

Excerpt from John Clarke: The Fight for Soul Liberty Novel

© 2026 Andrea M Clarke. All rights reserved.

This excerpt may not be reproduced, distributed, published, or transmitted without written permission of the author.

Lynn, Massachusetts — July 20, 1651

The distant church bells had begun to fade.

Inside William Witter's cottage, John Clarke stood before the small gathering, Bible in hand. There was no pulpit, no elevated platform. Nearby sat Obadiah Holmes and John Crandall, elders of John's Baptist church in Newport, who had traveled with him from Rhode Island to minister to William and his family. William Witter, elderly and nearly blind, rested beside his wife, Hannah. Around them, family and friends had gathered with their children.

“We have been warned there are proper buildings for worship. Proper words. Proper authorities.”

John looked around the room.

“But Christ never waited for permission to speak truth. He met people where they were—at tables, on roads, in homes like this one.”

A moment passed.

“So today we speak plainly. We listen closely. And we trust that God is here with us.”

Five-year-old Abigail Whitaker whispered a little too loudly.

“Is this the praying part?”

A few smiles passed through the room.

John looked at her gently.

“It can be, if you would like.”

When the time came for communion, John reached for the freshly baked loaf of bread.

“This bread reminds us that Christ's life was given freely. Not for the righteous alone, but for all who hunger for truth and mercy.”

He broke the bread and passed it first to William. Hannah guided her husband's hands before passing it to the others.

John lifted the cup.

“This cup reminds us that faith is not forced. It is chosen. It is entered into willingly, with clarity of mind and an open heart.”

He passed it among them.

“Drink, in remembrance, and in peace.”

When the cup returned to the table, John continued.

“For the kingdom of God—”

The door suddenly crashed open.

Abigail cried out and ran to her mother.

Two constables burst into the cottage. Chairs scraped backward. Parents drew their children closer. Holmes and Crandall rose.

William struggled to his feet, shaking as he leaned upon his cane. Hannah steadied him.

“Who are you to enter my house uninvited? This is my home.”

The constables ignored him.

John stepped forward, placing himself squarely between the constables and the gathering. Whatever warmth had been in his voice moments before was gone. He faced the men without hesitation.

“By what authority do you claim the right to burst into a private home and interrupt our worship with such rude intrusion?” he commanded.

Behind him, the cottage had fallen utterly still. The children pressed against their parents. Hannah kept one hand firmly upon William's arm, while Holmes and Crandall stood beside John, neither man retreating. Only moments before, the room had been filled with prayer and the breaking of bread. Now uncertainty moved quietly among them as they waited for the constables to answer.

One constable handed a folded paper to the other.

“Read it,” he ordered.

The second constable unfolded the document. His hands trembled.

The small sound of paper opening seemed unnaturally loud in the silent room.

“This warrant, signed by Robert Bridges, magistrate of Massachusetts, calls for the arrest of John Clarke and his two associates, Obadiah Holmes and John Crandall, for conducting an unlawful worship service.”

Unlawful.

The word hung over the room.

The broken bread still rested upon the table. Beside it sat the empty communion cup.

Excerpt from John Clarke: The Fight for Soul Liberty Novel

© 2026 Andrea M Clarke. All rights reserved.

This excerpt may not be reproduced, distributed, published, or transmitted without written permission of the author.