale. In gentle hands, they shape.

Thomas spins, heart hammering.

ELIAS (cont'd)

In clumsy ones, they break.

THOMAS

Mr. Wentworth. We're closed.

ELIAS

Everything worth doing is done after closing.

His eyes drop to the scrap under Thomas's palm. He doesn't reach for it. He simply lets Thomas know that he SEES it.

ELIAS (cont'd)

You found the bones beneath the words. Most men only ever see the meat.

THOMAS

What is it? Who writes like this?

ELIAS

Men who cannot afford to be quoted.

A DISTANT ROAR rolls up from the harbor, a crowd, moving.

Elias tilts his head toward the sound, almost fond.

ELIAS (cont'd)

Come. You'll want to see the next page of history before they decide what it says.

EXT. GRIFFIN'S WHARF-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

A RIVER OF TORCHES pours toward the water. Hundreds of men.

Some have smeared their faces with soot and lamp-black, feathers jammed in their hats, playing at being Mohawks and fooling no one.

Thomas is swept into the current. Among the crowd he glimpses **ABBY MERCER** (19), quick, fearless, a tavern keeper's daughter, her sleeves shoved up, soot on her cheek. She's not watching. She's WORKING.

ABBY
(grabbing his arm,
grinning)
Thomas Hale. Come to watch, or come
to help?

THOMAS
Come to remember.

ABBY
Then keep your eyes open.

She's gone, up a gangplank, into the dark shape of a moored ship.

EXT. ON THE SHIP-CONTINUOUS

Not chaos. DISCIPLINE. Men break open crates in near silence. Chests of tea hoisted, cracked, tipped. A black snow of tea leaves hisses down into the harbor.

No looting. No drinking. Orders given and obeyed.

Thomas watches, transfixed, and then he notices something that turns him cold.

HIS POV-A WAREHOUSE DOORWAY

Above the crowd, safe in shadow, ELIAS stands beside a **MOUNTED GENTLEMAN**. The rider wears the same ring. Elias is not shouting. Not throwing tea.

He is WRITING. In a small notebook. Watching the watchers.

BACK TO SCENE

EXT. GRIFFIN'S WHARF-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS

Thomas looks from the disciplined destruction, to the man recording it, to his own inky hands.

THOMAS (V.O.)
For the first time, I'm not sure
whether we set the type... or whether
someone else sets us.

The tea keeps falling into the black water, like the ash of something burning far away.

SMASH TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: SHADOWS OF LIBERTY
END OF TEASER

ACT ONE**EXT. BOSTON STREETS-DAWN-THE NEXT MORNING**

Grey light. The whole town smells of wet tea, tannin and salt. British **REDCOATS** stand in doubled pairs at every corner, hated and bored.

Thomas walks fast, head down, the collar of his coat up.

INT. HALE & SONS PRINTWORKS-CONTINUOUS

JOHN HALE (50s), Thomas's father, broad, cautious, flour-pale from worry, is already at the press. He doesn't look up.

JOHN

You were out.

THOMAS

Everyone was out.

JOHN

Everyone isn't my son. Everyone won't hang with my name over the door.

He finally turns. Fear, not anger.

JOHN (cont'd)

I print sermons and ship notices, Thomas. I set other men's quarrels in type and I stay out of them. Scripture and spacing. That's this house.

THOMAS

And when their quarrel is on our doorstep?

JOHN

Then we sweep the doorstep and we say nothing.

A **BRITISH CORPORAL** enters without knocking, sets a paper on the counter.

CORPORAL

By order of the Crown. To be printed and posted. Condemnation of last night's outrage. Fifty copies. Today.

John takes it, all servility.

JOHN
Of course, sir. Ink is ink. Coin is coin.

The corporal goes. John exhales. Thomas stares at the order.

THOMAS
We'll print the King's version.

JOHN
We'll print anyone's version who pays.

THOMAS
(quietly)
That's the whole trouble, isn't it.

He picks up the King's order. Reads it. Then, deliberately, sets it face-down on the counter and goes to the type-case, fingers moving on their own, a craftsman's hands that have done this ten thousand times.

THOMAS (V.O.)
I learned to read the way other boys learned to walk. Not on a slate. In lead.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HALE & SONS PRINTWORKS-DAY-YEARS EARLIER (1766)

CLOSE ON small hands, **YOUNG THOMAS**, age 11, sorting tiny reversed letters into a wooden case, each in its own little bed. His father JOHN, younger here, leans over him.

JOHN
Mind your lines, boy. Bad spacing makes for bad reading. Bad reading makes for bad thinking. And we've had enough of that in this town without your help.

YOUNG THOMAS
Yes, sir.

JOHN
Two things a man must not get wrong. Scripture. And spacing.
(a rare, gruff warmth)
Everything else, God will sort out. We just sort the type.

INT. BOSTON TAVERN-NIGHT-CONTINUOUS (1766)

Young Thomas, broadsides under his arm, delivers them into a smoky room where he's not supposed to be. At a table, a red-faced cooper, **JONAS**, stabs the air with his pipe.

JONAS

It's not just the tax. It's the damned Company behind it. You think the King dreams up these schemes himself? No. There's a circle of them. Secret. Always meeting. Lodges and clubs where they drink their Madeira and plot how many ways to skin us. That's a conspiracy, that is.

A **BAKER** laughs.

BAKER

A conspiracy of merchants, Jonas?
That's just called business.

Young Thomas stands frozen at the edge of the lamplight, the broadsides forgotten under his arm. The word lands in him and stays.

TAVERN KEEPER (O.S.)

Hey, boy. Those papers for me, or for your education?

YOUNG THOMAS

(quietly)

Both, sir.

The men laugh. The word "conspiracy" sticks.

INT. HALE & SONS PRINTWORKS-DAY-LATER (1767)

Thomas, now 12, at the composing stone. A tall, dark-coated stranger lays a manuscript on the counter, a younger, sharper ELIAS, the signet ring already on his hand.

ELIAS

I am told you can be discreet.

JOHN

(not missing a beat)

Discretion costs more.

ELIAS

Discretion always does.

A purse slides across the wood. Elias turns to the boy.

ELIAS (cont'd)
I'd like this line to start here. And
this word to fall at the end of the
third line.

YOUNG THOMAS
That'll make the justification
ragged. My father won't like it.

ELIAS
Your father likes coins. I shall
bring enough to soothe his aesthetic
injuries.

The boy adjusts the spacing, frowning. Later, alone,
proofing the page, his finger drifts down the margin.

Certain words align. Harbor. Light. Men. Committee.

INSERT-THE MARGIN: the first letters, read downward

-H, L, M, C

-and beneath, in faint relief, a phrase surfacing: THE EYE
WATCHES.

Young Thomas's eyes go wide. He looks up, but Elias is
already gone. He tucks a scrap into a notebook and pries up
a loose floorboard for the first time.

EXT. KING STREET, BOSTON-NIGHT-MARCH 5, 1770

Snow and torchlight. A jeering crowd hurls ice and insults
at a knot of nervous **BRITISH SOLDIERS** backed against the
Custom House. THOMAS, 15 now, and ABBY, 15, are caught at
the edge of it, too curious to leave.

A club flies. A soldier stumbles. Shouting-

Then GUNFIRE. Ragged, unordered. Bodies drop in the snow.

Screams. The crowd scatters.

In the chaos, Abby grabs Thomas and hauls him into a doorway
as five men lie bleeding on the cobbles.

YOUNG ABBY
(shaking)
Who told them to fire? Did you hear
an order? Did anyone?

YOUNG THOMAS
 (staring at the
 blood on the snow)
 No. Nobody. It just... happened.
 Nobody gave it.

YOUNG ABBY
 Then how will anyone ever know whose
 fault it was?

Young Thomas looks at the dead, at the panicking soldiers,
 at the dark windows full of watching faces.

YOUNG THOMAS
 (quietly, a boy
 learning the shape
 of his whole life)
 Somebody has to remember it before
 they decide what it means.

Within days, an engraving of the "Bloody Massacre", furious,
 false, magnificent propaganda, comes off a press.

Young Thomas holds a copy, looks at how neatly it lies about
 the night he actually saw.

THOMAS (V.O.)
 That was the night I understood. The
 shot and the story are two different
 things. And the story always wins.
 Unless someone keeps the shot.

BACK TO PRESENT
 (1773):

INT. HALE & SONS PRINTWORKS-DAY

Adult Thomas sets the last line of the King's condemnation,
 jaw tight.

THOMAS (V.O.)
 I'd been reading their margins for
 seven years before I understood I was
 doing it. Some men collect coins. I
 collected the words other men tried
 to hide.

INT. MERCER'S TAVERN-BACK ROOM-NIGHT

Low ceiling, lower voices. Abby pours and listens, she's
 better at listening than anyone in the room. She finds
 Thomas by the hearth and pulls him aside.

ABBY

You've been listening to more than letters. I can see it in your eyes. You used to notice only when a line was crooked. Now you notice when a word is.

Thomas hesitates. Then shows her the scrap.

INSERT-THE SCRAP: "THE EYE WATCHES. MEETINGS WITHIN MEETINGS."

ABBY (cont'd)

(reading, eyebrows
climbing)

Dramatic.

THOMAS

It was hidden in one of Elias Wentworth's pamphlets. In the margins. On purpose.

ABBY

Everything means more to someone.

She hands it back. Studies him, not the scrap, HIM.

ABBY (cont'd)

You've been hiding other men's secrets in your letters for years and pretending you don't see them. So which is it? Are you with us? Or will you keep pretending words are only ink?

Before he can answer, the door. ELIAS enters the tavern like he owns the deed to it. The room quiets a half-beat, then pretends not to notice him.

Abby's eyes narrow.

ABBY (cont'd)

(low)

Speak of the shadow.

INT. MERCER'S TAVERN-BACK ROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Elias and Thomas alone at a corner table. Elias turns a coin over his knuckles: the eye-and-keyhole mark.

THOMAS

Last night. The tea. Did your circle order it?