

THE FINAL PAWN

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FADE IN:

EXT. GROVE OF TREES - NIGHT

A tree bereft of any leaves sways in the wind.

An acorn hangs precariously from a tree limb before it slowly loosens, and falls to the ground.

A SQUIRREL scurries out of its hiding place and greedily snatches the nut. BUG EYED, it furtively scans the area for competitors before running up a hill.

On the other side of the hill a military encampment takes shape. Tents are lined in neat rows. Smoke from the glowing camp fires billows aimlessly into the air.

SUPER: SARATOGA SPRINGS, NEW YORK 1777

INT. GENERAL'S TENT - NIGHT

GENERAL CORBIN, a white haired man (60) with a small paunch leans back in his chair and looks at his comely daughter MARGARET (22) with tired eyes.

GENERAL CORBIN

Maggie, I've reasoned with you for too long. Now it is time for you to simply grant your father his wish.

MARGARET

And I love my father with all my heart, and yet I cannot grant this wish.

(beat)

To do so would dishonor everything that he has taught me.

Despite the General's noticeable exhaustion, his soldierly countenance is unmistakable as he examines his daughter.

Candles flicker as he lets out an exasperated sigh.

GENERAL CORBIN

And if your mother were alive, what would she say?

MARGARET

I think we both know the answer to
that, father.

They look at each other with matching grins and begin to
laugh.

GENERAL CORBIN

Your mother was without equal.

MARGARET

And she would have staunchly held
her ground to do what she thought
was right. Even if it was in
defiance of her loving husband's
wishes.

The General stands and picks up a stack of letters.

GENERAL CORBIN

I appreciate your resilience my
dear, your patriotism, but this is
no place for a young lady.

MARGARET

And what of the women who have come
from town to do their part, am I
better than them?

GENERAL CORBIN

One million times yes, and no.

MARGARET

Are we not fighting for a country
in which each man, and woman must
do their share? Must be treated
equally should they be up to the
task?

A tent flap loosens and blows in the wind as the General's
eyes beam with undeniable pride.

GENERAL CORBIN

You can stay.

Margaret's smiles broadly and quickly approaches her father,
arms outstretched ready to embrace him.

The General stops her.

GENERAL CORBIN (CONT'D)
Under one condition. You are not
to leave the hospital tent under
any circumstances. Is that
understood?

MARGARET
Of course, father. I promise to
make you proud.

GENERAL CORBIN
I have long since left the realm of
pride and have been living in a
state of utter enchantment with you
for years now, my dear.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

A YOUNG MAN (early 20's) dressed in farmer's clothes lies in his tent. He eyes Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" by candlelight.

This is PAUL GRANDER.

Paul, rustically handsome with intelligent eyes, studies the pamphlet with eagerness.

He places the pamphlet down, and turns to his side.

PAUL
Give me strength, Lord.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

JONATHAN GOODSTEAD (39), a pastor, stands on a crate and delivers an impassioned speech to a group of baby faced men.

JONATHAN
You, men of these 13 colonies, have
decided to stand as one. As free
men against a King, who has been
led astray by thieving and
bloodthirsty advisors. A King, who
sacrificed the love and admiration
of an entire continent of loyal
subjects for the enrichment of his
coffers.

Paul stops and listens.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

And come what may tomorrow, know
this young lads. Together, you
will have stood up against an
egregious injustice to right
thinking men everywhere, and in
doing so, you will leave your mark
on this world in a way that will
dwarf the King's lust for money and
power. Take heart lads, for
tomorrow we do God's bidding.

INT. GENERAL'S TENT - NIGHT

The General works on correspondence at his desk as MAJOR ROBERT MCGUIRE (30), chief engineer, reports to his commanding officer.

Robert, a handsome officer, carries himself with the elegance and honor of a person befitting his privileged upbringing.

Despite these upper crust sensibilities his face is hard.

ROBERT

Major McGuire reporting as ordered,
sir.

GENERAL CORBIN

Ah, Robert, at ease. Please,
relax.

Robert stands at ease but his face holds its earnest gaze.

GENERAL CORBIN (CONT'D)

Well my good man, have we finished
with those defensive works?

ROBERT

We have, sir. The men are tired,
but we should be at your full
disposal come tomorrow.

GENERAL CORBIN

Good, good. I only hope your men
are as qualified with a musket in
their hands as they are with a
surveying glass.

ROBERT

I assure you, sir they will make
both you and themselves proud.

GENERAL CORBIN

I have no doubt, no doubt at all
about it.

The General begins to pack a pipe.

GENERAL CORBIN (CONT'D)

I only wish they did not have to
know war. Engineers should concern
themselves with building up
humanity, not tearing it down.

The pipe rests comfortably in the corner of his mouth.

He lights a match and for an instant his face is fully
illuminated in the dimly lit tent.

GENERAL CORBIN (CONT'D)

Alas, we do not have that luxury do
we?

ROBERT

No sir, I think not.

GENERAL CORBIN

We will be evenly matched tomorrow
as far as men, but our enemy has
strength in experience.

ROBERT

How are we to meet them, sir?

GENERAL CORBIN

Head on. Musket to musket.
Artillery to artillery.

ROBERT

And Margaret?

The General, not entirely surprised by the question, looks at
Robert firmly.

GENERAL CORBIN

She will stay. In the hospital
tent.

ROBERT

But Sir...

GENERAL CORBIN

Save your protestations and your
breath, Robert. She has made it
clear she will not leave.
(MORE)

GENERAL CORBIN (CONT'D)
I love her for it, and I suspect
you do as well.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

Paul wanders past the hospital tent which is being prepared for tomorrow's battle.

A DOCTOR sits at, what appears to be a butcher's block, as he sharpens and shines his instruments.

Margaret enters from the back of the tent. They briefly exchange a glance before Paul attempts a hasty getaway.

EXT. HOSPITAL TENT - NIGHT

PAUL
What are you doing here, Maggie?

MARGARET
I could ask you the very same
thing, Mr. Grander.

PAUL
Stop it, Maggie. This is...

MARGARET
No place for a woman, yes I'm well
aware.

Paul is immediately disarmed as Margaret smiles and her dimples come out in full force.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
I could not leave, Paul. I could
not leave father, I could not leave
the cause...
(beat)
I could not leave you.

PAUL
We've spoken about this, Maggie.
You know how I feel.

MARGARET
Yes. I know that you feel you are
not worthy of my love, when in
truth, I have never met a man more
deserving of it. Or one that I
would more willingly share it with.

Margaret takes him gently by the hands and stares in his eyes.

PAUL

I love you, Maggie. But I have nothing to offer you.

MARGARET

Before this war, before he was a General, my father was a simple farmer. He was happy, I was happy, and most importantly my mother was happy.

PAUL

And could he read? Or write before the war, Maggie? Or did you, or your mother, teach him that as well?

They both look down at the ground. Paul notices Robert as he approaches and pulls his hands away.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I love you, Maggie. By God I truly do, but you are better off with him. He will give you what you deserve.

EXT. HOSPITAL TENT - CONTINUOUS

Tears well in Margaret's eyes as she watches Paul walk away.

Robert reaches her and notices the tears in her eyes.

ROBERT

Margaret, is everything all right?
What did that man want?

Margaret does her best to compose herself.

MARGARET

Yes, all is well. He was just telling me about his wife. He seems to love her very much. I was overcome.

ROBERT

(smiling)

Ah, so you do succumb to the frailties of the fairer sex after all.

Margaret manages a feint smile.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
I was speaking with your father
earlier. About us.

MARGARET
Us?

ROBERT
Well yes, should God see fit, I
would very much like to have your
hand in marriage?

Margaret bursts into tears.

MARGARET
I cannot speak about this right
now, Robert. Please, I cannot.

Margaret returns to the hospital tent as a stunned Robert stands alone in disbelief. He watches Paul walk down a row of tents.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

Paul meanders through camp and studies the men.

Some smoke, others read their bibles, while still others busy themselves with letters.

He comes to a paddock and notices a YOUNG MAN, dressed in a cavalry uniform, as he tends to his horse.

The young man is no more than 15 years old.

EXT. CAMP - MORNING

The camp is abuzz with movement.

Paul exits his tent as a horse whinnies and rears on its hind legs. The young man Paul saw the night before tries to settle the horse.

Orders are shouted.

Men hurry left and right.

EXT. CAMP - LATER

Paul marches in step with his fellow infantrymen.

In the distance, the muffled sound of ARTILLERY SHELLS can be heard EXPLODING.

Margaret waits outside the hospital tent as Paul marches by.

Paul, eyes trained on the ground, never looks up.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

A YOUNG BOY plays YANKEE DOODLE DANDY on a flute as the battlefield reveals itself with all the requisite pomp and circumstance.

Across an expansive field the vibrant red coats of the enemy stand out starkly against the backdrop of forest green.

Artillery shells continue to EXPLODE in the middle of the field as both sides test their range.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - LATER

Infantrymen line up at the front of each of the collective forces. Paul stares across the field at the enemy.

No one speaks.

General Corbin sits confidently atop his steed as he surveys the battlefield. With a hand gesture, he orders part of the cavalry to move forward.

The long line of infantrymen parts as cavalrymen make their way to the front. Paul notices the young man from the night before. Fear has taken hold of his eyes.

In a flash the cavalry is given the order to CHARGE.

The enemy answers the charge with musket and artillery fire.

The infantry is given the order to load their muskets as the horsemen are enveloped in a cloud of smoke.

The smoke begins to clear.

The cavalrymen are gone.

INT. HOSPITAL TENT - DAY

The hospital tent is empty. A few nurses mill around and speak quietly with one another. The doctor reads a note.

DOCTOR
A volunteer is needed at the front?

Without hesitation Margaret steps forward.

MARGARET
I'll go, doctor.

DOCTOR
Ms. Corbin, your father was very explicit, I cannot allow you to go.

MARGARET
My father is not here doctor, and if he were, I would still offer my services. I've been travelling with the army the longest out of these women. I know the men.

The doctor rubs the stubble on his chin.

DOCTOR
As I said, I cannot allow you to go. But, if you were to slip away without my notice. Well, there is nothing I can do about that.

MARGARET
Thank you, doctor.

DOCTOR
It is I that should be thanking you, my dear. It is men and women like you who will prove to be our salvation.

Margaret smiles and cups the doctor's weary face with one hand.

MARGARET
Thank you, doctor.

EXT. BLUFF - DAY

A shawl is wrapped around Margaret's head as she hurriedly makes her way to the front.

A group of soldiers load a cannon as an explosion goes off directly in front of them. Dirt and shrapnel fill the air.

Margaret is knocked to her side.

As she comes to, she is confronted with the carnage that has been left behind. Two men have been left dismembered as their cohorts try in vain to revive them.

MARGARET
(shouting)
They are gone. Fight for those who are left.

Pastor Jonathan, deep in prayer over the body of a fallen soldier, is immediately brought back to the earthly plane as Margaret attempts to rally the artillery men who remain.

JONATHAN
Madame, let me help.

MARGARET
You aren't going to try and stop me?

JONATHAN
That would be God's place.

Margaret and Pastor Jonathan re-position the cannon while two soldiers reload.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Soldiers stand shoulder to shoulder in tight formation. Paul is mired amongst this mass of humanity as the sickening THUD of musket balls pelt human flesh all around.

The order is given for the infantry to advance.

Men begin to intermittently cry out in agony as they are picked off by musket fire.

They disappear at an alarming rate.

PAUL
(whispers)
God, help me, please.

EXT. BLUFF - DAY

The heavy black cannon is loaded and properly aimed. Pastor Jonathan and the two soldiers look to Margaret for the order to fire.

MARGARET
By God men, do your duty and fire!

The soldiers light the fuse and a plume of white smoke rises into the air as the cannonade is discharged.

In the distance a squad of enemy infantrymen fall to the ground in a heap.

The soldiers are euphoric and slap each other hearty congratulations.

JONATHAN

Well done, madame! Well done!

MARGARET

Thank you pastor, but this is no time for congratulations. Please, help me re-load.

Across the field more artillery is fired. A huge hole develops in the center of the enemy's lines.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Paul fires a shot as the enemy nears closer. He begins the laborious process of re-loading his musket.

They will be on him soon.

Paul re-loads and fires. He takes hasty cover in a gully.

He is the only infantryman left.

He turns back searching for re-enforcements but a thick charcoal colored layer of smoke clouds his vision.

It will be over soon.

Suddenly, Robert and his fellow engineers CHARGE from the other side of the wall of smoke.

They shout at the top of their lungs as they fire their muskets and momentarily stop the advancing charge of the enemy.

They join Paul in the gully.

ROBERT

Are you well?

PAUL

Yes. I did not think I could hold them for much longer.

ROBERT
You could not have.

Robert eyes Paul with a steely gaze.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Do you need to go back, or can you
fight?

PAUL
I'm no sunshine patriot, and I've
not come all this way to go back.

ROBERT
Even if it meant you could have
her?

Neither man seems to take much notice as musket balls WHISTLE
by their heads.

PAUL
I wouldn't have her as a coward.

ROBERT
Very good then. Take up position
with my men.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - CONTINUOUS

An AIDE DE CAMP comes upon General Corbin as he surveys the
field.

AIDE DE CAMP
General sir, we've broken their
center.

GENERAL CORBIN
Yes, thank you.

AIDE DE CAMP
How should we proceed, sir?

GENERAL CORBIN
Send in our remaining cavalry.
Major McGuire, and his men will
follow.

EXT. BLUFF - DAY

Margaret and her soldiers have hit a steady rhythm as they
continually load, fire and re-load again.

Margaret stares through a spyglass to ensure that their fire has hit its intended target.

After their latest volley, Margaret notices Paul and Robert as they fight side by side in the middle of the battlefield.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Amidst the gun fire and din of battle Robert yells to his men.

ROBERT

Hold your positions, men. Their center has broken. We will take the day!

He turns to Paul.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

The General will be sending what's left of the cavalry. We need to distract them. Where are the rest of your infantrymen?

PAUL

Dead.

Robert simultaneously shouts orders to his men and discharges his weapon. A fire rages in his eyes.

Paul takes a note from his pocket, stares at it, then gives it to Robert.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Give this to her. Tell her that things will be better for her, better for all of us, when this war is won.

Robert looks at the note, studies Paul. The two men share a brief, knowing nod as he tucks the letter into his breast pocket.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Major, give me some of your men. I will distract them long enough for you to join up with the charge.

Robert looks at Paul for a moment before he accedes.

EXT. BLUFF - DAY

Through the spyglass Margaret sees Robert and Paul shake hands.

Paul and a group of men dart for the right flank of the enemy.

The enemy meets the flanking maneuver with heavy fire while simultaneously creating a larger hole in their center.

Margaret turns her attention to a great roar that has sprung up from the center of the battlefield. The cavalry is charges.

In an instant the entire battlefield is shrouded in an indecipherable haze of white smoke.

Slowly, the smoke begins to dissipate.

The field, which moments before, was littered with bloody corpses and the agonized cries of wounded men is almost completely empty.

Paul, like most of his fellow combatants, is erased from the field. Nowhere to be found.

The battlefield smolders as Robert stands in a state of bewilderment. He takes in his sudden isolation.

Out of the corner of the spyglass Margaret sees her father as he gallops alone towards Robert.

FADE TO WHITE:

FADE IN:

INT. AUDITORIUM - PRESENT DAY - NIGHT

A huge, flat screen TV hangs above a stage, as a large, silent crowd watches with baited breath.

On stage, two young men sit at a table across from one another. JOHN DEGRAW (23) fidgets apprehensively. A hand covers his mouth.

Directly across from him DAVID HARROW (12), a pimply faced, bespectacled adolescent who wears corduroys, and a bright yellow shirt scans the audience.

A loud, SCREECHING sound echoes through the silent auditorium as John suddenly backs his chair away from the table and stands.

He looks down at the table one last time. He looks at David and smiles.

Slowly, he reaches a hand across the table and gently tips over his last CHESS PIECE.

Instantly, a huge roar emanates from the crowd.

INT. AUDITORIUM - CONTINUOUS

VERN VAN PATTON (35), handsome with perfectly coiffed hair, bounds on stage with a microphone.

VAN PATTON

It's all over, ladies and gentlemen. David Harrow, has won the 2009 World Speed Chess Championship, becoming the youngest ever to do so.

David nervously shakes Van Patton's hand, turns toward the audience and offers a huge, gap toothed smile. His MOTHER and FATHER wave at him manically.

VAN PATTON (CONT'D)

David, that was a spectacular match. Would you mind sharing your strategy with us?

DAVID

Uhm, well, I didn't really have much of a strategy really. I guess.

The crowd laughs nervously.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I just kinda studied real hard, and once the match started I just let my imagination run.

VAN PATTON

You let your imagination run?

DAVID

Ya, I guess it kinda relaxes me when I'm playing. Not always, but sometimes, I guess.

VAN PATTON

Well it certainly worked today. Did the match play out as you anticipated?

DAVID

Well sorta. I mean, I kinda hoped
to have my king, queen, and at
least one rook left. Pastor
Jonathan was a bit of a...

VAN PATTON

Pastor Jonathan?

DAVID

Oh sorry, I mean my bishop was a
bit of a surprise. It all really
came down to my final pawn though.
Without him I couldn't distract him
and I'm not sure I would have won.

VAN PATTON

Well David, it was a great strategy
and a great move. Congratulations.

(to the audience)

Let's give him one last big round
of applause ladies and gentleman.

As the crowd rises to its feet and showers David with rousing
applause he shyly waves to his parents.

He momentarily stops at the chess table.

He looks at the discarded chess pieces and slowly sifts
through the pile and grabs the final pawn.

He places it in his pants pocket and leaves the stage to
triumphant applause.

FADE OUT.

THE END.

