

SCENE V

(As the scene opens the Charlottetown set is in near darkness, indicating the early morning hour just before dawn. There is complete silence and then, along the road, far right, can be heard the sound of horsemen riding furiously. The sound of the horses' hoofs draw nearer and now two men on horseback can be distinguished in the gloom as they ride hurriedly up to Jack's Tavern, dismount, and tie their horses at the hitching rack. Then they walk up on the porch, and one of them belabors the door furiously.)

After a few moments an upstairs window, just above the door, is pushed open and the head and shoulders of old Pat Jack can be seen in the dim light. Old Pat is wearing a night cap. He sticks his head out, looks down.

PAT JACK

(His voice high, angry.)

You can't get no drink this time o' night, and you can jes' get goin' 'bout yore business. This here's a sober town, inhabited by Prisbyterians what don't drink no liquor--this time of the night, by crackity--

(His voice softens into good humor.)

and you'll jes' have to let yore whistle stay dry till I open up in the mornin'. You got no business runnin' 'round this time o' night no ways. If'n you wuz the sort you ought to be you'd be down Camden way with the rest o' our young men from Mecklenburg a-fightin' them dad-blasted Britishers. No, sir, you can jes' get back on yore hosses and get goin'.

ONE OF THE MEN

Mr. Jack, this is Richard Caswell. We've just come from fighting the British down at Camden. We are completely spent. We need refreshment--

PAT JACK

(Leaning farther out, cupping his ear.)

Eh? What'd you say. Been to Camden, did y' say?

CASWELL

This is Richard Caswell, Mr. Jack. Richard Caswell. Did you understand?

PAT JACK

Caswell? Caswell? Governor Caswell? Jest a minute, Governor. Jes' let me get my candle lit. I didn't know 'twas you, Governor. By crackity, sir, I beg yore pardon. Always runnin' my mouth too much. It'll get me in serious trouble 'fore I get my full growth, no doubt. Jest a minute, Governor. I'll be right down.

(He disappears, and in a moment a candle is lighted in the room, the light disappears, and in another moment the front door is opened and Uncle Pat, still wearing his night cap and carrying the candle in a holder, stands in the doorway.)

Welcome to my poor tavern, Governor. I'm sorry I talked as I did. Come right in and I'll rustle you up a stiff drink and a hot breakfast as quick as I can get the fire a-goin'.

CASWELL

Thank you, Mr. Jack. We are very tired and thoroughly discouraged. A stiff drink might help pick us up a bit.

(Turning to face the other man.)

I'm sorry. I've about lost all my manners. General Gates, this is Mr. Jack, the proprietor of one of the most delightful taverns in North Carolina. Mr. Jack, General Gates, commander of the southern army.

(Uncle Pat's arm shakes, and he almost drops his candle.)

General Gates! By crackity, gentlemen, come inside. But why--why--

CASWELL

We have been riding as fast as our horses could bring us-- and we've changed several times. We had a great battle down at Camden, Mr. Jack, and the British soundly whipped us. We just got away with our necks. We want beds and a few hours rest and then General Gates is going on to Hillsboro. We--we're in a bad way, Mr. Jack. Our Army's killed or run into the swamps.

GENERAL GATES

Let's get some refreshment and then to bed, General Caswell. I'm about all in. Mr. Jack, I'll want a fresh horse in the morning. General Caswell will remain behind to help round up the militiamen in these parts and give the British a fight when they reach Charlotte-town.

PAT JACK

And our Mecklenburg men, Governor. Did you hear how they fared in the fightin'?

CASWELL

I heard Griffith Rutherford was captured. But I don't know-- don't know anything for certain, except that we're--we're beaten and discouraged and--and about at the end of our ropes. And now, sir, if --

PAT JACK

(Standing back.)

Come in, gentlemen, and welcome to our poor place. And I'll be gettin' you a big drink and start rustlin' up some vittles. Come right in.

(The light fades as the two walk through the tavern doorway and Uncle Pat follows, holding his candle high.)