

Captain Obadiah Bainbridge opened his logbook and began to fill in each column.

Date: *December 30, 1864*

Moon Phase: *Waxing crescent.*

Visibility: *Low.*

Wind: *Northeast.*

The captain paused, his mind replaying the evening's events. Fears the mission might soon be compromised had ramped up his efforts. Consequently, this day's venture had been the biggest one to date.

Dipping his quill into the inkwell he jotted a final note, a cipher he'd created solely for his purposes.

Remarks: 5PS HD CH

Leaning into the faint amber light cast by the flickering lamp, he laid a piece of blotting paper on the page and pressed down. Other than the crackling fire in the hearth, the house was silent. His family had retired to their rooms several hours ago. One more entry and he, too, would turn in and try to catch a couple hours' sleep before his wife and children began to stir.

A rustling sound sent a wave of unease surging through him. Glancing at the window, he glimpsed a flash of movement, then another. He extinguished the lamp, snatched up the logbook, and dropped it into the shallow compartment built into the bottom of the ditty box. Setting the removable tray back into place, he locked the box and pocketed the key.

Picking his way carefully across the dark room, he removed several tomes from the lowest shelf then tucked the ditty box in the narrow recess hollowed out behind the bookshelf. He had

just returned the last book to its proper place when a bullet shattered the window. Another shot quickly followed, striking the captain.

With a grunt, Captain Bainbridge fell to his knees. Blood streamed from his side, blending with the brown fibers of the carpet beneath him. He coughed, blood flecking his lips.

Faint from loss of blood, he crumpled to the floor, blood-stained fingers plucking at the corners of the carpet. As though from a distance, he heard cries and the slamming of doors. Someone was coming.

*No one must know*, he thought, realizing this was the end. *The truth dies with me.*

With one final effort, he raised himself up on one elbow, tossed the tiny brass key into the fire then collapsed dead on the floor.