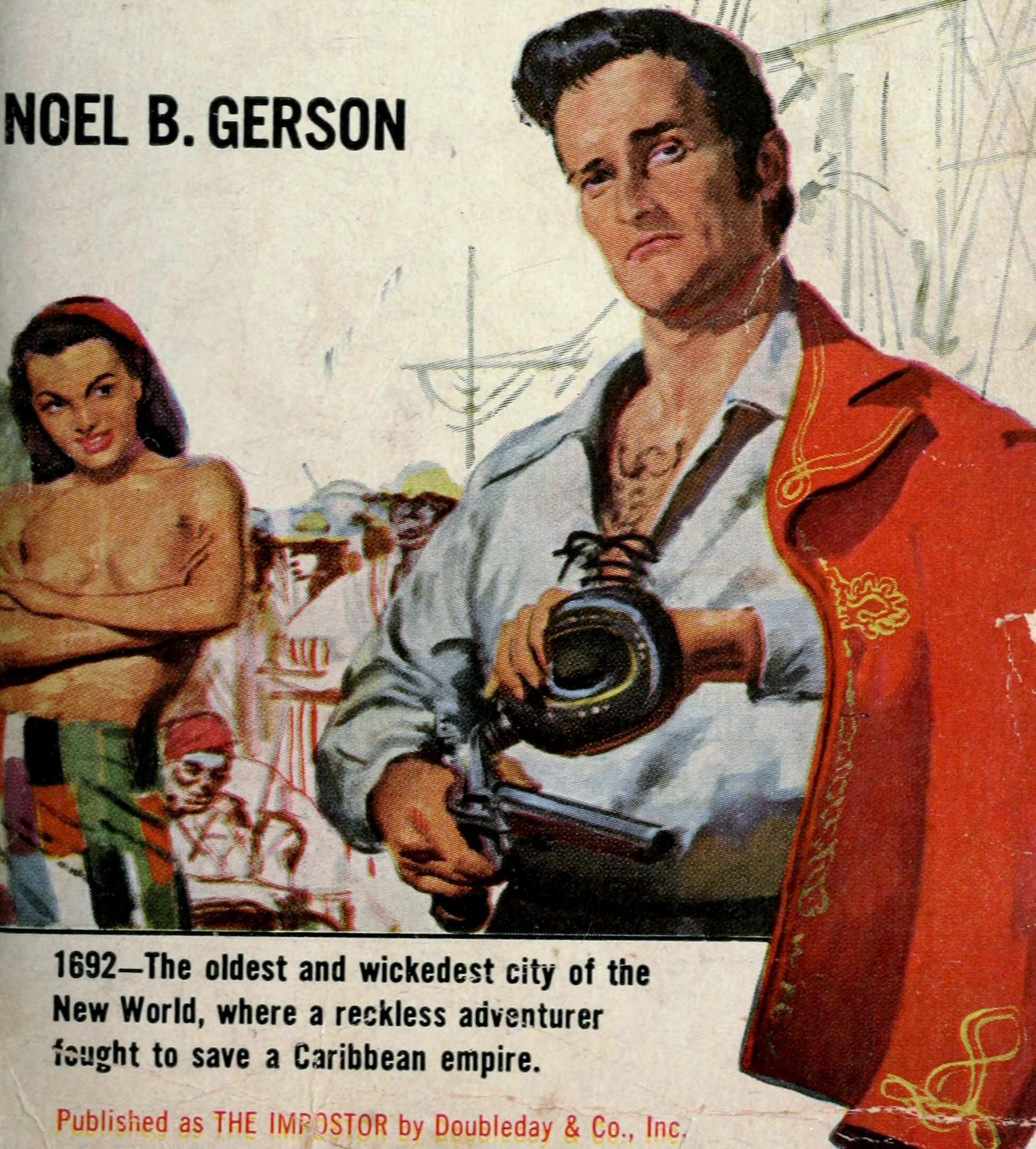


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# PORT ROYAL

NOEL B. GERSON



1692—The oldest and wickedest city of the New World, where a reckless adventurer fought to save a Caribbean empire.

Published as THE IMPOSTOR by Doubleday & Co., Inc.



# “Fabled Port Royal— Glory of the West Indies—

. . . Most depraved metropolis since the lost cities of antiquity . . . Favorite liberty town of buccaneers, Port Royal could furnish three trollops for every two freebooters who came ashore.”

—*New York Times*



**Into this sinners' paradise came Jeremy Stone—hero, rascal, swordsman—whose capacity for women, fighting, and intrigue took him through palace boudoirs and into the living death of exile in the wild mountain fastnesses of the rebel Maroons. “Flashing swords, booming cannon, arrows in the dark, torture, conspiracy, beautiful women—and convulsions of nature . . . Noel Gerson’s best.”**

—*Chicago Tribune*



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*(Originally published under the title  
THE IMPOSTOR)*

by NOEL B. GERSON



BANTAM BOOKS • NEW YORK

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FOR *Nicola* AND *Diana*



# Foreword

Few cities in this world have known the glory of the West Indies' fabled Port Royal, and fewer still have faded so deep into oblivion. In the seventeenth century the glittering, wicked Jamaican port was the "jewel of the Caribbean," the first city of the Western Hemisphere. But like the harlot she was, she lost her glamour when adversity struck her, and she never regained either her importance or her insolent abandon. This sleepy village that is today Port Royal was once a seat of empire, a military and naval base without a peer, a trading center of the first magnitude, and a depraved metropolis unknown since the lost cities of antiquity flourished.

I have tried to impart a little of the flavor that made her so gay in her prime, so pathetic in her decay. Her atmosphere may explain why she attracted that incredible trio, the Duchess Caroline Stuart of Glasgow, Sir Ian MacGregor, and Lord Thomas Murray, and why she took them to her heart. She, like they, truly existed.

All other characters in this story, with the exception of a handful of government officials, are the product of the author's imagination, however, and any relation these people may bear to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and unintentional.

I am grateful to the director and the staff of the Institute of Jamaica for making their extensive records available to me, and I am equally thankful to the Maroons of the mid-twentieth cen-

tury for supplying me with so much data on their ancestors who lived more than two hundred and fifty years ago.

There are so many who helped in the preparation of this book that it would be impossible to list them all, but I should like to express my particular appreciation to Sam Hart of Kingston for the use of his unique library, which made it possible for me to do adequate research on the earthquake of 1692. I shall always remember a trip into the Blue Mountains of Jamaica to inspect that library, for it was destroyed in the modern counterpart of the Great Earthquake, the hurricane of 1951.

As always, I appreciate immeasurably the painstaking advice and loving help of my wife, Cynthia Ann Gerson. My thanks, too, to Mrs. Rhoda Levine, who labored long over the manuscript.

I am grateful also to my agents, Paul R. Reynolds and Oliver G. Swan, for their never-failing, ever-patient counsel and assistance, and to my editor, Timothy Seldes, to whom no word was sacred and no idea profane.

N. B. G.

*New York City*

**THIS BANTAM BOOK contains the complete text of the original edition. Not one word has been changed or omitted. The low-priced Bantam edition is made possible by the large sale and effective promotion of the original edition, published by Doubleday & Company, Inc., under the title THE**

## CHAPTER ONE :

# December 1691

**I**T WAS bitterly cold even for a December day, and snow was piled high on the four cannon of the Battery. Strangers newly landed in New York Town from England gaped at the big guns and were satisfied; if the war with France should be resumed, the enemy would think twice before invading a port protected by such formidable weapons. A score of small boys hurled snowballs at each other, and when an occasional missile struck an adult, the immigrants were lenient, smiled indulgently, and wiped their clothes dry. Few of the established residents, who would of course tolerate no such nonsense, were in the neighborhood of the unprotected open spaces of the Battery. Despite the weather, a holiday atmosphere prevailed, for Christmas was only three days past, and the bare branches of the trees on the rim of the Battery were trimmed with bits of colored cloth in the old Dutch custom.

A few workmen carrying planks of roughhewn lumber straggled into the tiny park and began to erect a platform. The governor of the colony had ordered that the new year be opened with a celebration that would feature a pledge of loyalty to King William and Queen Mary from all of their subjects, and His Excellency intended to administer the oath in person. The platform was made necessary by the presence in the town of Duchess Caroline of Glasgow, cousin of the Queen and the first member of the royal family ever to visit New York. The council of burghers had decided that it would be wrong to ask one of so exalted a rank to stand in the wet snow, and the sum of five pounds had been appropriated for the erection of the stand.

Meanwhile, there was considerable activity aboard a brig riding at anchor a short distance up the mouth of Hudson's River. A swarm of young apprentice laborers wearing distinctive green-tasseled stocking caps were moving up and down the sturdy deck of the four-hundred-and-fifty-foot craft. They were bolting a new cannon into place fore and aft, and a small three-pounder was being lifted into position at the rear of the quarter-deck. The ship herself was trim, for she had just received a fresh coat of dark red paint. Her decks were well

tarred, and gleaming gold-leaf lettering brought out her name, *Bonnie Maid*, in bold relief. Her furled sails had been patched, and mounds of boxes and crates were clustered around an open hatch on her aft deck.

Two young men, both dressed in somber black linsey-woolsey short coats and breeches and wearing the narrow-brimmed hats that identified them as journeymen craftsmen, stood together on the quarter-deck, supervising the work of the apprentices. One, Jeremy Stone, was almost six feet tall and slender. Twenty-seven years old, he seemed older when preoccupied, as he was at the moment. His hair was dark brown, he wore no wig, and a shabby, utilitarian eelskin fastened his queue. The few who ever bothered to glance at his eyes invariably looked at him again, for they were his most arresting feature; gray-green, they indicated an alertness, an intelligence, and a sense of self-confidence rare in one so low in the social and economic scale.

He liked to consider himself as one of the gentry, albeit one who was temporarily dispossessed, and he had actually been born and raised as a gentleman in Cornwall. His mother had died when he had been a baby, and his father, Colonel Bartholomew Stone, had given his son an education, a taste for good living, a boundless ambition, a sound drilling in the art of swordsmanship—and a future without hope. The colonel, with appetites far beyond his purse, had dug himself deep into debt. His creditors had finally lost patience with him, had thrown him into prison as a bankrupt. Heartbroken and humiliated, the old man had taken sick, and the jailers at Newgate had found his body one dull morning. And Jeremy had promptly been sold into bondage and sent to the North American colonies as an indentured servant; the proceeds of the sale, of course, had helped to pay off his father's creditors, and if the procedure was unorthodox and on the shady side of the law, there had been no one to stand and cry "Shame!" in the Commons.

In the seven years of his degradation Jeremy had been flogged and starved, cursed and spat upon, and he had lived only for the day when his servitude would end. That day had proved anticlimactic when it had arrived six months ago, however, for he had been trained as a gunsmith, and nowhere in the colonies but at Martin Smith's Foundry was such work available.

His companion was aware of Jeremy's mood but refrained from speaking about it. Instead this blond giant busied himself with bawling a stream of orders to the apprentices through huge cupped hands. Although Jeremy was fairly tall, Dirk Friendly dwarfed him. It was reputed that he was the tallest

man in the colony, and even if the legend was slightly exaggerated, none could doubt that his size was extraordinary. He was surprisingly agile, however, and there was a perennial twinkle in the very pale eyes that peered out from beneath shaggy blond brows. A jagged scar that extended from his right temple to a point halfway down his cheek belied the mildness of his eyes and contradicted the ever-present grin on his thick lips.

"Lay that there barr'l straight, ye fuddleheaded knaves!" he roared, then turned in sudden exasperation to Jeremy. "If'n ye 'n' me had been that stupid when we was 'pprentices, we'd had our backs laid open, Jerry. I swear t' ye that whilst Friendly's m' name 'n' friendly's m' nature, I've half a mind t' knock some sense into the heads o' them 'dentured buffoons by a-crackin' their skulls t'gether till they c'n hear ev'ry church bell in London a-chimin'."

"What's that, Dirk?" Jeremy motioned to the crew working on the stern gun to tend to business and looked up blankly.

"Like I was a-sayin'," Dirk repeated patiently, "them 'pprentices ain't got the brains they was a-borned with, 'n' I——"

"Oh, of course." Jeremy laughed suddenly. "And you're threatening dire things against them, Dirk. To be sure. You wouldn't lay a birch rod across the back of a single one of them any more than I would. And you know it."

"That ain't all I know," Dirk replied petulantly. "I know ye been a-standin' here rackin' them brains o' yeres, a-tryin' t' work out some new scheme that'll give us a hundred thousand guineas each 'n' make us famous as well. What is it this time, Jerry?" he asked, his tone gently chiding. "Are we a-headin' for the Seneca country 'n' carve us out some farms up Fort Albany way, or are we——"

Color rose slowly in Jeremy's cheeks, and his eyes became a deeper shade of gray. "If anyone but you talked this way, Dirk, I'd run him through."

"If ye had a sword, ye mean."

"If I had a sword." The fire went out of Jeremy. "And I told you last month that my idea of staking out farmland was no good, Dirk. I'm not a farmer, and neither are you. If we walk out of Smith's and head up to the frontier, we'll just be trading one miserable existence for another—and probably get ourselves scalped besides. No, I'm afraid I'm out of schemes at the moment, Dirk. If we could get to some new place where we aren't known—and start life all over again on a different level——"

"Me, I got an idee." Dirk chuckled, and the sound rumbled up from deep within his tremendous frame. "Looka here, Jerry. There's nobuddy aboard this here *Bonnie Maid* except us 'n'

our 'pprentices. Nobuddy, that is, 'ceptin' the mate, Mr. Springer, who's here t' watch us 'n' who's a-settin' down in his cabin a-drinkin' himself groggy on rum b'cause soon as we're finished he's a-leavin' the tub for good 'n' all."

"He hasn't signed on for the next cruise?"

"Nope. He told me he's had a bellyful o' old Cap'n Groliere. There's nobuddy mean as a Frenchie t' work for, he says. Anyways, he'd be happy t' oblige us by clearin' out right now, I reckon. Then us 'n' our 'dentured men could take this here boat 'n' sail her anywheres we like."

Jeremy stared out across the murky waters of Hudson's River and failed to notice the glint of humor in his friend's eyes. "It's not a bad notion, Dirk," he said slowly, "but there are two things wrong with it. In the first place, neither we nor the indentured men know anything about ships, and we probably couldn't sail the *Bonnie Maid* as far as Sandy Hook without cracking her up. We'd be caught sooner or later—probably sooner—and hung in Battery Park over yonder for piracy."

Dirk guffawed and Jeremy looked up at him sharply, drawing back his right fist. Before he could strike, Dirk took hold of his wrist and held him powerless. "Now, now, Jerry," he soothed. "Ye know me, 'n' ye know that no man c'n aim t' hit me without a-gettin' his neck broke. Ye happen t' be luckier'n most, seein' ye saved m' life that time I near fell into old Smith's furnace, not t' mention the other time when ye come t' my help when I got over-big for m' boots 'n' took on all six o' them trappers by m'self in that free-for-all fight. But I'm a-warnin' ye—never raise a hand t' me. Me, I'm sorry I riled ye, right sorry, 'n' I give ye m' word I won't do it again. I know how strong ye feel over not bein' rich 'n' famous like ye want t' be, 'n' even if it don't make sense t' me, I got no call t' be a-rubbin' yer fur the wrong way."

He released the other's wrist, and Jeremy stared at it for a moment, then looked his friend straight in the face. "I'm the one who should do the apologizing, Dirk. You've been the only person I've known in the seven and a half years I've been in the colonies who's been a friend. I don't know what's come over me lately. I——"

"Ye need a woman." Dirk's eyes were twinkling again. Abruptly he turned and bawled a new stream of instructions to the apprentices.

"I'm taking care of that tonight. But it's something more. I'm restless, Dirk—I keep thinking that I'm getting older every day, and I have nothing better to look forward to than becoming a master gunsmith."

"There's worser lives," Dirk remonstrated gently. "Ye eat proper, 'n'——"

"You've never known better, Dirk. I say that with all due apologies. When we hit on the right scheme and you've had a taste of real wealth and power, you'll agree."

Dirk pulled off his hat and scratched his short blond hair. "If ye're so all-fired anxious t' get away, why not sign on t' the *Bonnie Maid* here? The new mate 'n' part o' the crew will be aboard her t'morrow, 'n'——"

"And change the lot of a gunsmith for that of a seaman? No, thank you. I've become accustomed to waiting, so I can wait a little longer, Dirk. I'll wait—until the right chance, the real chance, comes along. And then I'll take hold of it with both hands—and squeeze the living daylights out of it."

Despite the emphatic objections of the taxpaying land-owners who paid the bills, the watch in New York Town had recently been doubled and there were now twenty-eight men, each armed with a stout club, a lantern, and a sash denoting his authority, patrolling the snow-banked streets and paths of the community after sundown in an attempt to keep the peace. But their efforts were feebly inadequate, and the net result was that, although New York's population was slightly below nine thousand, it was fast acquiring a reputation as the most lawless metropolis in the North American colonies. Nevertheless, there was an air of established respectability about the modest homes that crowded both sides of the lane known as the Wall Street, as most of the burghers kept watchdogs to discourage thieves, and the newer dwellings had been built with windows so small that no intruder could squeeze through them.

A new town law sponsored by the merchants who lived on the lane prevented shopkeepers from erecting edifices devoted to commerce there, but nothing could be done to oust Jakob van der Voort's Ordinary, which claimed rights of seniority in the neighborhood. Jan van der Voort, the present owner, had become sufficiently well to do, what was more, that no mere Wall Streeter wanted to incur his enmity by attempting to dispossess him. In addition, the food at the ordinary was too succulent, the beverages too heady for any man who enjoyed eating and drinking to take a chance on being barred from the inn.

The street itself was in a state of constant disrepair, and despite the attempts of the property owners to fill in holes at their own expense, there were deep ruts in the dirt, and the stump of an elm tree in the middle of the road made traffic hazardous, particularly for carriages. As Jeremy Stone walked briskly up the narrow side path reserved for pedestrians, candles winked warmly behind the oiled paper of the windows,

and clear wood smoke poured up through chimneys. Most people had already finished their supper and were settling down for an evening of festivity.

Two men engaging in earnest, slightly drunken conversation approached from the opposite direction. The elder, a portly merchant in his late forties, was wearing an old-fashioned narrow-brimmed hat, a beaver-collared, beaver-lined long cloak, and heavy gauntlets. His companion, of slight build, was bundled in a greatcoat of expensive wool, and his hat was braided in the latest English style. Both wore wigs, and swords dangled from their right sides. Neither seemed aware of Jeremy's presence on the path, and he, swallowing hard, stepped aside into the icy mud of the road itself to let them pass. Raging inwardly, he remained motionless until they had gone by, then resumed his walk, deflated and bitter. Experience had taught him that the lower classes invariably made way for gentlemen, who expected such behavior from mere tradesmen and artisans and who expressed their gratitude by giving every indication that those beneath them were nonexistent. Jeremy had learned a sense of humility through the years, but what galled him most was the sight of the men's swords. He who could best any man in all New York Colony in a duel could not carry a sword without bringing down on his head the ridicule of his fellows at the foundry and the extreme displeasure of his betters, who would be convinced that he was trying to ape them and usurp a place in society not rightfully his.

Still smarting, he swung into the Broad Street, and, as always happened here, his spirits lifted. Travelers insisted that neither Boston nor Charles Towne boasted an avenue more impressive than New York's finest. No one could doubt that these great homes of gray field stone and oak housed the aristocracy: each plot of ground fronted the street for an expanse of at least one hundred feet, and the majority of the dwellings were set back from the road, with a screen of trees separating them from the stares of the casual passer-by.

Odors of cooking from the well-staffed, larder-filled kitchens were unmistakable on the frosty night air, and the Yuletide delicacies of England and Holland were cheerfully mingled with the good things that the New World offered. There were the spicy scents of brandied plum puddings and savory meat pies, roast wild turkey and broiled venison, leg of mutton steeped in wine and partridge barbecued in bear fat, steaming caldrons of clams and lobsters and oysters, bubbling vats of buffalo-and-beefsteak stew. There was the tangy zest of candied apples and of luscious pears heated and sprinkled with cinnamon, of grapes mashed with sweet wine and cooked into

a soft jelly, of sausages stuffed with chopped nuts and raisins, of Dutch cheeses carefully preserved in spice and vinegar-soaked cloth.

The sounds of the revelers were clearly heard through the thick beams and sturdy stones of the walls, the luxurious, hard-to-procure panes of window glass. In spite of himself, Jeremy stopped to listen to one group in the parlor of Cornelius Kirk, who owned lumber mills, shipyards, and a fleet of fishing vessels, and the familiar tune and the words took him back to his childhood, made him hungry for the status and rights that had once been his:

*"Bless us, let the welkin ring,  
Bless our hearth, our home, our King,  
Bless our blessed England's might,  
Bless the Lord, ye sons of Light."*

Digging his hands deep into his pockets, he trudged another eighth of a mile, then turned in at the stone gate of a white two-story house. Carefully skirting around the main building, his boots squeaked on the hard-packed snow as he made for the row of servants' buildings in the rear. He stopped before a low-slung door, removed his stocking cap, and rapped chapped knuckles on the door.

"Who is it?"

"Jeremy Stone." He tried to conceal the irritation in his voice; the minx knew full well who was there, for she had encouraged his call.

"A moment, please."

There were sounds of footsteps and bustling, and Jeremy shivered beneath his thin, inadequate winter garb. He tried to peer in the window, but there was no glass here, merely heavily oiled paper. At last the door swung open, and Peggy Stanley, nursemaid to the children of Sir James Alden, stood revealed in the frame. Her curly dark brown hair hung loosely to her bare shoulders, and as the cold air struck her, she ran slim white hands quickly down her sleeveless low-cut blouse, high laced belt, and voluminous silk figured skirt.

"Come in, Jeremy, or this air will be my death!" she cried, her deep-set brown eyes sparkling and the color rising beneath the smooth, fair skin of her cheeks.

Jeremy shut the door behind him, and with a courtly bow that seemed incongruous in the tiny room he moved to a small fire of pine logs that crackled in a little hearth. The warmth of the blaze made him ache for a brief moment, but he carefully remained directly in front of the fireplace as he turned his back to it. "You look well this evening, Mistress Peggy,"

he said gravely, "uncommon well. I've often heard it said that there is no prettier maid in all New York, and seeing you tonight convinces me beyond all doubt that no truer statement has ever been made." The girl's lush, ripe beauty would help him forget his problems for an evening.

Peggy smiled at the compliment and seated herself with slightly exaggerated grace in one of the two plain chairs the room afforded. "I hope you haven't made extensive plans for this evening, Jeremy," she said lightly, almost too lightly.

"On the contrary." He tried to hold her glance. "I had thought we might go to one of the King Street ordinaries for a bite of food and a pint of ale. But if the weather is too cold for you," he continued boldly, "we could spend the evening right here."

"I'm sorry, Jeremy. Truly I am." There was no sign of sorrow on her face, only uneasiness, and the fingers of her left hand played nervously with the fabric of her skirt as she looked first at the floor, then at the fire.

Jeremy was acutely aware that she had not asked him to sit, but he pretended to notice nothing, tossed his cap onto the neatly folded quilted comforter at the foot of her small bed, then moved to a position directly in front of her. "I'm sorry too, my dear. If I had the funds, there is nothing I'd enjoy more than to take you to the ladies' hall at Jakob van der Voort's, for you deserve no less than the best this drab town can offer. Unfortunately, my purse is slim."

The girl stood, so close to him that a lock of her hair brushed against his shoulder. She pursed her red lips and seemed to consider before speaking, but her elaborate manner was a sign to Jeremy that what she was going to say had been carefully planned and rehearsed. "You don't understand, Jeremy." Her voice was soft, faintly sweet. "I can't spend the evening in your company."

"Oh?" He stiffened, grew tense.

"Sir James has asked me to come to the mansion this evening to discuss the future of the children. Poor man, it isn't easy for him, with a brood of three and Lady Alden dead of the pox."

Jeremy's hands slid around her supple waist, and he tried to draw her to him, but she resisted. "To the devil with Sir James!" he exclaimed. "You work for him from dawn until the children are abed. Surely you have the right to a little time for your own pleasures."

"Sir James is my employer, and I have no choice but to obey his requests," she replied demurely, still struggling to free herself.

His heart pounding, Jeremy attempted without success to

take hold of the lace of her high belt. "Suppose you told Sir James you were engaged for the evening. Suppose you said to him——"

"I wouldn't!" She broke loose, retreated two paces, and stamped a foot. "I had no wish to hurt your feelings, Jeremy, for you seem better-mannered than most of the—the louts who pay court to a children's nannie. But you give me no choice. I know you came here tonight hoping to bed me. But you'll do no such thing tonight—or any other time!" Peggy tossed her curls back defiantly.

"Am I so repulsive to you then?"

"Not *you*, Jeremy. But what you are. It's true that there are no maids prettier than I in New York. I can read, I've learned to write, and I'm quick-witted. Not many have such an abundance of assets, but they'll be wasted unless I husband them in the right way."

"Unless you can catch the right husband, you mean." In spite of himself, Jeremy was growing angry.

Peggy's eyes blazed. "If you wish, yes!" she exclaimed, her voice rising. "I don't care to spend my life in some miserable, crowded cabin, raising a brood of half-wild, uneducated children and working for a man who can scarce support me."

Jeremy raised a hand to stem the flow of words. He agreed heartily with the sentiments she was expressing, and he wanted to tell her so. Perhaps this was the girl who could help him up the ladder, for surely her ambition matched his own.

But he had no opportunity to say anything, for she continued in a rush: "There are so many millers and carpenters and tanners and—and gunsmiths in this world and so few men of standing and quality. I'm worthy of the attention of someone like—like Sir James."

He stared at her for a long minute, saying nothing, scarcely breathing. Then suddenly he reached out quickly, took hold of Peggy's arm, and pulled her to him. Sitting on the edge of her bed, he wrenched her over his knees, backside up, and proceeded to spank her thoroughly, putting the full strength of his sinewy muscles into each blow. The girl screamed and struggled, tried to bite and scratch, and finally unleashed a torrent of curses. Only when her struggles ceased did he stop, as abruptly as he had begun.

Without a word to Peggy, who was now gazing at him with shining eyes as she struggled to her feet, he walked out into the night, slamming the door hard behind him. His rage was unabated, but he felt slightly ashamed, knowing that what he had just done was futile, totally unsatisfying. He heard the door open, then Peggy called to him softly, but he did not slow his step or look back.

He started in the direction of King Street, vaguely realizing that he had eaten no supper and that he needed some food and a drink before going back to the dingy room he shared with Dirk. The streets became narrower, and occasionally he stumbled over debris carelessly thrown into the road. Suddenly, some yards ahead and off to the left, he heard a cry for help and he responded automatically, breaking into a run. Some twenty yards in front of him was the opening into an alleyway, where he dimly saw the figure of a man lying on the ground some feet inside the alley. Three other masculine figures were bent over him, dropping and scattering papers. One of the men was holding a thick leather pouch purse and was gleefully swinging it to and fro.

Jeremy moved cautiously into the alley. The man on the ground was sprawled in a grotesque heap, breathing heavily with his eyes closed. In the trampled snow beside him was his sword, still in its scabbard and attached to its belt, which the men had removed in order to tear the purse loose. The biggest of the trio of footpads, with gray-streaked hair and beard, looked up sharply as he heard Jeremy's steps on the snow.

"You!" he barked in a rasping voice. "Get out o' here!"

"If'n you know what's good for you, get!" echoed the man who held the purse. "This here one," he added, pointing a grimy forefinger at the figure on the ground, "done us the favor o' droppin' off peaceable-like, all by hisself. But we might get a mite rough with a nosy like you. Go mind your own affairs and you'll be healthy enough in the mornin' t' go t' work in your cobbler shop. Get, now. We ain't goin' t' warn you again."

A spasm of rage shook Jeremy: even criminals brushed him aside as a lowly artisan. A cobbler, indeed! He'd show them!

Leaping forward, he bent down, scooped up the unconscious victim's sword, and drew it from its sheath. It was a good blade—long, with a balanced hilt, and he switched it experimentally, secretly rejoicing at the feel of the weapon in his hand. The footpads, thoroughly alarmed, were on their feet in an instant, and Jeremy saw that the leader carried a heavy club in his right hand. The man's face was working, and he spat into the snow.

"We don't like killin' when we don't have t' kill," he snarled. "But you don't seem t' know when you're well off, cobbler."

While he spoke, the silent member of the trio stooped down and lifted some large object from the ground. The man's hand drew back, and he hurled a large brick straight at Jeremy. The young one-time gentleman ducked instinctively, and the missile grazed his head before crashing into a wooden wall behind him. The move threw him off balance, and before he

could recover, two of the thugs rushed him. The man who had not spoken grappled with him, and Jeremy pulled back his left fist, then smashed it hard into the criminal's face. The fellow staggered back, and Jeremy was quietly grateful for the physical strength he had acquired in his years as an indentured gunsmith. The fleeting, ironic thought crossed his mind that few gentlemen were endowed with such muscles.

The silent footpad skidded on the ice and crashed into his companion who held the moneybag, just as the latter was about to leap for Jeremy's throat. The criminal struggled to regain his footing, and in that instant Jeremy's sword flicked out and expertly severed the thongs at the top of the bag. Coins spilled out into the snow, and the man's drive lost its impact; he stood indecisively, undecided whether to press his attack against the intruder or to recover the silver and gold pieces that lay on the ground.

Jeremy determined the issue for him: the long sword whipped out again, pinked the thug in the shoulder, and drew blood. Then, without losing speed, it swept down and sliced open the breeches of the silent man, who in trying to scramble to his feet unwisely presented his backside as a target. The cut across his buttocks gave his efforts added zest, and he leaped to his feet, then fled down the alleyway. Meantime the fellow who had sustained the shoulder wound withdrew more slowly, holding the bleeding flesh with his other hand and cursing under his breath as he backed away.

Only the leader remained now, and he stood warily, feet planted apart, out of reach of the sword as he held the heavy wooden club firmly in his right hand. He began to swing it slowly, and an unpleasant leer appeared on his face as his eyes met Jeremy's. "So you c'n handle a sword, eh, cobbler? You've bought'n yourself a long tin toy somewheres, and you've gone out t' the woods o' upper Manhattan 'n' practiced when you thought nobody was about t' watch, eh? 'N' now you think you're goin' t' step in 'n' take the booty from this drunken pig of a rich cull, now I 'n' my lads have done all the work. Think you these things, eh? You've another think com'in', cobbler!"

The club was swinging rapidly now, and Jeremy, sword poised, realized that in another moment the criminal leader would let fly with the heavy piece of wood; from the expert way in which he handled it, there was little doubt that he had used it as a weapon in this peculiar manner before and was talking so determinedly merely in order to distract Jeremy's attention. There was no choice but to strike first, and as the man's arm came up, Jeremy lunged forward. Despite the half-

light of the moon, his aim was unerring and the point of the blade sank into the man's wrist.

Screaming in pain, the burly footpad dropped his club and scurried off. Jeremy watched him until he was out of sight, then at last turned to the figure sprawled on the ground. As he did so he absently stuck the naked sword into his belt, and it felt good there. Dropping to one knee, he looked at the man who was lying so quietly. The thieves had not, apparently, hurt him in any way, for there was no blood on his face or clothes, no swelling anywhere on his head. In fact, he was breathing evenly and deeply and seemed to be perspiring slightly. Jeremy leaned a bit closer, then grinned. The odor of liquor was heavy on the victim's breath; he was, in short, dead drunk.

Despite his condition he was a gentleman, for his suit was made of fine wool, his short cape was beaver-lined, and his boots were cunningly fashioned of a soft leather and could have been made nowhere but in London. A short mustache and a protruding nose were the most prominent features of what seemed in repose to be a dissolute and undistinguished face. In his thirties, the man had not bothered to shave for a day or two, but his linen, despite the spattering of snow, was clean and fresh.

Jeremy moved quickly, for the footpads might return or, even worse, a member of the watch might stumble on him and he would have the greatest difficulty proving that he himself was not a robber. Hurriedly he picked up all the coins he could find in the snow and stuffed them into the unconscious man's pockets. Then he gathered the various papers and documents that were scattered about the alleyway and held them up to the pale light, frowning. If he could find some clue as to the man's identity, he could take him home, but the ink was badly smudged. He was beginning to despair and was wondering whether to desert the drunken gentleman and take himself elsewhere, when he came upon a folded, stiff letter on heavy paper. Opening it, he found that despite streaks here and there he could make out the handwriting, which was large and bold. He held the paper up to the light and squinted at it.

*Hon. Terence Bartlett  
Van der Voort's Ordinary  
The Wall Street.  
Honored Sir:*

*It has come to the attention of the undersigned that you are nephew to Sir Arthur Bartlett, Their Majesties' Governor-General in the Royal West Indian Colonies.*

*As you are doubtless aware, Her Grace, Caroline, Duchess of Glasgow, cousin to Her Majesty, Queen Mary, is at present in New York Town, concluding a brief visit to the North American Colonies. As Her Grace is shortly departing for Port Royal, Jamaica, where she will be the guest of Sir Arthur, she and you have common interests.*

*I shall call upon you to discuss these matters with you in person at Nine o'Clock in the evening on the Twenty-Eighth Day of December, if I may. I should appreciate word from you through your equerry or valet if this Date and Hour are convenient.*

*Until that Hour, then, and in anticipation of Meeting you,*

*I am, sir,*

*Your humble Servant, etc.,  
Ian MacGregor  
Bart.*

*Signed and Sealed at the Residence of His Excellency, Governor of the Royal Colony of New York, on this, the Twenty-Seventh Day of December in the year Sixteen Hundred and Ninety-One.*

Jamming the paper into his own pocket, Jeremy bent over and picked up the unconscious Terence Bartlett. They were about the same height and weight, and he staggered slightly under his load. But it was not too far to Van der Voort's Ordinary, and a wild, audacious scheme began to form in his mind. It was obvious from the tenor of the letter he had just read that Sir Ian MacGregor had never met Bartlett. Today was the twenty-eighth of December, it was not yet nine in the evening, and the baronet's call was still ahead. A young man who used his wits and who took proper advantage of anything in the situation that might accrue to his advantage could perhaps lift himself out of the rut into which circumstance had pushed him.

Despite the thoughts that raced around in his head and made his burden lighter, he was panting by the time he reached the ordinary and kicked open the unlatched door. One of the younger Van der Voorts, a barrel-chested man with the family inclination to chubbiness, was standing just inside, watching the guests in the common room. His glance flickered toward Jeremy and the man thrown over his shoulder. Terence Bartlett was snoring gently, but Van der Voort's expression did not change. It was apparent that the sight of his boarder in this condition did not surprise him.

"Take him oop to de landing," he said, nodding toward the staircase on his left. "His iss de t'ird door on de far side."

Jeremy said nothing, shifted Bartlett's weight slightly, and started up the stairs. As he approached the door that the host had indicated, it opened and a slightly built, middle-aged man-servant in black livery stood in the frame. At the sight of his master his eyes widened and his face contorted in dismay. He did not move, and Jeremy shouldered him aside and moved into a small but comfortably furnished sitting room. Dumping Bartlett unceremoniously onto a low divan, the young gunsmith turned to face the servant.

"Thank you for bringing Master Bartlett home," the man said, speaking with as much dignity as he could muster. "I'm sure that when he is—ah—himself again, he will wish to give you some small reward for your——"

"That will be unnecessary." Jeremy drew himself up proudly.

The servant blinked and shook his head; something seemed to be very much on his mind. "Is he too—ah—ill to be awakened and made presentable?"

Jeremy grinned. "You know more about his habits than I do, but it seems to me he's going to sleep the night through."

"I knew it! I knew it!" The little man's agitation increased, and he wrung his hands helplessly. "I begged him not to go out tonight! I begged him to stay here and not drink a drop of sack until—— Oh, what can I do now?"

"You're worried about the meeting with Sir Ian MacGregor." Jeremy's voice was quiet.

"How did you know he is to receive a call from Sir Ian?"

Bristling at the other's tone, Jeremy glared at him. "It was necessary for me to examine the papers in his possession to learn his identity. As he was being robbed by cutthroats when I found him and was obviously in no position to defend himself, his papers and his money were scattered on the ground of a filthy alleyway. If you'll examine them, I think you'll find everything intact and in order."

The servant gulped and stared hard. Jeremy's uncompromising tone, his cultured accents, and his erect, almost arrogant bearing were a direct contradiction of his attire, and the man seemed to take full notice of him for the first time. "I beg your pardon, sir," was the slow reply. "I had no intention of impugning your motives. I—I had no notion I was addressing a gentleman of quality. Your clothes—ah—you'll forgive me, sir. But you can understand my predicament. Only this afternoon I carried Master Bartlett's acceptance to Sir Ian at the governor's palace. And Sir Ian is not a man with whom one trifles, I can tell you. He's chamberlain to Her Grace of Glasgow, and—and you know how quick the royal Stuarts are to take offense at the least slight. I'm near frantic."

I can tell you, sir! Sir Ian will be here soon, and with Master Bartlett in no condition to receive him, I don't know what to——"

"Have they ever met before?" Jeremy's eyes narrowed. "Has Sir Ian or any member of the entourage made your master's acquaintance—or has he been presented to the Duchess herself, perchance?"

"N-no, sir." The servant did not yet see where the conversation was leading. "He was invited to last week's rout and to the governor's Christmas assembly, but his—ah—health did not permit him to attend."

The young gunsmith smiled faintly, then turned his face away so the man could not see the eagerness in his eyes. "I think I can help you solve your predicament. Your name, my man?"

"Hamilton, sir."

"Now then, Hamilton." How easy it was to fall back into the old patterns. "Your Master Bartlett and I seem about the same height, and though he may be a bit heavier than I, especially around the middle, I dare say I could wear his clothes."

The servant's brows rose in alarm. "Are you proposing, sir, that you impersonate Master Bartlett?"

"Precisely. Do you happen to know why Sir Ian is intending to pay him this visit?"

"I know no more than was contained in his letter. And you've already seen that, sir." Hamilton was on guard now.

Jeremy smiled disarmingly. "There's precious little harm I could do by pretending for an hour or so to be Terence Bartlett. Yes, and I could do him only a small fraction of the injury he'll do himself if the Duchess's chamberlain finds him in this besotted state, no matter how badly I might bungle."

Running his fingers over his carefully waved gray hair, the servant pondered for a moment. The temptation was plainly a great one, but there was one thing he did not understand. "Why are you willing to do this for Master Bartlett, sir? I don't recall seeing you here before, so you're not one of his old friends. There's some risk involved if Sir Ian should ever learn of this masquerade, and——"

"I'll chance that. The odds are small, very small indeed." Jeremy shrugged, then deliberately yawned. "As for my reasons, say that I'm bored with my life. There's no time to tell you the story of how I happen to be—as I seem to be—but let it suffice that I'd enjoy play-acting for an evening. And as time is pressing, you'll need to decide quickly, for Her Grace's officer will soon arrive." He sauntered casually toward the frosted-glass windows, feigning indifference.

Watching him, Hamilton came to a decision. There was no doubt that this stranger had the air and manners of a gentleman, and there was nothing he could do to harm Terence Bartlett, provided he did not commit the sleeping man to some undesirable or unwanted course of action. On the other hand, tipping the scales strongly in favor of the deception was the undeniable fact that if Sir Ian were turned away at the door there might be innumerable repercussions and embarrassments.

"All right, sir. I—I accept your kind offer." The servant sighed, relieved that he had committed himself to a course of action. "You—will of course say nothing and do nothing that might cause—ah—complications for Master Bartlett?" The question was asked deprecatingly, with a lift of brows.

"To be sure." Jeremy answered in a murmur and evaded the other's eye.

"And when Master Bartlett is himself again, whom shall I say helped him out in his—ah—time of trouble?"

"My name is Stone, Jeremy Stone. I've never before had the pleasure of meeting Bartlett, but I dare say our paths will cross again someday." Jeremy was slightly surprised at the ease with which he could speak the glib, insincere words. "Now, if you don't mind, I think I'd better change into something worthy of our distinguished guest."

He followed Hamilton into a chamber in which a huge four-poster bed and a large wardrobe dominated, and within a few minutes he was suitably attired in green silk breeches, a ruffled jacket of scarlet and white, silver-buckled pumps, and white silk stockings. He refrained from fingering the expensive cloth, and as he surveyed himself in the long French glass attached to the wardrobe he was pleased to note that Terence Bartlett's clothes fitted him uncommonly well. A few moments later he and Hamilton dragged Bartlett, now sunk even deeper in sleep, into the bedroom, deposited him on the bed, and loosened his soiled doubtlet.

And when the expected tap came at the door of the little drawing room, Jeremy was seated negligently in a chair, a long pipe and a glass of sack at his elbow, a slim, unbound volume of essays on his lap. He pretended to be engrossed as he heard a deep, stylish thick drawl with a faint trace of Scottish burr.

"Good evening, my man. I am expected?"

"You are, Sir Ian. Come in, Sir Ian." There was a slight tremor in the servant's voice, but he controlled himself admirably as he bowed the baronet into the room, then coughed delicately. "Sir Ian MacGregor, Master Bartlett."

Jeremy shut the book slowly and stood. He found himself

**looking at a man of about his own height, whose solid, muscular frame was not hidden beneath a gaudy suit of tufted white silk into which were woven threads of gold. In his early thirties, Sir Ian was an impressive figure. His thick, wavy black hair was his own, his black eyes were quick and penetrating, his cheekbones and jawline were broad and firm, and his nose was thin and hawklike. Flipping off his black, beaver-collared cape but keeping his broad-brimmed, plumed hat firmly on his head, he advanced into the room, extending his right hand and smiling. There was something unusual about that smile, for it reflected neither friendliness nor warmth as he drew back his lips and exposed a double row of large, even teeth.**

"Welcome, Sir Ian." Jeremy moved toward the guest. "You have no idea of how much I have been looking forward to this visit."

Relief was written on Hamilton's face as he withdrew discreetly into the bedchamber, quickly drawing the door shut after him to prevent the Scottish baronet from glimpsing the sleeping figure within. Jeremy noted, however, that the door was quietly reopened an infinitesimal crack; Terence Bartlett's servant was going to eavesdrop on the conversation.

"Master Bartlett, your servant." Sir Ian's fingers were strong, but his hand was cold and his grip was perfunctory.

"Sit down, won't you? Perhaps you'll join me in a glass of sack. It's not the best, but one cannot import better from London these days. The fear of a new French war has cut our shipping to a minimum of late." Jeremy was beginning to enjoy himself; he knew about the decrease in shipping only because gunpowder had been increasingly scarce in recent weeks.

"Thank you, no. Her Grace is being entertained at an early dinner, and I must return to the governor's palace as soon as our business is completed." Sir Ian's gaze flickered first at Jeremy, then at the half-empty glass on the table beside him. The deliberate blankness in the Scotsman's eyes was eloquent, and it was all too clear that Terence Bartlett's fame as a heavy drinker had reached the ears of the chamberlain to the Duchess of Glasgow.

Although the indirect slur was intended for someone other than himself, Jeremy bristled. "We have business together, then?" he asked coolly, picking up the glass and taking a large swallow.

"That is my hope, Master Bartlett." MacGregor smoothed an almost invisible wrinkle in his tight breeches. "It is our understanding, Her Grace's and mine, that you are a nephew to Sir Arthur Bartlett, Their Majesties' governor general in the West Indies."

"True enough." Jeremy nodded blithely, scarcely able to conceal a smile. Virtually everyone in the colonies knew of Sir Arthur, the top-ranking administrator of the Crown in the Western Hemisphere, whose exploits in the Near East on behalf of England had preceded him to the New World.

"You, then, are the man we seek. Her Grace is sailing for Port Royal in a few days' time, and it is her feeling that it would be a compliment to Sir Arthur if one of his family were a member of her suite."

"Oh?" Jeremy's heart began to pound.

"I shall be frank with you, Master Bartlett." Sir Ian leaned forward in his chair and spoke earnestly. "Her Grace has another reason for desiring your company on this journey. She must engage in considerable business of state with the governor general. But it is not seemly for a member of the house of Stuart, a blood cousin to Her Majesty, to lower herself to the level of a mere hireling, no matter what his rank. Therefore, it is her thought that much of the actual negotiation should be conducted by others. You have come—well recommended, and as a relative to Sir Arthur, you would doubtless be highly acceptable to him, more so than almost anyone else."

"I see." Actually Jeremy didn't see at all; he knew only that if he were sufficiently bold he could alter the course of his life.

"And your answer, Master Bartlett?"

The door leading to the bedchamber opened another fraction of an inch, and Jeremy could guess at the agitation of Terence Bartlett's manservant. If he replied that he would accept, Hamilton would undoubtedly burst into the room and denounce him as an impostor. He would have to stall for time; what was more, as the Duchess was remaining in New York for three days, he would have to work out some way of continuing the pretense that he was Bartlett until they were safely at sea, and that would require careful planning and execution.

"I am afraid this is not a matter that can be decided hastily, Sir Ian," he said slowly, and was relieved to note that the door into the adjoining room closed gently again. "There are too many factors to be considered, so I can't give you an immediate reply."

"But you are interested?" The Scotsman tugged at his hat-brim.

"Oh yes." Jeremy tried to sound careless, almost indifferent.

"Perhaps Her Grace will receive you and will discuss the idea further with you herself." There was no denying Sir Ian's persistence.

"I'd be honored to meet Her Grace."

"Could you accompany me now? I might persuade Her Grace to spare a few moments for the interview before the dinner party." The baronet rose, and his eyes never left Jeremy's.

The gunsmith smiled brightly. "There's nothing I'd like better," he declared warmly, thinking that nothing he had said to Sir Ian was truer. Standing, he turned toward the door to the bedchamber. "Hamilton!" he called sharply.

The man appeared with alacrity. "My hat and cloak, please," Jeremy said quickly, blandly ignoring the look of consternation on the servant's face. "Oh, and my sword. Hurry, man. Hurry!" he added as Hamilton stood indecisively, and he added emphasis to his words by scowling fiercely.

Sir Ian noticed nothing unusual about the valet's manner, however, and as the man raced off to do his "master's" bidding the baronet strolled idly about the room. Jeremy, watching him out of the corner of his eye, saw that he was taking in everything: the row of partly empty bottles and decanters in a griled cupboard, the few books scattered on shelves, the bric-a-brac and ash receptacles, even the lone crude painting on the wall.

Hamilton, looking violently disturbed, hurried back into the room, and as he helped Jeremy into the cloak, he managed to whisper, "Please, Master Stone! Do not commit Master Bartlett to anything."

Jeremy pretended not to hear him. He jammed Terence Bartlett's hat on his head, feeling a faint trace of annoyance because it was too small. After buckling on the sword, he waved Sir Ian ahead of him, and as he himself was walking through the open door, he turned, grinned, and gave Hamilton an almost imperceptible wink.

## CHAPTER TWO:

# January 1692

CAROLINE, Duchess of Glasgow, had stunned, then conquered the heart of every male in the New World who had seen her, and Jeremy Stone was no exception. Standing before her in the small sitting room of the governor's palace in which she had received him, he felt slightly lightheaded and his blood pounded. He felt awkward and gauche; he knew he

was staring rudely at the Duchess and he was afraid that she would consider his clothes, Terence Bartlett's suit of which he had been so proud only a few minutes before, to be no more than shabby provincial finery. But in spite of his fears he could not tear his gaze from her.

Caroline was exceptionally tall for a woman, though small-boned, and her figure was slim and supple. She had reason to be proud of her body, and her gown did nothing to conceal it. Made of several layers of a white, gauzelike silk, the dress hugged every curve. Her arms, shoulders, and neck were bare, save for a priceless emerald necklace and matching bracelet. The gown was unique, almost shocking in one respect: unlike the floor-touching garments in vogue among women of every class in the colonies, it featured a skirt that ended at the calves of her shapely legs and showed off her slim ankles and dainty feet encased in gold, diamond-studded sandals.

Her hair was long and was elaborately arranged in a series of ascending soft waves topped by a mound of curls. Her mouth was red and full and ripe, and her eyes were large and a deep blue in color. Her only concession to the French craze for cosmetics was a star-shaped beauty mark attached to the smooth surface of her right cheekbone. In fact, the sole flaw in her loveliness was her Stuart chin, which was a trifle too long, too jutting, too strong. She was sleek but feminine, regal but not imperious, patrician but mild and sweet. While it was difficult to judge her age, she seemed no more than twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age.

She allowed Jeremy to gape at her and coolly, shrewdly, took stock of him. At last she spoke, and her voice was high, clear, and resonant, the voice of one accustomed to a constant round of public appearances. "You may sit, Master Bartlett. Sir Ian, you will perhaps oblige us by leaving us alone with our guest."

Sir Ian frowned and shook his head slightly. "If I may say so, Your Grace——"

"You may not." Despite the rebuke, Caroline remained soft and pleasant. "We wish to speak with Master Bartlett alone."

Blood rose in the dark Scotsman's face, but he bowed low, then backed out of the chamber. He touched his hand to the latch, then rather pointedly removed his fingers and left the door ajar. The Duchess's finely drawn brows rose a small fraction of an inch; otherwise she seemed in no wise perturbed by what could have been nothing less than a deliberate insult. Apparently dismissing her chamberlain from her mind, she smiled at Jeremy and a dimple appeared in her cheek just below the beauty mark. "You were good to disrupt the pleas-

ures of your evening to come to me on such short notice, Master Bartlett."

"Not at all, Your Grace," Jeremy said. "I am honored, deeply honored, to be received by you." He was still on his feet, and when Caroline motioned him to a straight-backed, carved chair opposite her, he sat down abruptly.

"You have learned from Sir Ian of our departure for Port Royal in the West Indian islands within three days and of our hope that you will accompany us?" Despite the ease with which Caroline received him, her manner left no doubt that she was constantly aware of her position, of her heritage.

"Yes, Your Grace. Sir Ian has told me of your desires." He found himself wondering how a member of the house of Stuart would react to a kiss, and with an effort forced himself to concentrate on the conversation at hand.

"We need your assistance on this journey, Master Bartlett. There is the tall and small of the matter. There is much of a confidential nature that must be discussed with your uncle, Sir Arthur; we cannot tell you the nature of these topics at the present moment, but you have come highly recommended, and we are sure that you could act in our behalf when we cannot act ourself. It is sometimes less than convenient to claim the Queen of England as kin." She leaned forward, smiled again, and lowered her voice. "To be truthful with you, Master Bartlett, my station often hampers me in the performance of my duty. Will you help me?"

"I—I'm flattered, Your Grace." She was so close that Jeremy caught a breath of the pungent but elusive scent she used, and he became flustered.

But Caroline thought his hesitation stemmed from another cause. "Naturally you would be asked to do nothing that would prove a strain on you or your resources, Master Bartlett. Your passage and all of your expenses would be paid, of course. And in return for your time it would please us to make you a gift of fifty guineas."

Only with the greatest of will power was Jeremy able to conceal his amazement. Not only was he being offered an opportunity beyond his wildest dreams, but would be paid more than he could earn as a journeyman gunsmith in many months of dreary, hard labor. "I—I'm overwhelmed, Your Grace," he managed to stammer, and thought he had never spoken truer.

To his further surprise the Duchess nodded, as though she had never doubted her ability to convince him his place was with her party. "I must be honest with you always, Master Bartlett, for that is my code. And I would be less than fair if I did not warn you."

"Warn me, Your Grace?" It was almost impossible to keep pace with this bewildering royal lady.

"Warn you, Master Bartlett. It has come to our ears that you have—shall we say—a never-sated thirst for sack. Remember that we have not—as we might have done—commanded you to drop your affairs here in order to accompany us but have merely requested your presence in our company, much as lesser folk might ask. Let that suffice as proof of Stuart leniency and Stuart consideration for others. Do not give us cause to show you the other side of the coin."

Jeremy stirred uncomfortably at the prospect of filling another man's boots, for the calm contempt in Caroline's lovely eyes was disturbing. "Your Grace need fear neither my sobriety nor my loyalty," he murmured, and unconsciously ran his hand through his thick brown hair.

"Then we shall say no more about it." The imperiousness seemed to melt out of Caroline. She lifted a small bell from a table beside her with long, tapering fingers, and when a servant appeared in the doorframe she directed, "Ask Lord Murray to attend us, please." Her attention turned back to Jeremy, and the dimple appeared in her cheek once more. "After my little sermon, Master Bartlett, would you think it unfair if we seal our agreement with a small glass?"

Jeremy could not be sure if she was serious or if she was mocking him impishly. He decided to take no chances; it was suddenly of great importance to him that Caroline of Glasgow thought well of him. "I have no need for spirits in Your Grace's presence," he declared gallantly, then continued even more boldly, "The prospect of seeing Your Grace over an extended period of time is more than sufficient exhilaration for one evening."

Caroline's brows rose again, but there was a distinct twinkle in her eyes. "Those who reported you to me were somewhat less than thorough, Master Bartlett," she said softly. "They gave me no inkling that you were of a Cavalier bent of mind or that you were a disciple of the Cavalier poets."

Jeremy rose quickly to the situation. Grinning almost impudently, he quoted:

*"No fairer flower has e'er her petals opened wide,  
No night star shines so radiantly, oh Heaven's bride."*

For the first time the Duchess seemed to become aware of him as a man. She leaned forward slightly in her chair, her eyes fastened on Jeremy's, her lips parted, and there was a faint increase in the speed of her breathing. Jeremy's head began to throb and he returned her gaze unblinkingly. For

the first time since he had entered the room he felt himself on an equal footing with this fascinating, lovely, and powerful woman.

At that instant a newcomer strode into the room. He was a small, wiry young man wearing a glossy powdered wig and a cream-colored suit of stiff satin. A diamond-and-ruby ring flashed on the hand that rested elegantly on the golden hilt of a ceremonial sword, and diamonds twinkled on the buckles of his shoes. To compensate for his lack of height, the soles of his pumps were an inch thick, and two-inch red heels gave him even greater stature. He would have been handsome had it not been for a small purple birthmark that began at his right temple and extended, crescent-shaped, in a curve around his eye to the bridge of his nose.

His features were thin, his nose straight, and his lips firm. Yet despite his gaudy attire there was nothing feline about him; anyone meeting the steady look in his gray eyes knew that here was a man. He advanced straight to Caroline, bowed civilly, and stood erect again. At no time did he look at Jeremy.

The Duchess favored the man with a blinding smile. "Lord Murray," she said, "I present Master Terence Bartlett."

"Your servant, sir." The Scottish noble's eyes showed a spark of real interest. The name of Terence Bartlett was not unknown to him, then, and he had some notion of why this colonial stranger was here.

"I am honored, milord." Jeremy measured his own bow by the depth of the other's.

"He has accepted your offer, Your Grace?"

"He has, Thomas. And I have asked you here not only to meet him, but to bind our bargain. Will you be kind enough to pay him ten guineas, please?" Caroline spoke lightly, airily, as though a discussion of money was something so beneath her that it should be dismissed as rapidly and unobtrusively as possible.

Jeremy was elated, for if he was to continue with the masquerade as Terence Bartlett, he would certainly need funds at once. Nevertheless, he felt it necessary to protest, as any true gentleman would do. "There is no need to reduce this transaction to a mercenary level, Your Grace," he protested. "Surely the funds can wait."

"Nonsense!" Caroline waved her slim hand airily. "There are those in the family who claim that the word of a Stuart is enough to bind any bargain, but I say that a business arrangement is a business arrangement. You'll receive your next payment when the *Bonnie Maid* strikes land at Jamaica, and the remainder when your service to me is ended. We shall sail with the afternoon tide three days hence, Master Bartlett,

and I shall expect you on board at least an hour before that time."

"I'll be there, Your Grace." Jeremy sensed that the interview was coming to an end.

The Duchess held out her hand to him, and her skin was cool and smooth. "I trust we will come to know each other better in the days ahead, Master Bartlett," she said, and though her eyes seemed frank and open, her tone was faintly mocking. "The long journey to the Indies promises to be interesting."

Two candles flickered, then flared again in their sockets, and the roughhewn boards of knotted pine stood out in bold relief. The furniture was plain, cheap, and drab: a small table stood in one corner, and on it was a pitcher of water; an unpainted, crude highboy leaned dispiritedly against the wall next to a window covered with thick oiled paper; the greater part of the chamber was filled with a huge, sagging bed, and on it Jeremy Stone lay sprawled, his clasped hands pillowing his head. He ignored the rhythmic protesting squeaks of the sagging floor boards as Dirk Friendly paced up and down the length of the little cell, his long legs covering the distance in four strides each way.

"I tell ye, Jerry—ye're daft! Ye're mad, mad as the loonies, and ye should be locked in chains with the rest of 'em in the old bear pits over on Amsterdam Way! Ye'll end in prison, and they'll keep ye there for the next fifty year! Ye can't go play-actin', makin' off like ye're someone ye're not, 'specially when ye're a-dealin' with sech high-quality folk like the Duchess o' Glaskie. Use what little head ye got left, Jerry! That there Duchess is kinfolk t' Queen Mary, that's who! I c'n see her 'n' King Willum a-haulin' ye afore their throne, roastin' yer hide proper, 'n' then sendin' ye off t' the Tower o' Lunnon 'n' choppin' off yer damn-fool head from that there skinny neck it's a-hangin' from. And that ain't all. I c'n see my head on a pike right next. Yuh. 'N' folks who knew me'll say, 'That there was Dirk Friendly. Don't he look nat'ral, now?' That ain't how I want t' look. I aim t' keep lookin' nat'ral as I do right now, with my head 'n' my body joined t'gether proper-like."

Jeremy feigned a yawn. "Are you all through talking, Dirk?" He pursed his lips together and began to whistle a Highland marching song.

"No, I ain't through, and well ye know it! I been tellin' ye for years that yer ambition would be the death o' ye someday, and now ye're a-fixin' t' make it the death o' me too."

Propping himself on one elbow, Jeremy scowled, and the

humor left his eyes. "What do you call the life we have now, Dirk? We'd be better off dead, and make no mistake about it. After seven years of bullying and starvation we've been made journeymen! That's wonderful, that is! We're living in luxury now, aren't we? Can't you get it into that thick skull of yours that it will be another ten years before we'll even qualify as master gunsmiths? And even then we'll have to stay on with old Smith, unless we want to go off somewhere and start a foundry of our own. Yes, and that would be impossible, for it would cost more money than we'll ever see as journeymen to buy forges and build furnaces and import the molds and equipment we'd need. My mind is made up, Dirk. I'm taking the gamble of impersonating Terence Bartlett, and that's final. If you're with me, there's nothing I'd like better. If not, I'll bid you good-by."

Dirk stopped his pacing and wiped his hands on his thread-bare breeches. "I can't let ye go it alone, Jerry. Ye'll swing from a gibbet all the sooner if I leave ye t' the mercies o' the world." He paused, and when he spoke again there was acute distress evident in his deep bass rumble. "But why must I act like I'm yer manservant? Why can't I make like I'm a friend o' this here Bartlett's, or——"

"I've explained it twice, and I'll tell you once more," Jeremy said patiently, sitting upright. "Terence Bartlett was asked to make this voyage. The Duchess did *not* ask him to bring a friend so he'd not be lonesome." In order to spare Dirk's feelings he refrained from adding that the big man could under no circumstances pass as a gentleman and that he could logically participate in the ruse only in the guise of a servant.

"What about the feller who's workin' for the real Bartlett?" Dirk showed definite signs of weakening.

"Unfortunately, Hamilton will be detained." A trace of a smile appeared at the corner of Jeremy's mouth. "Terence Bartlett will be waited upon by someone else. Don't be so glum, Dirk. Just think of it—you'll be able to use your own name!"

"Ye were speakin' o' this here feller Hamilton. Ye've told me how Sir Ian MacGregor had seen him afore t'night and that it was Hamilton presentin' ye t' Sir Ian made his high 'n' mightyship b'lieve ye really was Bartlett. How ye goin' t' slide around me a-bein' with ye 'stead o' this here Hamilton?"

Jeremy rose and waved a hand deprecatingly. "That will be the easiest of our problems, Dirk. I'll simply say that Hamilton considers himself too old and too delicate for a long sea voyage and a sojourn in wild tropical parts. I'll say that you've been in the service of my family for years, that I consider you

completely trustworthy, and that you're accompanying me. There'll be no trouble on that score."

"Ah, but how d'ye know they'll let ye bring any kind o' servant with ye?" Thinking he had scored a point, Dirk's voice rose to a slightly higher pitch.

"I asked Lord Murray if I could bring my man with me. Or rather, I worded it in such a way that it seemed as though I assumed it. He agreed as a matter of course."

There was a moment's pause, then Dirk held out his hand. "There ain't none c'n argue around ye when ye have yer mind set, Jerry, and that's sure. I reckon I ain't a-goin' t' have much choice. So we'll be off t' foreign parts t'gether, ye in fancy clothes 'n' me in livery. I ain't for it, I'm dead set agin it, but I'll be with ye all the way. 'N' may the Lord have mercy on the both o' us."

It was mid-morning when Jeremy, still wearing Terence Bartlett's clothes, and Dirk Friendly, uncomfortable in a suit of gray livery that looked skimpy on his tremendous frame, climbed the stairs of Van der Voort's Ordinary. The common room was deserted, and there were no sounds of activity anywhere. Jeremy covered two steps at a time and hummed softly under his breath, but his companion lagged some feet behind.

"Hold on there, Jerry. Not so fast," the big man grumbled. "These here hired breeches'll split sure as there's deer on this here island."

"Never mind, Dirk." Jeremy spoke over his shoulder without slackening his pace. "You'll be the best-dressed valet in the colonies when the tailor finishes your new clothes."

"Meantime this ain't the kind o' weather when a man ought to go showin' his rear end, Jerry. And I don't see why you're so all-fired anxious t' get us into this mess, anyways. Take another day t' think things over, 'n' by t'morrow mornin' you'll be right in the head again, mebbe."

Jeremy paused outside the door to Terence Bartlett's suite of rooms and turned to face his reluctant friend. "It's too late to back out now, Dirk. I accepted money from Lord Murray last night, and if I tried to turn back they could have me put under arrest. So—here we go. And remember, let me do the talking." Without further ado he rapped sharply on the door.

There was a long wait, then the sound of approaching footsteps sounded from within, and at last the door swung open. The sober face of Hamilton lighted when he saw Jeremy, and he bobbed his head in relief. "Master Stone!" he cried. "I've been worried, so worried I couldn't sleep last night, not

all night. Did all go well? Did you see the Duchess? And you didn't commit Master Bartlett to anything that——"

"This is no place to talk, Hamilton." Jeremy pushed into the little drawing room, Dirk at his heels. "Is your Master Bartlett up and able to receive guests?"

Hopelessly Hamilton nodded toward a sodden figure in the chamber's biggest chair. Terence Bartlett, attired in a soiled dressing gown and shabby house boots, was slumped low in the seat, a jar of sack beside him and a vacant look in his eyes as he stared aimlessly into space. He grinned foolishly at Jeremy, took a quick gulp from the jar, and slouched even lower in his chair. Dirk kicked the door shut and smiled pleasantly at the drunken man.

"Jerry," he said happily, "it 'ppears t' me like this here one ain't a-goin' t' cause us no trouble at all."

"No one will cause us difficulties of any kind, Dirk. Just have a little faith." Jeremy was supremely confident as he transferred his attention to Terence Bartlett's manservant.

"Hamilton, we're hungry, as we've had no breakfast. I trust you have a pantry here in these rooms, and I hope it's stocked."

"Y-yes, sir. There's a joint of beef and the better part of a leg of mutton in the pantry. And some bread and a loaf of good Dutch cheese. I—I could order a fowl from Mynheer van der Voort if you prefer, though the ordinary's kitchen usually doesn't open until dinnertime."

"No, no." Jeremy's attitude was lofty. "What you have on hand will suffice for the moment. Oh, and tell me, Hamilton. Is there enough wine on hand to satisfy the thirst of our friend yonder for the next few days?"

The servant's long face grew longer still. "His new supply of sack arrived from the vintner's only last week, Master Stone. But—but why do you ask? And why have you brought this—ah—person here this morning? And what took place last night when you went to see Her Grace?"

"You ask too many questions, Hamilton." Jeremy's voice lost some of its buoyant good humor. "Far too many questions. But I'll tell you this much—my man and I have decided to move in with you and your Master Bartlett for the next few days. We'll not inconvenience you in any way, and I'm sure our friend here won't mind. In fact, he won't even know we've been here if he can get enough spirits down his throat to keep it moist. And I intend to see to it that he suffers from no lack."

"You—you can't, Master Stone!" Hamilton's face was white, and he twisted and untwisted his fingers in genuine anguish.

"Can't? That's a big word, Hamilton!"

"But it—it's against the law to force your way into some—

one's home. Master Bartlett hasn't invited you here as his guest. This is—it's brigandage, that's what. You're plotting some foul deed, Master Stone, and I won't permit you to do it!"

Dirk had been watching the servant from beneath half-closed lids. Now he strolled over to Hamilton, stretched out a tremendous hand, and grasped the other by the front of his black satin doublet. With no seeming effort he lifted the smaller man off the floor and held him in the air at the level of his own face. "Hamilton, m' lad," he said gently, "it looks like me 'n' ye have t' come to some kind o' understandin'. I work for this here Master Stone, 'n' what he says, that's how things happen. Now then, him 'n' me, we're a-movin' into this here cozy little place for a spell. Do what we tell ye t' do, keep yer lips shut 'n' try t' do no runnin' away or blabbin' t' folks about us bein' here, and everythin' will be fine. Stay right here with us 'n' keep us from gettin' lonesome, 'n' in a couple o' days ye'll be as healthy as ye be right now. If there's anythin' I hate t' do, it's t' go a-hurtin' a nice little feller that can't fight back. So mind yer manners, b'have proper 'n' stay put—'n' b'fore the week is out ye'll not set eyes on the likes o' us any more. Sure as Friendly is m' name 'n' m' nature, ye c'n depend on what I'm a-sayin'."

To emphasize his spirit of camaraderie, he set Hamilton back on the floor with a thud that jarred the mild little servant from his heels to his head. The frightened, stricken face turned helplessly from Dirk to Jeremy and back again. He found neither consolation nor comfort from the expression of either, and without another word he turned and fled toward the pantry. Dirk, at a nod from Jeremy, followed and remained close behind him. A time of ordeal had begun for Hamilton and one of waiting for Jeremy Stone, now too far gone in his adventure to turn back. He showed no signs of regret as he lifted a small glass from a bookshelf, blew out the dust, and poured a small amount of sack from the jar. Terence Bartlett's sleepy, befuddled eyes followed his movements, and there was just enough sense left in the man for him to grin vapidly and then reach greedily for the jar.

Jeremy lifted his glass in a toast. "To you, my host—my alter ego," he said softly. "Long may you prosper—in my person. May you be successful in all of your endeavors, and may you win fortune and fame, distinction and honor—through me. Yes, and may I cover your name—our name—with glory." He finished off the glass in one swallow.

A bleak winter sun gave light but no warmth, and a fresh snowfall made the rutted street of New York Town wet and

slippery. A considerable crowd was converging on the Phillips Brothers' Wharf on Hudson's River, for although ships sailed almost weekly for England and European ports and the rich tropical islands of the Indies, this was the first time a royal duchess had ever departed from the colonies, and the people had a rare opportunity to see a member of the house of Stuart in the flesh. Caroline of Glasgow had made remarkably few public appearances during her stay, and partly in order to compensate for the aloofness she had shown, today had been declared a public holiday. Schoolboys and apprentices, merchants and waterfront harlots, trappers and woodsmen, sober citizens and lighthearted, all flocked to the dock to watch the sailing of the *Bonnie Maid* with her distinguished passenger.

As Jeremy Stone rounded a corner and saw the brig riding at anchor, his heart began to pound, and some measure of the guilt he had been feeling for the past few days began to dissipate. The necessary but distasteful terrorization of Terence Bartlett's manservant had been the least pleasant of his activities, but he knew he had been wise to move into the rooms at Van der Voort's Ordinary, for two messages, each advising him of slight changes in sailing plans, had arrived for him there.

He and Dirk had alternated in keeping watch on Hamilton through every hour of day and night, and just before leaving the inn they had tied the manservant securely and had gagged him as an extra precaution. He would be in no real danger, however, for when the sodden Bartlett next awoke from a stupor he would find his sack under lock and key and would eventually become sober enough to cut his servant's bonds. Bartlett himself had been no problem at any time, for he had been in a constant state of drunken inertia. Jeremy's conscience was clear in one regard: he had left most of the remaining money the Duchess had given him in return for the clothes he had taken from his "host," and he drew considerable satisfaction, too, from the knowledge that his wardrobe would be as complete as that of any gentleman in Caroline's party.

He glanced obliquely over his left shoulder as he strode down the street and smothered a grin. Dirk was trudging behind him at the three-pace lag required of good servants; the big man shouldered a large sea chest bearing Terence Bartlett's initials, and the wood and brass sparkled in the sunshine. Dirk, who was beginning to lose his qualms about the scheme, winked broadly and drew his face into solemn lines only when Jeremy scowled.

The *Bonnie Maid* was directly ahead now, and Jeremy settled his hat at a more rakish angle, flung open his silk-lined cape, and let his gauntlet-gloved hand rest lightly on the

hilt of his sword. The crowds around the wharf were thick, and he pushed his way through them with difficulty. Vendors of roasted chestnuts and dried, spiced fruits were doing a heavy business, swarms of children and dogs were underfoot everywhere, and the odors of human sweat, alcoholic beverages, and soft yellow soap were all-pervading despite a faint sea breeze.

Out of the corner of his eye Jeremy could see a group of apprentices from Smith's foundry, shepherded by two journey-men gunsmiths. At the moment they were not looking in his direction but were watching an argument between a tall, buckskin-clad man and a burly sailor in a stocking cap, a heated exchange that threatened to become an open fight. Increasing his pace, Jeremy pushed on; he knew that he was risking recognition until he was safe aboard the brig, and he had decided to brazen his way through any uncomfortable scene should the need arise. But the best way to avoid trouble was to put distance between himself and the possible sources of it.

Near the far end of the pier a line of scarlet-coated sentries from the governor's own company of guards was lined up in a single file, musket butts resting in a uniform line on the oak planks of the dock, bayonets at precisely the same angle. A pink-cheeked young ensign, the cut of whose uniform indicated that he was an offspring of a wealthy family, took a step toward Jeremy, whipped out his sword, and saluted smartly.

"You're intending to board the ship, sir?" He glanced briefly at Dirk, who had failed to stop in time and had almost skidded into Jeremy's back.

"I am." Jeremy paused and drew himself up to his full height.

"May I ask your name, sir?"

"Bartlett. Terence Bartlett." The name came to his lips more easily each time he spoke it.

The ensign drew a sheet of paper from his pocket and began to study a list of names. At that moment a shout rang out from somewhere inside the cordon of soldiers. "Master Bartlett! Welcome!"

Without waiting for the young officer's permission, Jeremy stepped through the line of guards and swept off his hat. "Your servant, milord."

Lord Murray held out his hand and smiled. "Glad to see you, Bartlett. You'll be sharing a cabin with me. Colonel Martin and Captain Talbrice will be with us too. Is that your man? Good. He'll find a blanket in the fo'c'sle. Come aboard!"

The young Scots noble linked his arm with Jeremy's and started toward the *Bonnie Maid*. Standing on the quarter-deck

was a burly man whose uniform indicated that he was the ship's master. Beside him was an extraordinarily pretty girl with flaming red hair. The young gunsmith noticed her, then was startled as he realized that she was staring down at him with an expression of surprise on her attractive face. An instant later he forgot her; he and Lord Murray reached the end of the pier. Jeremy climbed aboard the brig, and as his feet touched the deck he knew that he was now truly about to lead a new life, the life of an impostor.

## CHAPTER THREE :

# February 1692

BY THE time the starboard watch sighted the coast of Virginia, life aboard the *Bonnie Maid* had settled into a steady routine. Caroline of Glasgow and her suite, including Jeremy and Dirk, numbered twenty persons; the Duchess and her gentlemen never went below deck, while the men-at-arms, lackeys, and servants were of course quartered with the crew in the fo'c'sle. Complaints about the food increased among the landsmen when weevils began to appear in the daily ration of hard biscuits and the inevitable breakfast portions of oatmeal became sour and rancid, but the captain turned a resolutely deaf ear to the cavils, and in time even the most fastidious of Caroline's retainers became accustomed to their food.

Jeremy Stone, enjoying a life of comfort and ease without responsibilities, found nothing on the *Bonnie Maid* that displeased him. His sole previous excursion on board a seagoing vessel had been his nightmare trip to New York from Plymouth, and he found the present experience a marvel of luxury by comparison. Instead of being forced to exist in a ship's foul, cramped hold, he shared a cabin with only Lord Murray and the two officers of Royal Guards assigned to Caroline; there were real sheets on the narrow bunks, and the tiny cell was blessed with a large, square window. Meals were taken in a large saloon located between Captain Groliere's cabin and that given to the Duchess, and although Caroline and Groliere each ate the majority of meals in solitary splendor, they occasionally saw fit to join the gentlemen and the *Bonnie Maid's* officers and surgeon at dinner. Most of the delicacies of the New World were spread on the table, and so

far, at least, there was no shortage of fruits and vegetables.

Dinner was usually served around two in the afternoon, and immediately afterward the nobles, officers, and gentlemen, numbering seven in all, were admitted to Caroline's cabin. There, dressed each day in a different dazzling gown which seemed incongruous aboard ship, she held court in miniature. The formalities of a Stuart household were rigidly observed in these sessions; weather permitting, the men remained on their feet throughout; Sir Ian was stationed at the Duchess's left, and whenever the conversation took a turn that was boring or that threatened to become embarrassing to her, she merely nodded to her chamberlain and he deftly introduced some new topic into the stream of talk. Such levees invariably lasted for two hours, and at the end of that time Lord Murray always thanked Her Grace for the privilege of having spent a portion of the day in her presence. Following this, the company withdrew.

It was during this period of late afternoon that Jeremy usually paced the narrow deck briskly, avoiding sailing gear and cannon and nimbly stepping over numerous obstacles. After more than seven years of a physically active existence, he found life on the *Bonnie Maid* confining, and long walks on the deck gave him an opportunity to work off his excess energy. It was on one of the first of these walks that he had become aware of Janine Groliere, the girl who had glared at him from the quarter-deck, and he had encountered her almost daily since. Aside from Caroline and her personal maid, the daughter of the captain was the only woman on the brig.

Nineteen or twenty years of age, she was of medium height and slight, though not small-boned. Her figure appeared neat and trim beneath the voluminous skirts and heavy sweaters she wore to protect her from the Atlantic winds; her waist was tiny and her breasts firm, and one afternoon Jeremy had caught a glimpse of straight, slim legs. Her hair was a brilliant but soft shade of red, and when the sun shone on it, it looked like highly burnished copper. Her large green eyes were luminous but showed character, her mouth was red and full, and across the bridge of her straight nose was dusted a generous sprinkling of freckles.

There had been considerable talk among Caroline's gentlemen about Janine Groliere during the first days of the voyage, and Jeremy had gathered that her English mother was dead and that her father had paid for an expensive education for her in both France and England. She had, it seemed, joined him prior to his departure from Le Havre some months previous; and, according to the whispers, she was being taken to the West Indian Islands in the hope that some wealthy planta-

tion owner long removed from his homeland would overlook her humble background in favor of her undeniable physical attractiveness and appeal and hence enable her father to marry her off with a distinction impossible in England or on the European continent.

Jeremy was decidedly curious about her. Promptly at four o'clock each afternoon she stepped from her small cabin, which opened on to the deck, and stood in the doorframe. Each time Jeremy circled the deck he could feel her steady gaze on him, but aside from a slight inclination of her head when he first bowed to her in greeting, she neither spoke nor smiled, but only stared at him with a guarded, speculative look in her eyes.

Today, with a bright sun beating down on blue water and a definite feel of warmer days to come in the air, Jeremy suddenly made up his mind to speak to the girl and to end the riddle of her peculiar behavior toward him. As he rounded the stern, he saw that she was already standing on the deck outside her cabin; as a concession to the balmy breezes, she had discarded her sweater and over her bare white throat she had tied a loosely knitted scarf. Perhaps a few minutes of conversation with her would tell him why she had recently been showing such discreet curiosity about him.

Only two days ago she had approached Dirk Friendly and had tried to question him about his "employer." When Dirk had proved singularly uncommunicative on the subject, she had switched to a few casual questions about his own relationship with "Terence Bartlett" but had learned nothing beyond the fact that Dirk had been close to him for many years.

It was improbable that the girl would openly reveal whether her interest had been in any way significant, but she might give herself away. Approaching her, he bowed, and she dipped her head gravely, never moving her eyes from his. Instead of proceeding down the deck as he had always done previously, Jeremy halted directly in front of her and smiled amiably.

"Mademoiselle Groliere, your servant, ma'am."

"Good afternoon, Master Bartlett." Her voice was sweet, very feminine, and faintly husky. Jeremy realized that this was the first time he had heard her speak. "What do you wish of me, sir?" she demanded with quiet strength.

"I sought the pleasure of a few moments' conversation with you, mademoiselle." Jeremy was sure he was not imagining her aversion to him.

"I do not think we have much in common. Please pardon me." Her fingertips darted up and down the fringe of her scarf, and she started to turn away from him.

Jeremy did not want her to leave; her accent was fascinat-

ing, for although she spoke English perfectly and in the best accepted manner of the aristocracy, there was a delicate Gallic lilt to her words, more evident in the rhythm of her speech than in the pronunciation. "Have I offended you in some way?" he asked in genuine concern.

"On the contrary, Master Bartlett. You have never done me any harm at any time." She stared at him coolly, and again he read contempt in her gaze. "Good day, sir."

The door shut hastily, and Jeremy stood staring at the weather-beaten wood panels. He was confused—and more than a little annoyed. Before he could give vent to his urge to rap on the door, he felt someone come up behind him and, turning, saw Dirk approaching, his face grim.

"Jerry," the big man said without preamble, "the Duchess wants t' see ye, 'n' I tell ye plain, watch yer step! There's trouble a-bubblin' up aboard this here ship!"

Instantly alert, Jeremy moved with seeming carelessness to the rail, and Dirk followed glumly. "What sort of trouble, Dirk?"

"All kinds. First off, there's somebuddy disappeared."

"Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Seems like I have, Jerry. There was six o' them Scots guards when we set sail from New York. You know, them fellers that never talk to nobuddy, not even each other, the ones that all seem t' look alike——"

"Yes. I know."

"Last night, like I say, there was six of 'em. This mornin' there was only five, 'n' they was buzzin' back 'n' forth amongst theirselves like a swarm o' hornets that's been riled up. But soon as I come near 'em they shut up tight. I tried askin' one or two others, but they just give me a deaf ear too. I even tried talkin' t' some o' the crew, but o' course they never pay no heed t' what goes on with the passengers, so they wasn't any help."

"I can't imagine a man actually disappearing, Dirk." Jeremy frowned as he stared out across the open sea. "But I can tell you this much—you and I must be careful of how we conduct ourselves. Don't go round asking too many questions or stirring up troubles."

"If it was only that dour Scots guard, I'd say good riddance t' him, Jerry. But there's more."

"Don't tell me someone else has disappeared too."

"N-no. Not exactly." Dirk scratched his blond head.

"I can't stand here with you all day, Dirk. Tell me who it is and what's happened to him. And hurry, man. I can't keep the Duchess waiting."

"It's the one good 'n' pleasant feller in that pack o' varmints that works for her high 'n' mightiness. Tully."

"Lord Murray's manservant? The one with whom you've been on such good terms?"

"That's the one. He's been a-behavin' kind o' queer the past two days, Jerry, 'n' this mornin' he started drinkin' heavy-like. Boilin' Jehos'phat—a whole beaker o' rum is what's gone into his stummick! Anyways, he started a-cursin' that there Duchess like nothin' ye've heard. There he was in the fo'c'sle, a-screamin' that she was a double-dealin' wench 'n' a trollop t' boot. That's when Sir Ian come in with the cap'n, 'n' now pore old Tully is down in the hold in irons." Dirk shook his big head gloomily.

Jeremy was impatient; there was too much at stake to waste sympathy on a servant who drank too much and became abusive toward Caroline. "You say the Duchess wants to see me?" he demanded.

"Yep. She asked me t' come a-searchin' for ye. Jerry, if'n ye could put in a kindly word t' her for Tully——"

"If I can, Dirk. If I can." Jeremy hurried off, far more concerned with Caroline's summons than with the future of Lord Murray's valet. This was the first occasion since the start of the voyage that the Duchess had requested his presence, and he assumed that she must have more than a casual reason for wishing to see him.

A few moments later he tapped on the door of her state-room, and her cool, clear voice bade him enter. He opened the door, expecting to find her alone. Instead, Lord Murray and Colonel Martin were seated in two of the stateroom's more comfortable chairs. Caroline was dressed in an elaborate off-the-shoulder, calf-length gown of ivory satin, and her hair was piled high on her head. Concealing his surprise at finding others with her, he lowered his eyes as he made a leg to her. "Your Grace," he murmured, straightening slowly.

The Duchess favored him with a brilliant smile, raised a hand, and beckoned to him to move closer. "We were talking about you, Master Bartlett," she said. "These gentlemen were a trifle curious about you, so I thought it would be best to ask you to join us. It is never my policy to talk about a faithful retainer behind his back."

"Thank you, Your Grace." Jeremy glanced at her, then his eyes flicked briefly at Lord Murray and the colonel. The expressions of both were wooden, revealing nothing. He took a deep breath and looked directly at Caroline. "Have I displeased you in any way?"

"On the contrary, sir. It is merely that the time is long past

due for us to have a chat together and become acquainted. Come sit beside me."

She patted an empty chair near her own, then deliberately reached out and pulled it several inches closer. Jeremy crossed the stateroom quickly, a vein in his left temple throbbing. Caroline might be a Stuart and a duchess, but she was first and foremost a woman, an extraordinarily attractive woman. He seated himself and waited for her to speak.

Instead it was Lord Murray who broke the momentary silence. "The colonel and I were ignorant of the background of our newest associate, and of course we're interested in you, Master Bartlett," he said, and Eustis Martin nodded agreement.

"And I told them," Caroline added quickly, "that I know almost as much about you as you know of yourself." There was a trace of a challenge in her voice.

"Nothing Your Grace knows would surprise me." Jeremy spoke slowly; the certainty was growing on him that Caroline knew he was an impostor. But unless the two men were superb actors, they appeared to be ignorant of the fact that he was not Terence Bartlett. Therefore, the Duchess had either called him here to expose him or was intending to trick him in some way.

"That is true," Colonel Martin rumbled. "How she does it I don't know, but before Her Grace took me onto her staff—before she had even met me, in fact—she had learned things about me that I thought were family secrets. There was the campaign of '85, for instance. It was shortly after my regiment had landed at Brussels, and——"

Caroline and Lord Murray both broke into gales of laughter, and the colonel looked pained. "I beg your pardon, Eustis," the young nobleman gasped, "but we've heard that story many times."

"We still find it fascinating, of course," the Duchess interposed smoothly. "But at the moment we prefer to concentrate our attention on Master Bartlett, if you don't mind, Colonel."

"I consider your every wish my command, Your Grace." Colonel Martin rose, bowed stiffly, then seated himself again.

"You will join us in a glass of sack, Master Bartlett?" Caroline gestured toward a crystal decanter and several glasses on a small table.

"Thank you, but I must decline, Your Grace."

She smiled and her eyes seemed to be mocking him. "How strange that Terence Bartlett never accepts a drink. Your reputation indicated that you are thoroughly familiar with the joys of sack. Too abrupt a departure from your accepted customs might be—disturbing to some people, sir."

Jeremy felt as though an icicle had caressed the base of his neck. He blinked and looked at her sharply, but there was no change of any kind in her expression. Slowly he arose, poured a glass of sack, and drained it.

"You enjoyed it, sir?" she inquired politely, almost too politely. "This particular sack came from Their Majesties' private cellars at Windsor."

"I've never tasted better."

"Pray seat yourself again, Master Bartlett. You were born near Plymouth, as I understand it, and were educated first by private tutors, then spent a year at Trinity College of Oxford." She spoke very slowly, almost, he thought, as though she were trying to impress certain facts of Terence Bartlett's background on his mind. "That is correct, is it not?"

"Yes, Your Grace. The facts are correct." He hoped devoutly that they were, for if Caroline were trying to trap him into an admission that he was actually someone other than Bartlett, it would be ridiculously easy.

"It was immediately following that year at Oxford that you came to the North American colonies—or so I am told."

"Yes, Your Grace." All of his self-control was required to conceal his agitation.

Smiling, she straightened the hem of her gown. "The less said about the unfortunate scandal that was responsible for your hasty departure to the New World, the better it will be for all of us. The incident has long been forgotten, Master Bartlett, and I'm sure you have no wish to mention it, not even to your good uncle, Sir Arthur Bartlett. Any such reference might reflect on my own judgment in having made you a member of my party. So you will of course be discreet."

"You can count on me, Your Grace."

The Duchess arose, and the sardonic humor faded from her eyes. "Yes, Master Bartlett," she said with peculiar emphasis, "I'm quite sure that I can."

It was dusk, and the tapers that filled the many wall candelabra in the dining saloon of the *Bonnie Maid* were already burning. Their light seemed harsh, as it always did here, for their gleam was reflected in the cold metal of cutlasses, long swords, and sabers that hung from the bulkheads. Captain Groliere was a practical man who cared little for the aesthetic, and the weapons were always in place; in the event of a sudden attack from a *boucanier* ship, the passengers would have ample opportunity to arm themselves. In the center of the big stateroom stood a table of heavy oak, held to the deck by intricately contrived braces. A ring of small armchairs stood neatly in place around the board, and as the weather was

freshening, protective hatch covers had been secured over the window openings. An untidy pile of papers was spread out near the head of the table, and Sir Ian MacGregor, the sole occupant of the room, threw down a quill pen, stood, and bowed to the slender girl who had just spoken to him from the doorway.

"I never consider an interruption by a beautiful woman an intrusion, Mademoiselle Groliere," he said smoothly. "And I assure you that the business of attending these dull documents can wait."

Janine entered quickly and shut the door behind her. Then she sighed inaudibly.

If Sir Ian was aware of her tension, he gave no indication of it. He slipped into his jacket and drew a chair out from the table. "You have been seeking me, you said." His black eyes glinted shrewdly, but his voice was reassuring, soothing.

The girl moved toward the chair as if to sit, then changed her mind and grasped the back for support. "I—I actually wish to see the Duchess. I have been very troubled, sir, and I am not sure that I am doing that which is right. But your England has been good to me. I was educated there, and my friends are there. So I would be disloyal to King William if I did not come forward with what I know."

"Disloyal, mademoiselle?" Sir Ian's black brows drew together for a second as he sat down, elegant and at ease.

"I—yes." Janine's green eyes were troubled, and she twisted and curled one end of her scarf. "May I be permitted to see the Duchess Caroline?"

The Scotsman's thin lips parted in a humorless smile. "When you address me, you are dealing with Her Grace. Now, mademoiselle"—his tone became cold—"what is all this about disloyalty to Their Majesties?"

Janine glared at him. "I can speak to no one but the Duchess."

"I insist you tell *me*," he rasped. "Shall I rouse Captain Groliere, or——"

"That will not be necessary," Janine replied loftily. "It was while we were in New York Town, refitting for this sailing." Her knuckles showed white as she clutched the back of the chair. "Papa and I made our home there at an inn known as Van der Voort's Ordinary."

"Oh?" He seemed disinterested, even bored.

"Papa was much about the town, recruiting his crew and arranging for the cargo of salted cod, so I—I spent most of my time alone." Janine faltered, and her voice dwindled away.

"Pray continue, mademoiselle." Sir Ian showed his irritation plainly. "Her Grace and I have considerable work of state

to occupy us this evening, and I cannot spend unlimited amounts of time listening to irrelevancies."

Janine started toward the door. "I have been wasting your time, Sir Ian," she murmured. "It is as I feared. Please forgive this intrusion. I shall not repeat it."

"Enough of this nonsense!" The Scotsman raised his voice sharply. "Come back here and finish your story. Her Grace represents the Crown in this part of the world, and if there has been disloyalty to William and Mary, it is your duty to repeat to me what you know. At once, mademoiselle!"

Lifting her head and taking a deep breath, she started again. "It was while we were living at the ordinary that I—I saw Master Bartlett."

A shadow crossed Sir Ian's face; he made no effort to conceal his dislike for Terence Bartlett, but he said nothing. Leaning back and clasping his long, thin fingers over a silk-clad knee, he nodded for Janine to continue.

"A maiden dining alone in a public inn can be subjected to many embarrassments, Sir Ian, so Papa made arrangements with Mynheer van der Voort for me to be served my meals at a table located in a small alcove where I would not be noticed. However, I could see most things that transpired in the common room, and I saw Master Bartlett almost every day." Two red spots appeared on her cheeks, and she began to speak very rapidly. "Terence Bartlett was well known to all at the ordinary. He drank very large amounts of sack each day, and each day he became very drunk——"

"And you feel there is some disloyalty to Their Majesties because Her Grace has taken a sot into her employ?" The baronet laughed unpleasantly. "We knew about Master Bartlett's bad habit before Her Grace accepted him into her entourage. We——"

Janine held up her hand to halt his outburst. She had become very pale and was shaking visibly. "He is not Terence Bartlett," she whispered.

"I beg your pardon?"

"The man who is posing as Terence Bartlett is——I don't know who he is. I only know that he is not the Terence Bartlett who resided at Van der Voort's Ordinary in New York Town."

Sir Ian was on his feet. "This is a very grave accusation, mademoiselle."

"I make it reluctantly. I have spoken out only because it is my duty." She looked as though she would burst into tears.

"You are sure that what you charge is correct, Mademoiselle Groliere?" The Scotsman's eyes were inscrutable now.

"I am sure, Sir Ian."

He stared for a long minute at one of the flickering candles. The brig was beginning to roll and pitch, but he seemed unaware of the motion. "How many people have you told this news?"

The question startled Janine, and she drew herself up indignantly. "I have told no one, Sir Ian!" she flared. "I have had no wish to harm the young man who has been calling himself Terence Bartlett, for he seems to be a—a very pleasant person. I have come to you now only because I have been fighting with my own conscience and could think of no other honorable course of action."

He fingered his lace cuffs and stared at a point in space directly over her head. "Naturally you have told your father?"

"No, I have not!" Janine stamped her foot. "As I've already told you, I've spoken of this matter to no one!"

Sir Ian favored her with a short bow. "You have behaved with admirable discretion, mademoiselle. I charge you to continue to remain silent until you receive further instructions. There are many complications on a high level, and only Her Grace—personally—can make decisions as to what will be done. You may be sure that she will come to the right conclusion and that the right course of action will result, for she is a brilliant woman, brilliant. However, you need not be concerned with such matters. You have done your duty, and you may be sure that Their Majesties will not be ungrateful to you."

"I will do as you ask," she said in a strained voice, "and will speak of this to no one. You have no further need of me, Sir Ian?"

His smile grew broader. "I believe you have failed to understand me, mademoiselle. You have assured your own future by making this revelation to me. I am sure that Her Grace will reward you liberally——"

"I want no reward, Sir Ian!" The tears came now in a sudden flood, and Janine seemed unable to stop them. She groped blindly for the latch and fled down the passageway to her own cabin.

Sir Ian closed the door, removed his jacket methodically, and sat down once again at the table. He picked up his quill pen, then musingly tapped it on the oak. He began to laugh, quietly at first, then with gusto. It was not a pleasant sound.

## February 1692

**I**T WAS almost midnight when the gale struck with full fury, and the brig tossed and bobbed, pitched and wallowed, completely at the mercy of the giant waves that crashed over her bow in angry foam. Captain Groliere tried to keep the *Bonnie Maid* running before the wind, but it was a task that had half the crew scurrying up and down the lines. However, after long labor the brig's master seemed to be winning his struggle against the violent seas and screaming winds.

When the storm had first broken, the passengers had been ordered to keep to their cabins, where they would be comparatively safe and would not impede the work of the crew. By midnight the gale began to subside somewhat, and the mate had all ropes tightened. Four men continued to work at the pumps in the hold, for the operation could not be stopped until the winds died and the *Bonnie Maid* sailed into calm waters. Part of the cargo had shifted during the first savage onslaught, but no attempt would or could be made to rearrange the bales and boxes in the hold for hours to come; a man who tried to crawl into that mass of sliding, lurching crates would be courting death.

Sleep was impossible for the passengers, and during the earlier hours of the storm the howling of the wind, the creaking of the ship and her gear, the pounding of seamen's feet on the decks made conversation difficult too. After the worst had passed, however, Jeremy Stone tried for a short time to talk with Lord Murray in the adjoining bunk, but the nobleman was fighting seasickness, and anything more verbose than a monosyllabic grunt was an effort for him. At last he found refuge in sleep, though the sea continued to run heavily, and Jeremy was alone with his thoughts.

Bits of his strange interview with Caroline kept coming into his mind, but he was no closer to solving the riddle of her remarks than he had been when he had left her, and only with an effort could he force himself to drop the subject.

The air was close and almost unbearably hot, and Jeremy's rough, heavy linen sheet was wet with perspiration. Nevertheless, he tried to compose himself for sleep and was just

beginning to grew drowsy when the cabin door opened and slammed shut, opened and slammed shut. Hoping that someone else would do something about it, he lay still. But the others seemed to be asleep, and he sat up, cursing under his breath. At that instant the door swung wider ajar and he saw a figure in the darkness outside. Leaping to his feet, he lurched to the door and peered into the gloom. Directly ahead was Dirk Friendly's unmistakable bulk. His right forefinger was held to his lips and he was beckoning violently with his free hand.

Silently Jeremy slipped into his breeches and shoes, moved into the passage, and shut the door behind him. He started to speak, but Dirk clamped a huge hand over his mouth, then half dragged him toward the far end of the areaway leading to the open deck. There both leaned against the bulkhead to help keep their balance, and Jeremy blinked indignantly.

"Dirk," he demanded, "what in blazes do you think——"

"It's Tully," the big man said hoarsely. "They're a-aimin' t' kill him. Right now!"

"What are you talking about? Who is——"

"Sir Ian 'n' them others. When the storm started t' let up a mite, Sir Ian come t' the fo'c'sle 'n' got them two bulgin'-muscle Scotsmen o' hisn off'n their pallets. I didn't like the looks o' things, so I follered 'em, 'n' I heard 'em a-talkin'. They was goin' t' let Tully out o' irons 'n' then take him up t' the deck. I heard Sir Ian a-sayin' it'd be easy t' claim he fell overboard with this boat a-rockin' like it is."

Jeremy was annoyed; it was about three in the morning, and while he did not believe his friend to be a liar, he felt that Dirk's fears were an exaggeration. "It doesn't make sense to me, Dirk. Nobody is going to murder a man simply because he drank too much and made a few uncomplimentary remarks about the Duchess!"

"All I know is what I know. 'N' I ain't a-askin' ye t' take my word fer nothin', Jerry! Just come along outdoors——'n' shake a leg whilst ye're at it, or that Tully will be a-feedin' the sharks!"

Without waiting for a reply he pushed open the heavy door leading to the deck and stepped outside. Jeremy, at his heels, saw that the brig was moving along neatly. Although a landsman might have been alarmed at the ship's pitching, it was plain that the captain and his officers were in no wise concerned; ropes were securely in place and the seamen who had fought the storm had gone off to the fo'c'sle or to other duties, for the deck was deserted.

Dirk sprinted toward the bow, and Jeremy trotted after him, feeling angry and slightly foolish. Suddenly, however,

Dirk darted behind a high pile of emergency tackles and ropes that were lashed to the deck. Jeremy joined him and crouched low. The deck ended some five yards ahead of them, and beyond the low rail, out of sight of the officer of the watch on the quarter-deck, several figures were huddled.

As Jeremy's eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, he saw that one of the figures remained apart from the others, and he recognized the man as Sir Ian. Dirk was straining to see, too, and he took hold of Jeremy's arm in sudden excitement.

"Look there!" he hissed. "Them two has got Tully b'twixt 'em 'n' they're a-trying' t' push him overboard—but he's fightin' back at 'em. Let's go!"

Before Jeremy could stop him, he stood erect and charged forward, whooping loudly. Jeremy had no choice but to follow, and as he drew closer he saw why the struggle was such a silent one: the intended victim was indeed Tully, and a heavy gag had been stuffed into his mouth. Dirk lunged at the would-be assassins, and so unexpected was his assault that one of them dropped to the deck under the impact of his flailing fists. The other fought back, and he and Dirk pounded each other unmercifully.

Sir Ian drew his sword and was about to cut down Dirk when he saw Jeremy. At that instant the ship lurched and the momentarily forgotten Tully, who had been standing groggily, weaving from side to side, fell to the deck with a thud and began to slide toward the edge of the planking and the open sea beyond it. And no one was making any move to prevent his death. Jeremy, who had almost lost his balance when the brig had plunged so abruptly into a trough, leaped forward and made a diving tackle. His arms circled Tully securely, and he hauled the man back to safety.

The gag in Tully's mouth prevented him from speaking, but his face was close to Jeremy's, and his eyes were shining with silent gratitude. Jeremy was about to say something to him when he felt the touch of cold steel on his chest and found himself staring at the tip of Sir Ian MacGregor's sword. The blade moved away again, and Jeremy pulled himself to his feet. The Scotsman was standing directly in front of him, smiling mirthlessly.

"That was very brave of you. I congratulate you. You are a hero." Sir Ian spoke in short, jerky passages, as though the words were being ripped out of him with great effort.

Widly angry, Jeremy forgot caution. "You would have murdered this man!" he shouted. "You and these—these scum of yours would have thrown him overboard!"

"Nonsense." Sir Ian was in complete control of himself now and spoke with icy precision. "Tully here has been in the

hold. He was forgotten during the storm and was brought up to the deck in the hope that a little fresh air would revive him. And when he fell, you were a trifle quicker than I in reaching him, that's all. I'm afraid you have a penchant for the melodramatic."

"That's a lie! You would have——"

Again the sword flicked out, and the point, touching Jeremy's chest, drew blood. The sudden realization that he was helpless sobered the young gunsmith and he fell silent. Glancing out of the corner of his eye, he could see that Dirk had gained the upper hand with the retainer who was still on his feet. The big American's fists were pounding methodically into the other's face and body, and it was a testimony of sorts to the man's stamina that he could take such punishment. The hard, heavy fists lashed out again and again; then abruptly Sir Ian took command.

"That will do!" he said curtly, and the sword whipped out in the direction of the two fighters. Dirk was unaware of him, however, and Jeremy was afraid that the Scotsman would run his friend through for disobeying. "Stop, Dirk! That's enough!" He had to repeat the order twice before the big man lowered his arms.

"Thank you," Sir Ian said ironically, then addressed himself to the others. "McDermid, get up off the deck. You're not hurt, but you'll suffer more than you've dreamed if you stay down there cowering, afraid of this bully's fists. Watson, wipe the blood off your face, then you and McDermid take Tully back to the brig. Do as you're told—now!" he said as no one moved.

The man who had been sprawled on the deck rose slowly, then picked up the bound and gagged Tully by the feet. Watson, still bleeding, lifted the prisoner's shoulders, and they started off down the deck. Sir Ian turned to Dirk.

"Go back to the fo'c'sle, or you'll receive the same treatment Tully is getting. Go—at once."

Dirk's mouth twisted, and he would have thrown himself at the baronet had not Jeremy guessed his intent.

"No, Dirk! He'll rip you open like a suckling pig!"

Sir Ian chuckled. "I would, with the greatest of pleasure, but I prefer not to dirty my blade."

Jeremy spoke quietly. "You'd better do what he says, Dirk. And no more fighting." He tried to balance himself on the rising and falling deck, and despite the humid warmth of the night air, he shivered. There was no doubt in his mind that Sir Ian meant to kill him once all witnesses had departed, and although his fear of death was not excessive, he wished fervently for a weapon with which to defend himself. He had

been a fool to leave the cabin without his sword or, at the very least, a poniard. Also, quite incongruously, he felt curiously naked; had he known he was going to die, he would have dressed for the occasion in more than a pair of breeches and soft leather shoes.

"If I leave ye, he'll run ye through. I won't—do it!" Dirk planted his feet wide apart and glared murderously at Sir Ian.

The baronet sighed in exasperation. "If he fails to obey," he said, addressing himself to Jeremy, "I shall have no choice in the matter."

"Do as you're told, Dirk!" Jeremy tried to sound stern. "And there's no use trying to rouse the captain, for you'll only cause more trouble for yourself. The word of a manservant—and a colonial at that—won't go very far against that of a nobleman who is chamberlain to a duchess. Be a good fellow and go, Dirk. I can look after myself."

"B'twixt us, mebbe we could——"

"There's nothing we can do. But I beg you not to worry, Dirk, for Sir Ian is not a butcher." Jeremy's mind was beginning to function clearly, and he took a long gamble. "He merely uses butchers to do jobs on which he doesn't care to soil his fingers. You see, he's a gentleman, and one gentleman would never cut down another who was unarmed and had no chance to defend himself. So go back to your pallet, Dirk. You'll find me in mine, waiting for my breakfast in a very few hours."

Dirk stepped forward, patted his friend clumsily on the shoulder, then walked slowly toward the companionway leading to the fo'c'sle. Every few feet he looked back over his shoulder, expecting to see Jeremy spitted on the baronet's sword, but each time he could tell that Sir Ian was watching him, so he neither paused nor disobeyed.

When he was gone, Jeremy faced the blade point. "Let's finish this," he said curtly. "If you have no intention of behaving like a gentleman, it would be best for you to dispatch me quickly."

"You consider yourself worthy of treatment reserved for gentlemen?" Sir Ian's voice was lazy and amused.

"Naturally." Jeremy spoke calmly, but hope flared.

"Despite the fact that you are an impostor?" The question was asked calmly.

Jeremy's brain whirled, and he hoped that the Scotsman could not read his expression in the dark. There was no choice but to bluff. "I am afraid, Sir Ian, that I must ask you to explain yourself."

"Let us not waste your time or mine in pretense. Mademoiselle Groliere was acquainted with the real Terence Bartlett.

But I do not care to argue or pursue the point with you. To me it is sufficient that you are a scoundrel. However, I see a way to rid the world of you at no embarrassment to Her Grace or myself. You still insist—whoever you may be—that you are a gentleman?”

“I am.” Jeremy’s voice rang out clearly.

“We shall see. Precede me into the dining saloon. Walk slowly and make no attempt to raise an alarm or to escape from me, or I shall be forced to skewer you as I would a hog.” An undercurrent of hate was evident in his even tone.

“You need have no fear that I shall run away from you, Sir Ian. It is not my habit to run—from anyone.”

Jeremy turned and started down the deck. The *Bonnie Maid* was moving into somewhat calmer seas but continued to pitch heavily, and the young gunsmith wondered if Sir Ian intended to run him through from behind and then push his body overboard. He admittedly had intended to claim there had been one “accident” tonight and might find it convenient to arrange another.

Opening the heavy door into the passageway, Jeremy walked down the lurching, silent corridor to the dining saloon, where a single candle stub burned low in a glass protector. “Light the candles in the other brackets,” Sir Ian’s voice behind him commanded.

“The brig is still tossing pretty badly,” Jeremy replied, inching around the big table and feeling a momentary sense of relief at putting the solid oak between himself and the Scotsman’s weapon. “And there’s danger of fire——”

“Do as I say!” Sir Ian was harsh, impatient.

Shrugging, Jeremy removed the glass protector, lifted the burning stub from its socket, then made his way carefully around the stateroom, lighting every taper still upright. Many had been dislodged during the storm, but a sufficient number remained to make the chamber bright.

Sir Ian stood at his ease, swaying slightly as he acclimated himself to the ship’s motion, which was more noticeable inside than it had been on deck. “All right, gentleman,” he said. “I shall give you a chance to defend yourself. No shadow of blame can be attached to me if you are found with a sword in your hand after a fair and honorable duel. However, lest you think for an instant that I believe you are someone of quality, let me tell you that I am permitting you to arm yourself merely for my personal convenience—and because it amuses me. I have resented the way you have looked at the Duchess, and killing you on deck would have been too quick for my taste. Now I can put you to death as you deserve to die, slowly.” He waved with his sword toward the far wall.

"You see quite an array of blades there," he said airily. "Help yourself to one that strikes your fancy, one that you feel will enable you to demonstrate your gentlemanly skill."

The young gunsmith eyed the swords on the length of the bulkhead; Sir Ian's steel was an exceptionally long one, and he would need one equally long, at least, for the Scotsman's reach was greater than his own. After an agonizing moment of indecision he spotted the weapon for which he was searching: its blade was straight, its point sharp, and the heavy iron hilt guard was practical if slightly clumsy.

He reached up, jerked it from its pins, and swished it back and forth to test its balance. All at once his fears and his sense of depression left him. The odds were no longer so overwhelmingly against him, and the baronet was in for a surprise.

"On your guard—and at your peril!" Sir Ian's snarl sounded directly behind him, around the edge of the table, and Jeremy turned just in time to see the other's blade lunging toward him.

At that instant the *Bonnie Maid* plunged ponderously into a trough, and Sir Ian slipped. His sword whistled harmlessly past the young gunsmith's shoulder, and by the time he recovered his stance Jeremy had turned and was in position.

"You are fortunate, impostor. This crowded cabin is not my idea of a perfect dueling ground, but it will serve." Again Sir Ian lunged, but this time the blow, aimed for Jeremy's throat, was neatly parried.

Metal rang against metal as the brig pitched, then Jeremy feinted and drove straight for the baronet's heart. Sir Ian barely managed to deflect the thrust and danced out of reach around the table, astonishment breaking the poised, ironic mask of his features.

"Where did you learn to use a blade with your left hand, charlatan?" he asked, rasping.

Not bothering to answer, Jeremy followed him slowly, pausing for an instant to steady himself with his free hand as the ship jarred and slid sideways. Sir Ian watched him, then chuckled. It was a deliberate sound, irritating and patronizing, and Jeremy was finally impelled to speak.

"I was taught," he said slowly, "to handle a sword in either hand, but to use my left only when intending to run my adversary through."

Sir Ian flicked his sword upward in a mock salute. "I shall remember that, charlatan, when we bury you at sea." Taking the initiative, he leaped forward, recklessly disregarding the brig's motion, and again steel beat against steel as they slowly circled the table.

Retreating carefully, afraid that a chair would become dislodged from its place and trip him from behind, Jeremy real-

ized that he faced an experienced duelist, an opponent who combined force with cunning, brute strength with practiced skill. But his confidence in his own ability was strong, and his zest for combat was keen. He was deft in beating off Sir Ian's attack, and he repeatedly thrust back at the older man, the point of his blade darting in and out as he sought an opening, a clue to the Scotsman's weaknesses.

Then, without warning, he stopped moving backward and lunged savagely just as the *Bonnie Maid* righted herself after a shuddering pitch. The wild, unorthodox tactic startled the baronet, and he fell back a pace. As he did so, Jeremy moved on to the offensive.

In a few moments it became clear that Sir Ian was finding it difficult to gauge the unorthodox style of a left-handed swordsman, and he manifestly did not enjoy being on the defensive. Sweat made his expensive lawn shirt soggy, and his thick brows were drawn together as he concentrated his full attention on the duel that was, very unexpectedly, no jest. Twice again they circled the table, and the baronet muttered a wild Gaelic curse under his breath, changed his stance abruptly, then sliced desperately, wickedly, at the younger man.

Jeremy raised his own weapon to eye level barely in time, but Sir Ian's thrust was so brutal that it almost knocked the gunsmith's blade from his hand. The Scotsman seemed suddenly determined to end the duel speedily and was apparently indifferent to his own fate as he slashed and cut repeatedly at his opponent. But Jeremy would not again retreat, for he knew that to do so would be fatal. Holding his ground on the heaving deck, he was forced to parry, to catch the other's blade on the outside of his own, and time and again to send it harmlessly past his body, over his shoulder, away from his face and head.

He continued to fight evenly, steadily, never missing his stride, never losing a beat in the intricate rhythm of the deadly combat, and at last a look of reluctant admiration appeared in Sir Ian's eyes. He had certainly not expected to find Jeremy so formidable an opponent, and the competition merely whetted his appetite. He redoubled the vigor of his attack, but Jeremy continued to hold firm, and the metallic clatter of clashing swords increased until it became a furious din.

"Stop—instantly! What does this mean? Stop, I say!"

Both blades were lowered as the sound of the commanding feminine voice penetrated the separate consciousnesses of the duelists. Breathing hard, they looked toward the door, where the Duchess Caroline, clad in a thin dressing gown of white silk, with her wheat-colored hair disheveled and her eyes heavy

with sleep, glared at them malevolently. Sir Ian was the first to recover.

"My deepest apologies for disturbing your slumber, Your Grace," he said. "But I was in the process of exterminating a verminous charlatan and mountebank. If you will be good enough to withdraw, I shall finish what I have begun."

Caroline received the news in unblinking silence. "Charlatan? Mountebank? Kindly explain yourself, Ian."

The Scotsman bowed low, almost too low, and his tone when he replied was faintly ironic. "With pleasure. This man is not Terence Bartlett. He is an impostor. Mademoiselle Groliere, the daughter of the ship's captain, can give you full details. She——"

"Stop! I've heard quite enough." Caroline's voice remained high and clear, and aside from a slight tremor in her hands she seemed in absolute command of herself. "If his lordship chooses to masquerade as Terence Bartlett, he does so to our great advantage rather than our detriment. Permit me to apologize to you for this inconvenience, milord."

Jeremy could only gape at her in total astonishment. Her calm at hearing him denounced as an impostor was merely a confirmation of his fears after his private interview with her. But to be called "milord" was bewilderingly incomprehensible. The effect on Sir Ian was equally startling, and he seemed to lose the power of speech.

Caroline turned again to her chamberlain. "You owe his lordship an apology, Ian," she said evenly.

"His lordship? Who is he?" The Scotsman's face was twisted into an ugly grimace as he peered at Jeremy.

Before the young gunsmith could speak, Caroline cut in swiftly. "His lordship is traveling incognito, and I have agreed to respect his wish not to reveal his identity," she said blandly. "And you, milord," she continued severely to Jeremy, "surely you knew that Sir Ian would sooner or later learn that you are not Bartlett. You must realize that my trusted adviser works and lives only to assist and protect me, and it was wrong of you, very wrong, to fight him because he stumbled on a portion of the truth about you."

For the first time Jeremy spoke. "That was not why I crossed swords with him, Your Grace. I could claim that I acted only in self-defense, that if I had not taken up a blade he would have killed me where I stood, but that would not be precisely accurate. I was happy to fight him, for he is a near murderer. Had it not been for my interruption, he would have killed a man."

"Sir Ian—a murderer?" Caroline's thin brows arched delicately.

"There was a slight accident after the storm, Your Grace," the baronet declared, "and this—ah—his lordship chose to misinterpret it. A manservant in our party who likes his jar of rum overmuch has been imprisoned in the ship's brig because of insolent conduct. As a humanitarian gesture I had him brought to the deck for air after the storm, for the hold is stuffy, and he suffered during the worst of the weather. He almost fell overboard, and milord here dashed to the rescue first. That's all there is to the matter." Sir Ian laughed harshly and glared at Jeremy as though daring him to contradict the story.

Caroline's face was a smooth mask. "I see," was all she said.

Jeremy was on the verge of mentioning the Scots guard who had vanished, but realized that would be Dirk's word against that of men of standing, and he held back. He thought of asking Caroline to summon Tully and hear the servant's own story of what had been done to him. But such a demand might set in motion a chain of events that would rebound to his own disadvantage, and his position was tenuous at best. Sir Ian undoubtedly had reason for wanting to be rid of Tully, and Jeremy's continued interference would merely increase the baronet's already deep hatred for him. In addition, there was Caroline's own knowledge that he was an impostor, and this, coupled with her amazing assertion that he was a nobleman, required his full attention. He had done all he could for Tully, he told himself, and hereafter must look out for himself.

"I trust you have nothing more to say, milord?" Caroline sounded almost as though she were giving a command rather than asking a question.

"I have already said all that it is possible for me to say, Your Grace." Jeremy stood erect, conscious that he was without a shirt.

"Very well, then. And you, Ian—is there more you wish to say?"

"No, Your Grace. Not at the moment."

"Then I shall express myself." Caroline's voice was no louder, but the definitive edge of authority crept into it. "First of all, there is to be no more of this insane dueling. That is the absolute command of Caroline Stuart. Am I understood?"

"Yes, Your Grace." The words were drawn out of both men reluctantly.

"Good. Ian, I place a solemn charge upon you. Under no conditions of any kind, at any time, are you to refer to Master Bartlett as a member of the nobility. He is the nephew of the governor general of Jamaica, and he is no one else. Do I make myself adequately clear?"

"More than adequate." There was again an unmistakable

sneer in the Scotsman's tone. "Your Grace will perhaps recall that someone other than I has knowledge that this—gentleman is not Terence Bartlett——"

The Duchess's eyes were hard. "I shall take care of Made-moiselle Groliere. In my own way. But you, Ian, if you ever hear anyone repeat such a rumor, you will insure his silence. You will take every means necessary to keep this secret secure."

Sir Ian bowed but did not reply.

"I think we all understand each other, then. Do I have your word, gentlemen, that you will do as I have bidden you?"

"Naturally."

"Of course, Your Grace." Jeremy tried to match the composure of the others.

"Thank you. Of course there will be no mention to anyone of any of the incidents that have apparently kept too many people awake for too much of this night." She hesitated for a second, and when she spoke again her voice was warmer. "We will say no more. Sir Ian, I bid you good night. Milord, be good enough to accompany me to my stateroom, for I wish a few more words with you before I retire."

Without waiting for a reply she started out of the door and down the passageway. Jeremy had no choice but to follow her, and as he did so he had to crowd past Sir Ian. The Scotsman did not budge, and Jeremy squeezed between him and the table. But neither man glanced at the other, and neither spoke.

The Duchess was speeding down the narrow passage, and before Jeremy could catch up with her she had entered her stateroom. When he came in she was seated on the edge of her bed. "Shut the door, please," she directed, and Jeremy complied, then waited, not knowing what to say or do next.

Only two candles were lighted, and it was not easy to read her expression as she studied him. Both were silent, and there was no sound but the creaking of the ship's ropes as they strained against the wind. Caroline brought the brief period of uncomfortable waiting to an abrupt end. "You are a fool—milord," she said.

"It is plain that I have displeased you, Your Grace." Jeremy was feeling his way cautiously, and he flinched whenever she referred to him as a lord. "But it was in your interests that I tried to prevent murder——"

"I have requested you never to mention that topic again!" she declared imperiously. "And I call you a fool because you serve neither your interests nor mine. It was only a short time ago, in this very chamber, that I tested you before others. You behaved commendably, so I tried to help you. Knowing you were not Terence Bartlett, I did what I could in a subtle way

to indicate that you must be wary. I have known from the very start that you are not Bartlett. I had investigated him thoroughly, and you neither resembled him nor acted as I had been assured he would act. Yet you have persisted in blundering tonight, and either you or my valued chamberlain would now be dead if I had not intervened."

"It would have been he, not I, Your Grace."

"Don't interrupt. You may speak when I give you leave, but only then." The flickering beams of candlelight showed enough to indicate that her blue eyes were cold. "You are apparently not one to whom subtleties can be entrusted. That is most unfortunate—for you. Your very life depends on the cunning you will demonstrate when we arrive in Jamaica."

"I do nothing without purpose. And realizing that you are an adventurer, I permitted you to accompany me aboard this ship, for I thought you might serve me more faithfully than the intoxicated oaf who happens to be nephew to the governor general at Port Royal. Do you follow me? You may speak now."

"I—after a manner of speaking I understand you, Your Grace. But you've been calling me 'milord'—and you told Sir Ian that I'm a noble who is traveling incognito, and——"

Caroline's high, trilling laugh was startling in the pre-dawn silence. "You are even less intelligent than I suspected, Master Whoever-you-may-be! Naturally I was forced to dissemble, for Sir Ian would have demanded that you be punished as an impudent, fraudulent mountebank had he realized that your true identity is unknown to me—and that you are, as I suspect, an ambitious and incautious person of no significance."

"You do my ancestors and my personal background an injustice, Your Grace." It seemed increasingly likely that Caroline was not going to have him imprisoned, and Jeremy was beginning to breathe more freely, to think more rapidly. "It so happens that I am the son of——"

"Never mind. I have no interest in your antecedents." The Duchess waved a slim hand airily. "All that concerns me is your future. And that future belongs—to me." She stopped and permitted the full meaning of her words to sink in. "You will continue to masquerade as Terence Bartlett. You will serve me faithfully and well; you will follow my every command to the letter; you will be loyal and steadfast. On pain of death."

## February 1692

WITH EACH passing day the weather grew balmier as the *Bonnie Maid* plowed through the open seas of the Atlantic into the comparatively sheltered waters of the placid Caribbean. And with each passing day Jeremy knew—with increasing certainty—that he was helpless, that he had played into the hands of the Duchess Caroline, and that a refusal to do her bidding in any matter large or small might well result in his execution. He cursed himself for the impulse that had led him to assume the identity of Terence Bartlett and cursed Caroline for being so astute and clever. It was at best a distinctly uncomfortable sensation to know that he was a mere pawn in the hands of a woman as beautiful as she was powerful and that she could use him as she pleased, then reject him, even crush him, if he failed to obey or if he gave too little satisfaction in whatever tasks might await him.

It was no consolation either to learn that Janine Groliere had been rewarded for her perfidy in having denounced him to Sir Ian MacGregor; the red-haired wench had been made lady in waiting to the Duchess, and when he saw her at Caroline's daily levees, calmly accepting the flirtatious advances of the gentlemen, yet carefully remaining in the background in order not to detract from her mistress, he wanted to slap her pretty mouth.

Thinking now about Janine Groliere as he stood on the deck and watched the sea in the cool of the late afternoon, he began to grow angry again, and his leather heels clicked vigorously on the pine boards. Though he vaguely realized his attitude was somewhat unfair, he nevertheless placed full blame on Janine for the untenable spot in which he found himself. Although the Duchess had known from the start that he was an impostor, she had not openly recognized the fact until Janine had disclosed the secret to her dour chamberlain. That she had chosen to impart her news to Sir Ian was doubly galling, for his hatred of the Scotsman grew as his feelings of impotence expanded.

"Master Bartlett." A soft, slightly husky feminine voice sounded directly behind him.

He turned quickly and found himself facing the very person of whom he had been thinking with such intensity, Janine Groliere. There were no combs in her gleaming red hair, which hung in loose curls, and she was wearing a muslin dress of delicate green, cut low at the neck, with a tight bodice and full, calf-length skirt. Obviously she had done considerable needlework since her appointment as lady in waiting in order to make her clothes conform to the Duchess's fashionable attire.

Jeremy allowed a frozen, polite smile to touch his lips. "Your servant, mademoiselle," he said curtly.

"I—I've been hoping for an opportunity to speak to you privately." The color was high on her cheeks. "Finding none, I have had to make one." She paused, watching him anxiously for some faint sign of encouragement.

But the young gunsmith did not unbend. "Very well. Now you have found me. There is some message Her Grace wishes you to deliver to me?"

"I wish to see you, Master Bartlett. This is no concern of the Duchess, I assure you."

"Say your piece, then, mademoiselle. I was enjoying my solitude and you have disturbed it."

"For that, I humbly beg your pardon." Janine's eyes were pleading with him, though she managed to control her voice. "But I—I cannot talk here, in full view of all who may appear. I—this is most embarrassing for me to say, and I hope you will not misunderstand me. But I—I would be most grateful to you if you would join me in my cabin in a few moments' time. If you are a gentleman, if there is within you any feeling of kindness or pity or sympathy for others, you will heed my request."

Eyes downcast, she would have walked away, but Jeremy stopped her. "You're being very mysterious, and I don't like mystery," he stated flatly. "As we both know—to my sorrow and your gain—I have no good reason to trust you. If you wish me to accompany you to your cabin, mademoiselle, I——"

"No!" Exasperated at the stupidity of the male, she stamped her foot. "I possess little in this world other than my reputation, and if we were seen entering my quarters together—it is unthinkable. Join me shortly or not, as you choose. I can but hope that you will come to me and that you will be discreet." With a toss of her head she turned and walked away rapidly, not looking back.

Jeremy watched her for a moment, then leaned his elbows on the rail and stared with unseeing eyes at the green-blue sea. Incongruously he became aware of the salt odor that seemed

to become stronger, more all-pervading as the *Bonnie Maid* moved southward. The possibility that Janine, in league with Sir Ian MacGregor, might be intending something to his detriment was uppermost in his mind, but he knew he would be forever curious if he failed to accept the girl's unusual invitation. Shrugging, he made up his mind and started down the deck.

So intent was he on maintaining a casual appearance that he failed to notice a coil of rope on the deck, caught his left foot, and almost fell. Regaining his balance with a great effort, he discovered that he had wrenched his ankle, and as he continued, limping slightly, he cursed savagely under his breath. As he neared Janine's cabin, which opened directly on to the deck, two seamen approached, so he slowed his pace until they were gone. Then he sprang forward, despite the pain shooting up his leg, and tapped on the door.

"Come in, please!" Janine's voice was low but urgent.

Jeremy opened the door, saw that the girl was alone, and quickly stepped inside. She was instantly beside him and slammed the door shut. Then she retreated to the far end of the chamber, her eyes on his. The young gunsmith returned her gaze for a few seconds, then looked about him, sighed, and grinned. This was the most feminine place on the ship, far more so than the captain's sumptuous stateroom which Caroline had appropriated. Though tiny and compact, it gave every evidence that it was being used by a woman. Lace-edged sheets covered the bunk, and there were frills on the cloth covers of a small dressing table and stool. There was a faint but definite scent of perfume in the cabin, and the tapers in wall sconces were dyed pink. On nails which had been pounded into the back of the door were hung several gowns and petticoats, and a pair of ridiculously fragile slippers could be seen peeping out from under the bottom of the dressing table. A gay flowered dressing robe lay across the foot of the bunk, and even the panels of the heavy window curtains that faced into the cabin had been appliqued with figures of small, elaborately gowned young ladies.

"A very nice cabin, this," he said. "Are you asking me to sit, mademoiselle?" His voice was insinuating, and he realized he was being rude, but his desire to humiliate Janine was almost overwhelming.

"If you wish to sit, please do." Her face was grave and her green eyes serious. "It is my desire to unburden myself to you, if I may call it that. This—this is most difficult for me——"

"I had no idea that you were shy."

"You do not make this easier for me, sir, though I cannot

blame you for hating me. Be that as it may, I would like you to know that when I felt called upon to go to Sir Ian MacGregor I bore you no ill will."

"You felt called upon? By whom?" Jeremy's hands found the foot of the bunk, and he gripped the oak upright plank until his knuckles whitened.

Janine took two steps closer and looked straight into his eyes. "I was urged by no one, influenced by no one, for none knew what I knew." She spoke quietly, her hands at her sides, her attitude sincere and dignified. "I did only what I believed was right. I certainly intended no harm to you, and I didn't dream you would fight a duel with Sir Ian——"

"Who told you about a duel?" Jeremy demanded sharply. The Duchess had been specific in her instructions that the fight was to be mentioned to no one.

"I heard Her Grace mention it privately to Sir Ian. And I'm sorry. More sorry than you will know or believe, Master Bartlett—or—or—whoever——"

"I am Terence Bartlett. Despite your vicious efforts to wrench my name from me."

The girl gasped, and Jeremy realized that he was being unnecessarily rude. Even if Janine had stupidly felt it her duty to reveal that he was not Bartlett, it was handsome of her to apologize. Looking at her, with the color high in her cheeks, her lashes damp, and her breathing rapid and agitated, he thought he had rarely seen anyone so attractive. Fishing his snuffbox from a waistcoat pocket, he flipped it open as he studied her.

Janine immediately sensed the change in him. "I have begged your indulgence, sir, though you have not yet seen fit to accept it. I can do no more."

The snuffbox shut with a snap. "I'm not so sure about that." Jeremy moved to her quickly, and his arms went around her waist.

"No!" she said softly but sharply, trying to break away.

Jeremy laughed quietly; he was sure she would not scream or otherwise attract attention, for she had been too concerned for her good name when she had asked him here. Janine was beautiful and desirable, and at the very least she could repay him in some measure for the anguish she had caused him.

Ignoring her struggles, he tried to kiss her; as he bent his head toward her, however, he suddenly became aware of the sharp glint of metal near his face. She had produced a double-edged poniard from somewhere and was holding it close to his throat.

Jeremy dropped his arms and stepped backward. Bowing, he uttered a short laugh. "You use persuasive arguments, ma-

demoiselle. As your point is now made, you may remove that particularly sharp emphasis. I shall not molest you again."

Her eyes burning, Janine dropped him a mock curtsy. "I was educated as a lady, but I am still Philippe Groliere's daughter, and I never hesitate to protect myself from boors who have a mistaken opinion of me and of my virtue."

"You have convinced me of your true nature, mademoiselle. Utterly. I no longer misunderstand anything about you. It is my turn to apologize, and I do so. Freely." Jeremy turned and left the cabin. In his mouth was the bitter, lingering taste of shame.

It was midmorning when the lookout cried, "Land ho!" and the passengers, lining up along the port rail, peered intently toward the haze behind which lay the craggy mountains and lush foliage of Hispaniola. A few moments of fruitless eyestrain were enough for Jeremy Stone, and he retreated to the starboard side, where he could be alone. The sight of land increased his sense of nervousness and frustration; in a few days the *Bonnie Maid* would arrive in Jamaica and his real work as an impostor would begin. Meanwhile he had made an enemy of Janine Groliere, though he certainly could have served his own ends better had his approach to her been diplomatic. It was too late, he thought bitterly, to recall his father's axiom that honey caught more flies than vinegar.

Meanwhile he knew very little, far too little about Terence Bartlett, and every scrap of information he could gather would be important when he confronted Bartlett's uncle, the governor general, at Port Royal. Surely Caroline Stuart was familiar with more than she had told him about the man he was supposed to be; acting on sudden impulse, he stepped into the passageway and knocked on the door of her stateroom. This would be a perfect time to find her alone, while the other members of her party were staring with hypnotized eyes at the distant shores of Spain's principal stronghold in the Caribbean.

The door opened slowly, and Nan, the Duchess's maid, stepped into the areaway. A blowzy caricature of her mistress, she was thin but gave the appearance of being tubby, for her bare arms were heavy, her face was fleshy, and her deep-set eyes were small and round. Too many applications of lemon and alum powder had broken off the ends of her overly blond hair, and lines appeared in profusion at the corners of her eyes and on her forehead. Notwithstanding these handicaps, she believed implicitly in the power of her fading charms, and she smiled broadly at Jeremy, her eyes shining with synthetic brightness.

His instinct told him to have as little as possible to do with the hag, and he bowed to her abruptly. "I shall be obliged to you, Nan," he said, "if you will tell Her Grace I seek an audience with her. You might tell her I'd like to discuss some things out of the past with her."

Still smiling, the maid slid back into the room, wriggling her rump in what she considered a provocative fashion. In a few seconds she was back. "'Er Gryce," she said carefully, "don't want to talk wif yer abaht what yer worship wants to talk wif her abaht. But don't yer be put off none," she added hastily, seeing Jeremy's face fall. She grinned slyly, and her fingertips caressed his sleeve. "Mayhap I might persuade 'Er Gryce to change 'er mind, if yer worship is nice and acts kindly-like."

"Thanks, Nan. I'll see her another time, perhaps, when she isn't busy." Breaking free of the harridan's clutch, he hurried back out to the sunlight and the clean smell of salt air. His disappointment was bitter, for it was all too plain that Caroline intended to tell him no more about Bartlett's past. He would succeed or flounder with the scraps of information he had previously gleaned.

As he reached the deck, a seaman bounded up to him and stopped short. "Cap'n would like a word with you, sir," the man said, touching his forelock. "An' if it please you, Master Bartlett, could you come with me now? Cap'n, he's in a rage, an' if I was to say you'd be along later or such, he'd give me the cat."

Jeremy nodded and asked the sailor to lead the way. Climbing a short ladder to the quarter-deck, they made their way through the wheelhouse to a small cabin from which the master of the *Bonnie Maid* had dispossessed his mates when he had been forced to give up his own stateroom to the Duchess of Glasgow.

A little window provided the only light, and the sunshine emphasized the drabness of the small room. A cutlass and a brace of pistols hung from the bulkhead opposite the window, and there were two small bunks in the room. On one sheets and a blanket were drawn taut, and on the other stood a carved teakwood sea chest, which obviously contained the captain's private effects. There was a table with a straight-backed chair on either side, and nothing else—save the overwhelming presence of Philippe Groliere.

Tall and brawny, he was a powerful man and showed it in every line of his body, every movement of his head and shoulders as he looked up from a ledger in which he was scribbling laboriously with a blunt-edged quill. His reddish-brown hair was flecked with gray, and there were streaks of white in his short, spiked beard and bushy brows. His penetrating

green eyes were a masculine version of his daughter's, but there the resemblance ceased. His skin was hard, leathery, and weather-beaten, his nose was broad and was twisted slightly to the right, showing the effects of a fight long ago forgotten, and his lips were thin and cruel.

Not even the presence of royalty aboard his brig could make him change the habits of a lifetime, and he was dressed in a pair of faded trousers stuffed into soft boots, and a plain cotton shirt, short-sleeved and open at the throat. Dangling from his broad belt was a sheathed poniard, and beside him on the table was his sole badge of authority, a stiff-brimmed hat around which was looped a coil of salt-stained gold braid.

He blinked, recognized his visitor, and waved the seaman out of the cabin with an angry, short wave of a hairy hand. "Bartlett," he barked. "Been waiting for you. Sit down."

Jeremy sat. Looking at the captain, he marveled at the complete lack of similarity between Janine's voice and that of her father. Groliere had spent his life at sea, and he spoke in a deep bellow whose every intonation reverberated against the thick oak panels of the bulkhead. Even his accent was different, for although the captain spoke English with ease, his cadence was redolent of Brest and Le Havre, Cherbourg and the Channel Isles.

Snapping the ledger shut, Groliere lifted a hand and brought it crashing down so hard the little table shuddered. "Impertinent whelp!" he boomed. "Insolent puppy! Damned gentlemen! All of you are the same. Think you own the world!"

Jeremy felt his skin tingling, but he kept his voice calm. "You seem to be accusing me of something, Captain," he said mildly. "May I know the nature of your charges?"

"May I know the nature of your charges? Hell and sin! Had my way, I'd keelhaul you! Try to seduce my daughter, will you?"

So that was it. Janine had told her father about yesterday's incident and had built it up out of all proportion to the truth. At best the situation was ticklish, for he could hardly admit to the girl's outraged parent that he had fondled her and had tried to kiss her. He racked his mind for something to say, but Philippe Groliere saved him the trouble.

"Any man seduces my daughter, I'll kill him. Well? Tell me the truth, damn you. Did you or didn't you?"

"Surely Mademoiselle Groliere has given you a detailed account of what transpired, Captain. But I can assure you, it was a most innocent meeting." Jeremy was perspiring heavily beneath his lightweight suit.

The captain spat accurately into a corner. "Damn wench. Never tells me anything. Wouldn't have known you'd been in

her cabin if it hadn't been for this." He rummaged beneath some papers beside his ledger, found a small object, and half threw, half handed it to Jeremy. "Here. Found it in her cabin myself. What do you say to this?"

Jeremy looked at the cool, round piece of metal in his hand; it was Terence Bartlett's snuffbox, and Bartlett's initials were clearly marked on the back. He had missed it, but only now did the realization flood over him that he had undoubtedly dropped it during the scuffle with Janine.

"What did she say about it, Captain?"

"Not a word. Not a goddamn word. Said to ask you. Well?" The green eyes bored into Jeremy.

The young gunsmith met the other's gaze unflinchingly. "There are certain matters of business that concern Her Grace of Glasgow, Captain, which are confidential. Your daughter is now lady in waiting to Her Grace, and I am a member of the Duchess's staff. I do not feel at liberty to reveal the topic under discussion. It is true that I spent a few moments in Mademoiselle Groliere's cabin. But I was there for those few moments only, and at her express invitation, I might add. I seem to have lost my snuffbox, and I am grateful to you for its return."

Philippe Groliere's face darkened with anger; he jerked the dagger from his belt and plunged it into the table. It quivered there, the point buried an inch deep in the wood. "Maybe you're telling the truth, Bartlett. Maybe not. But I'll find out. And by God, if you're tampering with my girl, I'll cut your heart out."

"You'll lay your hands on me at your peril." The words were out before Jeremy could stop them.

"So? We'll see about that. My girl's going up in the world. All I've ever wanted for her, she'll have. And nobody will interfere. Nobody. Maybe I'm just an old sea dog. But I'll help her. Understand me clear, Bartlett. Any gentleman with honorable intent toward my Jan will have my blessings. But anyone who just wants to bed her will find this steel in his heart." He stood up so suddenly that his chair shot back and crashed into the bulkhead behind him.

In an instant Jeremy was on his feet too, and it was all he could do to restrain himself. "A most interesting lecture, sir," he said, his voice taut with emotion. "If you have nothing further to say to me, I'll take leave of you now."

"Not so fast! There is more. You interfered with the operation of this brig the night of the gale. A man was being punished. You tried to stop it."

"That's not quite accurate, Captain. I——"

"Interrupt me at your peril, damn you! You interfered!"

Insolence, Bartlett. I won't tolerate it. This is my ship. I'm the law here. Do it again and I'll clap you into irons. Until you're landed at Port Royal you're under my jurisdiction. And don't you forget it. Good day. And be damned to you!"

## CHAPTER SIX:

# February 1692

A MERCILESS tropical sun glared brightly overhead, and the placid blue waters of Port Royal Harbor shimmered in the heat. Straight ahead lay the green-clad peaks of the Blue Mountains, and lazy clouds drifted aimlessly over them. Between mountains and sea stood the sprawling Liguanea Plain, a grassy rising plateau that was being converted into profitable plantations bearing sugar cane, indigo, and cotton as fast as ambitious landowners could import new shiploads of slaves from Africa. Port Royal itself nestled in the flatlands at the bulbous end of a long, narrow peninsula joined to the mainland of the island by a strip of sandy soil which the Spaniards, previous owners of Jamaica, had called the Palisadoes.

Tufts of wild crab grass studded the causeway, and a seemingly endless row of coconut palms snaked around the enclosed bay at the far end of the peninsula. The palms were considered an oddity, and neither the native Arawak Indians nor the imported Africans would touch the fruit, so the trees remained inviolate.

From the berth where the *Bonnie Maid* rode at anchor, the town itself appeared cramped and drab and colorless, surprising for a community renowned the world over for its wickedness and glitter. Though it was true that Port Royal was the only port in the Caribbean open to freebooters of any nationality and that her gaming, wenching, and drinking establishments had attained a luster in the eyes of men everywhere, thanks to the lurid tales told about them by sailors of every nation, the actual buildings of the town looked like no more than the squat, ugly structures of limestone and mud, native wood and clay that they were. Only three were in any sense imposing: near the waterfront was a church with a gilded spire; on the far side of town, where the aristocracy, government officials, and wealthy planters made their homes, a three-story

building made of imported brick was King's House, the official residence of Sir Arthur Bartlett, Governor General of Jamaica, Their Majesties' Viceroy in the Indies, and Vice-Admiral of the Fleet for Western Waters. Most of all was the Citadel, a grim fortress erected on a man-made promontory overlooking the harbor. Her cannon, placed at intervals in a thick stone wall, literally hung out over the water, and sentinels in scarlet uniforms and high fur shakos marched stiff-legged on the catwalks, demonstrating to the riffraff that William and Mary were supreme even in this remote outpost of Whitehall.

Jeremy Stone, seated in the stern of the *Bonnie Maid's* gig as it sped shoreward, was almost blind to the sights that lay ahead, and instead stared blankly at the oars of the four seamen who propelled the little craft. Dirk Friendly, sitting beside him on the low wooden plank, alternately muttered complaints about the heat and speculated excitedly about the rum and women who awaited a young man of vigor in the town. But Jeremy heard not a word and thought only that if he failed to carry off his impersonation of Terence Bartlett he would soon be dead.

"Jerry!" Dirk's harsh whisper cut through his thoughts. "Smilin' Jehos'phat! They're a-wavin' t' ye from the dock there! Wake up, will ye?"

There was a long roll of drums somewhere ahead, and Jeremy glanced up sharply. Standing at the end of a long stone pier were two figures, a man and a woman, both of middle years. The gentleman was dressed in a white uniform with an ivory plume in his hat, and across his breast was the watered silk ribbon of the Order of the Garter. Despite the heat, he wore a powdered wig, as did the lady, who was attired in a gorgeous if old-fashioned gown with many petticoats and a large bustle. Behind them, at the far end of the dock, was a line of scarlet-coated grenadiers, bayoneted muskets touching the ground at precisely the same angle.

In the rear was a large crowd, and as the gig drew nearer Jeremy saw that at least half were Negroes in tattered clothing. There were men of all ages in every variety of seamen's attire, and it took little imagination to guess that these were *boucaniers*, the blustering freebooters who had so long made the Caribbean dangerous for fat merchantmen. With them were a considerable number of handsome, highly painted women, most of them young, and ranging in color from white to a deep brown. These were certainly some of the Jezebels who gave Port Royal the name of the most sinful city on earth.

But it was the couple at the head of the pier who attracted Jeremy's full attention. Unless he was much mistaken, he was

looking at Sir Arthur Bartlett and his lady, for surely no other man in this remote corner of the earth was entitled to wear the distinguished ribbon of the Garter. Tall and spare, with a ruddy complexion, clipped white mustaches, and firm lips, he had the bearing of the able, loyal, and fearless servant of the Crown that his reputation proclaimed him to be. White, bushy brows framed a pair of deep blue eyes that were watching Jeremy keenly as the gig drew near the dock. Lady Bartlett was short, fragile in appearance, with delicate features and a pale skin that appeared incongruous in a place where all other whites were deeply tanned.

The gig pulled alongside the quay, the *Bonnie Maid's* seamen held the boat steady, and Jeremy leaped ashore, with Dirk clambering onto the dock after him; he drew his sword and saluted with a flourish. "Sir Arthur?" he asked, his pulse suddenly racing as his impersonation became distasteful.

"Yes. I am Arthur Bartlett." The governor general's voice was deep and smooth.

"I am the official representative of Caroline Stuart, Her Grace of Glasgow. I—I also have the honor to be your nephew Terence, sir."

Lady Bartlett snapped her tiny parasol shut with a fluttering but decisive gesture, uttered a happy, birdlike cry, and, brushing aside all ceremony, hurried forward and threw her arms around Jeremy's neck. A moment later Sir Arthur held his hand in a solid grip, and the warmth, the depth and sincerity of their welcome made Jeremy feel ashamed and sordid. It was small consolation to think that he better represented the Bartlett name than the sot who was slowly drinking himself to death in Van der Voort's Ordinary two thousand miles away.

"Terence!" Lady Bartlett said fondly. "Terence! Let me look at you! Gracious, you're handsome! Yes, you look like the Bartletts. I'd have known you anywhere."

"Thank you, Aunt," Jeremy murmured, suddenly horror-stricken at the thought that he did not know her Christian name.

"We've thought about you, lad," the viceroy of William and Mary boomed. "We've thought much about you, and we've hoped we might have the joy of seeing you, but we never expected you'd come to Jamaica with a royal duchess. Well!" He paused, seemed lost in thought for a moment, then plunged on: "We should have written to you at the time of the tragedy, but I was on a special mission for King Charles to the Turks, and it was many months before the news reached us. We've spent almost no time at all in England these past twenty years, you know. But we were sorry to hear of the loss of Daphne and—what was her name?—Clothilde——"

Lady Bartlett took hold of her husband's sleeve and shook his arm gently. "Not Clothilde, Arthur. Mathilde."

Jeremy almost sighed aloud in relief. He had no idea of the identity of the two women being discussed, but had caught enough of the drift of the conversation to keep his face set in sober lines.

"Look at him," the governor general's lady continued. "He doesn't want to be reminded, Arthur. You can see that." She turned to Jeremy and smiled softly. "It isn't that your uncle doesn't remember your dear sisters, Terence," she explained. "He does recall them, very well. But he isn't adept at names, even of those he loves. However, we'll say no more about them or the plague, either. It's dreadfully hot out here, and I'll be happy to go beneath some shade trees somewhere, if there's no objection."

Relieved that he had escaped detection with such ease, Jeremy immediately plunged into the business at hand, the landing of the Duchess and the official reception. As they spoke, Sir Arthur took his arm and led him past the line of scarlet-uniformed soldiers of the honor guard. Within the Citadel's inner network of walls was a small garden, and here, beneath a towering, thick-trunked tree laden with streamers of moss, a tree Jeremy was later to come to know by the native name of gwango, he informed Sir Arthur of Caroline's wishes. Listening intently, the governor general interrupted now and again, then summoned a subordinate, to whom he issued a series of brief, crisp instructions. Jeremy was introduced to each of these officials, but the only one he remembered was Brigadier Sir Oswald Terne, highest-ranking military man in the Crown's employ residing in the Western Hemisphere and the man who would certainly lead the combined armies of the Indies and the North American colonies in the event that a new war should break out with Louis XIV of France. Sir Oswald impressed himself on Jeremy's mind because of his marked similarity to Colonel Eustis Martin, and it occurred to the young gunsmith that a lifetime in the army cast officers in the same mold.

As the trio sat drinking a fruit punch mildly flavored with rum, Jeremy learned that one wing of King's House had been made uninhabitable by a hurricane three months previous and that the repairmen were incredibly slow. This, combined with the demands of Caroline for herself, her lady in waiting, and her maid, left virtually no room at the palace for any other members of the party. Quarters would be found for Sir Ian, and the officers could be housed at the army barracks nearby. But that left Lord Murray, among others, without a suitable bed. And Lady Bartlett was disturbed because there was no

room for her nephew. She began to puzzle aloud on how she could rearrange her household, but Jeremy immediately declared that he would find a place for himself and his manservant elsewhere.

"No, dear Terence!" Lady Bartlett said firmly. "I will not allow our nearest of kin to lodge anywhere but under our roof!"

Her husband leaned toward her, patted her hand indulgently, then sat straight in his chair. "It is because he is our nearest of kin that we cannot keep him with us, Barbara," he said in mild reproof. "It is not fitting that Thomas Murray, a lord of the realm, be compelled to dwell elsewhere while we favor our own blood. We would be severely criticized for it, you know, and quite rightly, too."

Secretly relieved, Jeremy said loudly, "I agree with you, Uncle!" While he wanted to be as near to Caroline as possible, common sense told him that until he could unravel the mystery of why she was allowing him to continue in her employ he should not be too close either to her, to Sir Ian—or, for that matter, to Janine Groliere.

"I think," the governor general continued, "the most fitting spot would be the Golden Bucket. We can arrange for a suite there for Terence, and we'll reserve another for Lord Murray. The others——"

"Not the Golden Bucket!" Lady Barbara Bartlett was vehement. "It—— Why, it is nothing but a cheap tavern, Arthur!"

"A tavern, yes," he responded dryly. "But not cheap. And certainly the best this benighted pesthole affords. I shouldn't worry if I were you, Barbara. It's the best solution, and Terence here looks as though he can take care of himself."

Jeremy was about to reply that he had learned swordsmanship from his father, but realized almost too late that he was speaking to people who would know instantly whether Terence Bartlett's father had ever held a blade in his hand. He swallowed the words that had come so close to tumbling out and was saved from further comment by a loud commotion from somewhere inside the Citadel. He heard a deep bass shout, "I tell ye, Friendly's m' name 'n' friendly's m' nature!" followed by a splintering crash.

On his feet instantly, Jeremy barely remembered to mutter, "By your leave," as he dashed into the heavy stone building toward the sound of the continuing altercation. Sir Arthur was at his heels, and several officers followed them along the arched corridor. They came unexpectedly into a large room overlooking the sea, a chamber containing several long tables of a hard native wood, with benches on each side. This was

probably the mess hall for the garrison, and it was obvious there had been difficulties. Two of the benches were knocked over, a battered pewter mug had been flung across the hall and had spewn its contents on the stone flooring, and several glasses had been ground underfoot.

As Jeremy and Sir Arthur burst into the room, there was a remarkable quiet. A group of six or seven red-coated soldiers stood huddled together at the far end of the room, muttering softly. Beyond them was Dirk Friendly, who held still another soldier suspended in the air. Dirk's huge hand gripped him by the cross-belts on his uniform, and although the victim was struggling and kicking, his arms were not long enough for him to reach the big New Yorker. Just beyond Dirk was a window frame cut in the stone, and Dirk was gesturing toward it graphically with his free hand.

"Admit ye be wrong," he was saying in his most deceptively inoffensive tone, "or ye'll all be a-takin' a bath in the Caribbean out there, beginnin' with this one here."

Unable to decide whether to laugh or lose his temper, Jeremy at last found his voice. "Dirk!" he said sharply. "What's the meaning of this?"

The group at the window turned, and the soldiers stiffened to attention at the sight of the governor general. Even the man being held in mid-air tried to recapture some semblance of military dignity. But Dirk was unabashed, and his tone was aggrieved as he twisted his neck to face Jeremy, still holding his victim off the floor. "This here English dandy has been a-sayin' that folks from the colonies ain't as smart or clever or brave as somebuddy that comes from London," he declared in a hurt voice. "'N' these other ones has been agreein' with him. But it ain't true. So I was just a-aimin' t' make 'em all see the error o' their ways."

Sir Arthur managed to keep a straight face with the greatest of difficulty. "I apologize to you on behalf of my regiments for their abysmal ignorance, young man."

Dirk noticed the Crown's viceroy for the first time, and he set the soldier down so hard that the man's teeth clattered. Unsure of whether to appear brazen or penitent, he grinned amiably. Sir Arthur's reserve broke, and he chuckled, then patted Jeremy on the shoulder. "We'd best go back to your aunt Barbara," he said. "We left her rather suddenly, and I'm sure she'll be relieved to hear that I've never uttered more truthful words than when I said you'd be safe at the Golden Bucket. With such a man as this—this giant to serve you, it's plain that all Port Royal will need protection from you."

It was ten o'clock at night when Jeremy arrived at the Golden Bucket tavern and took possession of the suite of rooms that had been held for him. He looked around the small sitting room, modest bedchamber, and tiny servant's room and decided that, unlike Lord Murray, who had accompanied him back to the inn and had announced his intent of going straight to bed, he was too exhilarated to sleep.

The evening, in retrospect, had been a complete success. Both Sir Arthur and Lady Bartlett had continued to accept him without question as their nephew, and he had gleaned enough of family affairs to talk glibly of Terence Bartlett's sisters and other relatives. Caroline had been elated at the bond he had established with the governor general and had favored him with numerous firm declarations of her faith in him.

Even Sir Ian MacGregor had been openly though unaccountably pleased with Jeremy and had gone out of his way to be complimentary at the dinner table and over Sir Arthur's excellent port and native *segaros*. Arrangements had been made for the impostor to accompany Sir Arthur and the military men on an inspection tour of the garrison tomorrow, and the Duchess had asked him to stop first at King's House so she could give him privately a list of items on which she wanted specific information.

The only sour note in the evening had been the attitude of Janine Groliere. Dressed in a simple yellow gown that had somehow brought out the beauty of her delicate coloring and burnished hair, she had seemed to be looking in Jeremy's direction whenever he had chanced to glance at her. And there had invariably been a gleam of sardonic humor in her eyes. While he was in a sense grateful that she now served the Duchess and thus could not spread her tale of his real identity, he fervently wished her elsewhere, for that steady, unwavering gaze made him decidedly uncomfortable.

Now, after changing into fresh linen, he made his way into the taproom of the Golden Bucket and sat down at a small table. Dirk, who already knew many of the servants and much of the backstairs gossip of King's House, took a chair at a table directly behind him, for a man and his master could not drink together without causing a lifting of eyebrows. However, their backs were almost touching, and they were able to converse in low tones.

Jeremy ordered a rum punch, the specialty of the establishment, which turned out to be a stronger version of the fruit-juice-and-rum concoction that he had drunk with Sir Arthur and Lady Bartlett at the Citadel, and he looked around the room with considerable interest. There were perhaps forty

tables, and light was provided by candles surrounded by glass windscreens. There was no roof over the center of the room, and the stars were plainly visible. Equally unusual was the presence of three banyan trees along a wall, each of which seemed to grow into the hostelry. Close examination showed that the trees were being used as pillars to help support the second story of the tavern, and some of the branches literally extended through the flooring of the apartments above.

The murmur of conversation swelled and ebbed, and it appeared as though the majority of tables were occupied. Most of the men present seemed to be officers of the ships in the harbor; at least they were somewhat better dressed than the seamen, though they were more or less of the same type. Some sat with beautifully gowned, overly rouged young women, and occasionally an unaccompanied wench would stroll through the room and smile invitingly at the newcomer. Each time Jeremy shook his head, and the girl would move on quietly, without trying to press her attentions on him.

Directly ahead of Jeremy was a large table, and one of the occupants in particular caught his notice, for the man was the last person one might expect to see in the taproom of an establishment like the Golden Bucket. Very tall and thin, with straight black hair and a short black beard, he wore the vestments of a clergyman: a somber black suit with a thin line of white piping at the neck and a large silver cross on his chest, held by a thin silver chain. Strangely, his companions seemed to be the roughest and most disreputable men in the room. Occasionally one would rise and leave, and soon another would saunter up to the table and take his place. Now and then a trollop accompanied one of the men, but the minister, if such he was, greeted all comers with the same quiet calm and good humor.

He was in no wise abashed or perturbed when one of the wenches was thoroughly fondled or kissed, nor did he seem taken aback at the vulgarity of his friends' language. Jeremy noticed, however, that he drank no intoxicating liquor and that when he spoke, softly but earnestly, the others fell silent and listened to his words attentively.

Suddenly Dirk gasped and muttered something unintelligible under his breath. Jeremy half turned in his seat, then stared: approaching was the most unusual young woman he had ever seen in his life. Walking sedately beside her as she half ran, half bounded across the room was a lean gray wolfhound, and apparently both mistress and animal were familiars of the establishment, for no one but the two young adventurers from New York looked up.

Tall, with a feminine but muscular figure, the girl seemed

to be in her early twenties. Her hair was cut short at the nape of her neck and had been trimmed to an inch and one half in length. A shimmering blue-black, it was as disarrayed as though she had been standing on the windy quarter-deck of a ship. Her features were alert and strong, and her hazel eyes showed intelligence and humor. Her costume, to say the least, was unorthodox: she wore an open-throated man's shirt that did little to conceal the swelling of her breasts, and a pair of man's trousers of faded blue-green, which she had cut off below the knees. On her feet were simple leather sandals, each held by a single leather thong wound around the ankle, and encircling her waist was a wide, brass-studded belt of black leather of the sort worn by *boucaniers*.

It was inconceivable to Jeremy that any female, even one with such a wild, untamed appearance, could have joined the half-savage men who were bound together in a fanatical brotherhood that knew no law, no discipline save its own. Only tonight at dinner he had heard Sir Arthur Bartlett tell of the mysterious rites of the privateers who landed on Hispaniola, held secret ceremonies, and afterward caught and killed the cattle of the island, then cooked the meat in long strips over green wooden frames called *boucan*.

The governor general had said that every man who wore the black, brass-knobbed belt was one who had been initiated into the elite clan of the privateers.

Studying the girl, the young gunsmith decided that perhaps she was capable of being one of the *boucaniers*. She arrived at the table of the minister and his motley assortment of companions, and as she bent down and kissed the cleric on the top of his balding head, she laughed. Never had Jeremy heard so joyously free a sound. It was an expression of genuine merriment, and he was in some strange way reminded of the gypsies he had once seen in his childhood in England.

A place was made at the table for the young woman, and she sat down directly facing Jeremy. She promptly and obviously inquired about him from her companions, and her eyes seemed to bore into him as she nodded in reply to what was being said to her. Without warning the lines of her face relaxed, and she winked at Jeremy, then grinned. It was not the greeting of a harlot, nor even the usual salutation of a woman to someone of the opposite sex. Rather she seemed to be welcoming him to the island in an amiable, extraordinarily casual manner.

He was about to reply in kind when a table somewhere crashed over, and the sound of a loud, violently angry voice cut through the hubbub. Jeremy was on his feet instantly, as were most of the others in the room. What he saw made him

forget all else, and he worked his way forward through the crowd, Dirk at his elbow. A heavy-set, florid man, flashily dressed in a suit of violet and sky blue, was thrashing out again and again with a short bull whip. Writhing on the floor at his feet was an Arawak, a smaller and darker Indian than the sturdy giants of the Iroquois nation whom Jeremy had grown accustomed to seeing in New York.

"I saw you lurkin' out there, you dirty little cur!" the man shouted, accenting each phrase with another vicious blow. "Run off from me, will you? I'll beat you till I've taught a lesson to every slave at Mangrove."

Jeremy was about to back away when a low-pitched feminine voice spoke softly into his ear. "The Arawak are not slaves. They are free men, and plantation owners have no right to impress them into service." Without turning around, he knew that the speaker was the weirdly attired girl with black hair. "The governor general would stop outrages like this if he could, but by the time he hears of it that poor little devil will be lying half dead in the slave pens at Mangrove Plantation, and not one of the blacks or Indians there will dare to speak up to the Crown investigators for fear of their own skins."

Her voice had a peculiarly insinuating quality; she seemed to be prodding Jeremy into action, and he turned to stare at her sharply. However, her face and eyes showed nothing but an overwhelming pity for the Arawak. Suddenly Jeremy could hold back no longer. His jaw setting grimly, he drew his sword, stepped forward, and with a single deft stroke cut the bull whip in two just as the heavy man was about to bring it down once more on the Indian's torn back.

A growl of rage escaped the man's lips, and his face blackened apoplectically as he whirled on the intruder who had dared to frustrate his design. "What in hell do you think you're doin'?" he shouted. "By God, I'll give you a taste of——"

At this moment Dirk Friendly intervened. Lifting Jeremy bodily and setting him to one side as though he were some small inanimate object, Dirk strolled toward the overseer, a pleasant smile on his face. "Ye ain't a-goin' t' do nothin' more t' nobuddy, 'n' ye've did all ye'll do for t'night, I reckon."

A huge fist lashed out suddenly and crashed into the overseer's face. Another blow caught him in the pit of the stomach, and he doubled over. Dirk struck again and this time caught him on the point of the chin. As the man buckled, Dirk caught him expertly, lifted him into the air, and sauntered unconcernedly toward the entrance. He was still smiling, and his pale eyes were mild as he pitched the inert form of the overseer

into the road outside. So rapidly had he acted that the crowd, stunned, could not quite believe that the fight was over.

Ambling back into the taproom, Dirk wiped his palms on his breeches. "It's a-gettin' so a body can't sit down for a sociable drink any more 'thout some loud-mouth a-tryin' t' disrept him." He caught sight of Jeremy, still standing with sword in hand, and moved toward him. "I reckon ye c'n sit down 'n' finish yer rum peaceful-like, Master Bartlett," he remarked offhandedly. "I don't rightly b'lieve that there one will be a-comin' back in t' pester us none." He glanced around, and a light of triumph appeared in his eyes.

The Arawak had disappeared.

Men and their doxies began to scatter to their respective tables, but before Jeremy could speak a word in private to Dirk, the minister was at his side, pumping his hand. "Master Bartlett, permit me to introduce myself. I am Reverend Pennywell. And I would be much obliged to you if you and your man here would join me in a cup to celebrate your triumph over the forces of evil. Pray do not hesitate to sup with your servant, sir. Remember, 'Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.' Romans, 12. Come, gentlemen, come."

A moment later the two young men were before the minister's table, at which the girl who had spurred Jeremy to action was now seated alone, her dog lying at her feet. Her manner was demure, and her eyes were without guile; it was as though she had just entered the taproom and knew nothing of the violent scene that had just taken place.

"Gentlemen, my niece, Esther Mary. May I present Master Bartlett and—uh—I fear I don't know your name, sir."

"Friendly. And there ain't nobuddy has ever lived up t' his name more'n me. I reckon I'm just about the friendliest critter there is."

Esther Mary held out a hand to each, and when Jeremy's fingers closed over hers he was again surprised. Though her hand was dainty and the flesh soft, her grip was as firm as a man's. "I like you," she said. "I like you both. Please sit down."

Jeremy spoke for the first time. "You're very kind," he said, bowing, "but we'll be taking the places of your—your friends."

Reverend Pennywell read his thoughts, and a sad smile appeared at the corner of his mouth. "You, sir—you who lash out at a bully—are like all the others? Is it so strange that I preach in places of this sort? Is it so strange that Jonas Pennywell should break bread with publicans and sinners? Did not our Lord Himself do likewise? Luke, 15."

Grinning openly, Esther Mary waved the men to their seats. "Uncle Jonas will deliver a sermon if you give him just half a chance," she confided to Jeremy and Dirk. "I warn you, never mention such words as 'self-righteous' to him. And by all means never mention the Parish Church of St. Peter's——"

"That mock shrine of worship!" her uncle interrupted, stroking his beard agitatedly. "That unhallowed hall where the self-satisfied and sleek congregate. In Port Royal, as nowhere else, there is a need for spiritual counsel, for aid to the poor unfortunates who have slipped down life's path and who know it not. But they may not worship at the Parish Church of St. Peter's. Oh no! The grand ladies and gentlemen who sit in their prim little pews might soil their fine silks should they touch a *boucanier* or a harlot. 'The foolishness of man perverteth his way.' Proverbs, 19. I tell you——"

The girl half stood, kissed the clergyman's brow, and chuckled. "You see what I mean. As you come to know Uncle Jonas better, you won't mind in the least." Suddenly her eyes became serious. "Are you intending to remain in Jamaica long?"

Jeremy considered for an instant before replying. "That will depend on the Duchess," he said carefully.

Reverend Pennywell, who had been continuing his diatribe in an undertone, broke off sharply and peered myopically at the young gunsmith. "This Caroline of Glasgow interests me," he stated flatly. "I thought I knew much about the Stuarts when taking my divinity degree at Cambridge, but apparently I was less diligent than I thought. What is the relation of this beauteous Caroline to Their Majesties?"

"Her Grace is a first cousin to Queen Mary."

The cleric's face lit up. "Ah, then her father——"

"Not now, Uncle Jonas!" Esther Mary was impatient, and she turned to Jeremy apologetically. "He has an overweening passion for genealogy of royal households, and I have something of importance to say to you, so his probing of the Duchess's ancestry will have to wait. Master Bartlett, Master Friendly, you've both earned the gratitude of the Maroons for your intervention in the beating of that poor Arawak tonight."

## March 1692

A FAINT sea breeze made the late morning sun bearable, and the distant Liguanea Plain shimmered in the heat, while above the Blue Mountains small white clouds drifted indecisively back and forth, as though unsure whether to move out over the Caribbean or whether to evaporate. Port Royal, unlike most tropical communities, which ordinarily began their day at sunrise, was just waking up. Waiters and cooks were slowly making their way to their work at taverns and inns, the residents of brothels were opening their shutters and doors, and the shopkeepers were unlocking the wrought-iron grilles that protected their store fronts.

Nevertheless, there was more traffic than usual on the High Street, for two *boucanier* vessels had docked within the hour, and the crewmen were beginning to pour ashore, eager to spend their recently won gold on the delights of the town. A handful of the less attractive trollops were already searching for men, but the experienced seamen were passing up the charms of these anxious harlots for the younger and prettier members of the sorority, who would wait until the new arrivals had consumed considerable quantities of rum before appearing and displaying their charms.

The important business of the day was being conducted on the tiny square known as the Vegetable Market, but Jeremy Stone, sauntering back to the Golden Bucket from King's House, saw nothing but a handful of sagging two-story wooden houses, tightly shuttered. A few Negroes lounged in the shade of a banyan tree, and a family of goats, led by a scraggly male with a gray-and-black goatee, pranced sedately in single file down the dusty road. Jeremy had heard only this morning from the brigade major of the garrison that the receivers of stolen and pirated goods made their headquarters in the drab buildings of Vegetable Market Square and that the masters of the two *boucanier* vessels would undoubtedly spend the better part of the day with these gentlemen, disposing of their haul.

A little girl of perhaps eleven, showing strains of both Negro and Arawak blood, was crouched beside a wicker basket containing a few withered bananas and pineapples. As Jeremy

approached, she smiled and held up the basket, showing two painfully thin arms beneath her rags. Reaching into a waistcoat pocket, the young gunsmith fished out a copper and flipped it to the child.

"Almighty in de hebbin be wid you, gentleman master," she called after him in the musical, singsong dialect of the natives.

Jeremy continued on his way despite an impulse to turn back and give still more money to the little girl. His own funds were running low, for he had received no more gold as yet from the Duchess Caroline. And if he tried to alleviate even a small fraction of the poverty he saw existing everywhere among the free blacks, he would be penniless in no time.

Besides, he had his own problems, he told himself as his thoughts turned to all that had happened in the two busy days he had been in Jamaica. He had spent most of his time with the military authorities, gathering information that Caroline had requested. He had been amazed to learn that the garrison on the island was extraordinarily strong. The brigade itself was made up of almost nine hundred infantrymen and two hundred artillerymen, plus the governor general's honor guard, which consisted of a full squadron of cavalry. The morale of the troops was amazingly high, for it was the policy of King William to permit no more than two years of colonial service before bringing a soldier back to England.

All of these facts had been carefully reported to the Duchess and to Sir Ian, who had accepted the information without comment and had then dismissed him for the day. Caroline, he had to admit to himself, seemed quite pleased with him; he was accepted without question as Sir Arthur Bartlett's nephew, and those from whom he sought data were more than pleased to give it to him. He could see now how wise Caroline had been in planning to include a relative of the governor general in her party and how she had been doubly clever in securing the services of an impostor, whom she could control with far greater ease than a real nephew of Sir Arthur. It no longer bothered him to think that he had played into her hands, as his deception was proving completely successful.

Caroline herself remained an enigma. He continued to find her attractive, even fascinating; it was no accident that he thought of her first as Caroline Stuart, a woman, and only secondarily as a royal duchess with the power of life and death over him. Nevertheless he could not forget that she had maneuvered him into an extraordinarily uncomfortable position which placed him completely at her mercy, so despite her beauty, despite the temptation to approach her as a man rather than a subject, he did not dare. Caroline was lovely, but an aroused and angry Caroline might easily ruin his future.

As he approached the High Street, the number of pedestrians increased, and donkey carts laden with bananas and peppers, papayas and muskmelons, passion fruit and a watery-green local vegetable known as cho-cho creaked down the center of the road. A small crowd had gathered around the high fence of grilled iron that kept inviolate the grave of the late Sir Henry Morgan, once the most successful and renowned of the *boucaniers* and more recently lieutenant governor of the island. Several seamen, newly landed from the vessels in the roads, were pitching farthing and ha'penny pieces onto the grave while the crowd applauded.

Jeremy stopped, grinning. "What is all this?" he asked a dark-skinned old man wearing a broad-brimmed straw hat.

"Grave of Henry Morgan. Very great man, him," the ancient replied. "You see?"

Jeremy shook his head. He didn't see at all.

"Henry Morgan dead. Four year him dead. Now sailormen from ships throw money on grave, so have good luck next time sail off to catch Spanish bastards, French bastards!" He regarded the young gunsmith solemnly, but his eyes twinkled. "Sailormen drink too much rum, throw many gold piece on grave of famous Henry Morgan. Night come, small boys go through bars of fence, bring good-luck money to poor Jamaica families. This way good luck come to all. This way——"

He broke off and winced as a series of sharp noises sounded behind them. The laughing crowd fell silent, and Jeremy turned with the others to see what had caused the interruption. The sight that greeted his eyes was far from pleasant. Five husky, half-naked Negroes, ranging in age from their late teens to middle thirties, were shuffling down the High Street in single file, their progress considerably hampered by two long chains binding each man securely by the left wrist and right ankle. Behind them, on a spirited mare, rode a florid-faced white man who flourished the whip and cracked it close over the heads of the sullen slaves as he hoarsely urged them to hurry.

Although there were a number of Negro house slaves in New York Town, they had always been treated with kindness, with more consideration, in fact, than the indentured servants who had worked so hard at Smith's Foundry. But never had he seen anything like this.

The overseer, aware that he had an audience, scowled and deliberately flicked the whip five times in succession; with each careful twist he succeeded in laying open the back of a Negro. Jeremy watched in horror as the slaves continued to move methodically along the road, their faces showing none of the pain they were feeling.

"You don't like it, Master Bartlett." A feminine voice spoke softly just behind Jeremy and to his right.

"They're men—not animals!" he retorted, barely realizing that he had spoken. Turning, he saw Esther Mary Pennywell, who was watching him with eyes both wise and sardonic.

"There are others who feel the same way. You may have a chance someday to help these poor brutes—and others like them. A man in your position could do much—if you would."

Before he could reply, she smiled fleetingly, then wormed her way through the crowd. Jeremy watched her, shaking his head slowly. Never had he encountered a girl like her, a girl who was provocative and tantalizing, yet as blunt and plain-spoken as a man. Her unconventional attire, even her unique hair style, did not make her less interesting as a woman. In fact he had rarely encountered a female who piqued his curiosity, who aroused him as she did. Her boyish clothes concealed little of her supple figure, and he continued to stare after her until she disappeared from view.

He could not banish her from his mind, however, and as he continued on his way he laughed softly to himself. Although his position was difficult, although there was much to occupy his attention, he was certain he would find time to become better acquainted with Esther Mary Pennywell. Without realizing it, he began to walk a trifle faster; the prospect of knowing her better was an enticing one, and he solemnly promised himself that pleasure.

The Rainbow Inn was the biggest of Port Royal's taverns, the rowdiest and the most popular. Located on the far edge of town, facing the sea, it was actually a collection of ramshackle buildings whose interior walls adjoined and could be partly opened to make one big room. With two ships newly arrived, it was a bedlam as hordes of seamen gorged themselves on foods they had been denied for months, drank to excess, and fondled the heavily painted and perfumed doxies who were present in a ratio of three to every two men.

In the largest of the rooms a four-piece orchestra made valiant but ineffectual efforts to be heard over the din, and the musicians thumped their oversized guitars vigorously but in vain. It was dusk, and the candles in glass protectors attached to the walls gave off a glow that was far from adequate for anyone who wanted to see his food or his companions. And despite the many windows and lattices, there was a persistent odor, compounded of rum and cooking grease, unwashed bodies and pungent colognes. Tables were crowded together, waiters had difficulty in serving the patrons, and even when they succeeded the food arrived cold. But nobody seemed to

mind these inconveniences; a carnival atmosphere prevailed at the Rainbow Inn, and virtually everyone present joined in the spirit of the evening.

Jeremy Stone was a notable exception, however, as he sat—somewhat to his astonishment—with Captain Philippe Groliere of the *Bonnie Maid* at a rickety table in the outermost room, the farthest from the little orchestra. He had no idea why the grizzled sailor had invited him to dine, and he was uncomfortable, as their last encounter had been far from pleasant. His surroundings did nothing to improve his mood either, and while he was grateful for the comparative isolation of the table, the inn and its clientele were at best distasteful. Captain Groliere was patently enjoying himself, though, and was apparently in no particular hurry to explain why he had suggested the meeting.

Sopping up a pool of thick brown gravy with a slab of bread that looked and tasted like a pancake, he munched contentedly, then held up the dripping chunk. "Bragadaps, they call it. Try some. Damn good."

"I have tried it, thanks. And I don't care for it. I'm afraid that bragadaps is too sour for my taste." Jeremy was prepared to talk trivialities until his host decided to get down to business.

"I like this place," Groliere continued comfortably, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "The Rainbow goes back to my early days on the island. When I first shipped out here, I was a 'pprentice. Like so many of the lads you see in there. Ha! Sailed a long way since then. Does my innards good to come back here now and again. Particularly before I go back to sea."

"You're leaving Port Royal, then?"

"Aye. If I don't, I'll lose half my crew. In a fortnight. Those who don't catch the French disease will decide to settle here. Dangerous. I'm leaving tonight. Midnight tide. Said farewell to my Jan before I met you here. When I leave you, I'm off on a fishing venture." His left eyelid dropped suggestively. "Be back one of these days. With some fine, fat fish in my hold. You might want to share a fish supper with me when I return."

It was increasingly evident that the captain was not speaking idly, but his air was deceptively casual, and Jeremy was determined to match it. "I'm rather partial to fish, Captain. Particularly the Spanish kind."

Groliere grinned at the joke and clapped his hands twice in the local manner to attract the attention of a waiter. Ordering two glasses of rum, he shifted his gaze back to Jeremy and studied the younger man intently from beneath his bushy brows. "Damn you, Bartlett," he said, "you're all right. Like

the way you handle yourself. Liked what I heard about you the other night. Thrashed that slaver proper. More important is my Jan likes you. Hasn't told me so. But I know her. Thought she was wrong about you. Not so sure now."

"You're leading up to something, Captain."

"I am." Philippe Groliere sucked at his mustaches for a second before continuing. "Don't like that crew around the Duchess. MacGregor is a cold-blooded bastard. He'd sell his mother to Satan. Murray is interested in himself, nothing else. And Martin is an ass."

"You seem to know quite a lot about your recent passengers."

"My business is studying men. And you're the best of that lot. Stood up to me on my own ship. That takes courage. Bartlett, I have an offer for you. Watch over my Jan for me while I'm gone. Don't like leaving her here. You won't suffer by it. When I come back, you'll have your share of the—the fish."

"Aren't you putting considerable confidence in a man you recently accused of attempting to seduce your daughter?" Jeremy tried not to sound stuffy.

"Hell! You're a man. And she's a pretty girl. Besides, you know I mean what I say. Try to bed her, and when I come back I'll kill you. Hell, Bartlett, I've got to trust somebody. What do you say?"

The rum had arrived, and Jeremy lifted his glass to his lips slowly. Offhand he could see nothing wrong with the scheme. As lady in waiting to the Duchess of Glasgow, Janine was perfectly safe; no harm could come to her while she was living in King's House as the guest of the governor general. And when the *Bonnie Maid* returned to Port Royal, her hold crammed with captured loot, it would be no hardship to receive a bag of gold pieces. The one danger was that the captain himself might have ideas of a liaison of a more permanent nature in the back of his head, but Jeremy could not believe that he would receive consideration as a son-in-law in preference to the men of wealth and rank whom Janine would meet in her present position, particularly when she and the Duchess returned to London.

The young gunsmith let his hand sink to the table without touching his rum. Frowning in concentration, he twirled the thick glass idly. The captain's offer of loot was not to be dismissed lightly, but if he accepted he would be under at least a partial moral restraint to leave Janine alone. It was not an easy decision, for the mere thought of her fresh beauty, her burnished red hair made her more desirable than ever.

Philippe Groliere was eying him narrowly, and he turned away slightly from the other's searching gaze. He knew that

he wanted Janine, even at the risk of incurring her father's displeasure. Then, suddenly, he thought of Esther Mary Pennywell. There was a wench just as exciting, just as tempting as Janine. If anything, her casual manner made her more desirable in some ways. Abruptly he decided to let the future take care of itself, and with a jerking motion raised the glass to his lips.

The raw liquor burned Jeremy's throat; he wanted to cough but conquered the desire. "It seems like a reasonable suggestion to me, Captain," he said at last. "I'll accept."

It was some days later, at dusk, that Jeremy returned to his lodgings at the Golden Bucket to find one of Sir Ian MacGregor's liveried servants awaiting him with a message that he was wanted at King's House immediately. The demand was too urgent to allow him time to change into fresh linen, so he quickly buckled on his sword and departed at once. Dirk Friendly had reached for his own hat, but the servant had said that only Jeremy's presence was required, and so the big American remained behind.

There were two spirited horses at the hitching post in front of the inn, and on the short ride to the governor general's residence Jeremy tried to learn why he was needed in such a rush. But the servant either knew nothing or had been told to reveal no information, for he answered the young gunsmith's questions with surly grunts. In a very few minutes they arrived at the front gate, where a pair of sentries saluted smartly and waved them on. Dismounting quickly, Jeremy threw the reins to the servant and mounted the steps with more haste than dignity. A major-domo opened the front door, and a young lieutenant of cavalry, his helmet in the crook of his left arm, stepped forward out of the shadows.

"Master Bartlett?"

"That's right." Jeremy was invariably amused by the ceremony that attended even a routine visit to King's House.

"Be good enough to follow me, sir." The officer marched stiffly up a broad flight of stairs and down a long, candlelit corridor. At last he stopped before the door of the drawing room of the suite used by the Duchess of Glasgow and knocked twice.

"Come in, please." Caroline's voice sounded calm and unflurried.

The lieutenant opened the door, then followed Jeremy into the room. The Duchess and Sir Arthur Bartlett, the latter looking grim and distraught, were seated on a divan, and Sir Ian MacGregor lounged on the arm of a chair not far from the windows looking out on the gardens. Three fully uniformed

cavalrymen, members of the governor general's honor guard, stood stiffly against a wall under a brace of candelabra. Jeremy's glance flickered toward them, for their presence here was unusual, to say the least. And when he saw that all were armed with their heavy sabers, he felt ill at ease.

He bowed to the Duchess, and as she smiled at him she seemed to be trying to say something to him with her eyes. But he could not decipher the message, and Sir Ian's dark features were set in their usual bland mask, affording him no clue. He did not have long to wait, however.

Sir Arthur removed a folded sheet of paper from an inner pocket, tapped it on a table beside the settee, and spoke without preamble. "The packet boat from the North American colonies that arrived this afternoon brought me a most interesting piece of mail," he said in a strained voice.

Someone standing near an inner door coughed, and Jeremy became aware for the first time that Lord Murray was in the room and that he was trying to control an obvious agitation. Sir Ian frowned at him, but Caroline, as always mistress of herself, had settled back on the divan.

"It has been a long time since I have received a communication from my favorite nephew," the governor general continued, "but I would know his cramped hand anywhere, a handwriting that I am sure you could not duplicate. This letter is from him and he tells me a bizarre story. He relates that he was made a prisoner by a reckless young adventurer who kept him under the influence of alcohol for several days. He states that this person then took his good name and sailed in his place for this colony. My nephew's words are corroborated by a postscript written by his servant. What have you to say to this remarkable information, young man?"

Before Jeremy could reply, the Duchess Caroline cut in swiftly: "What can Master Bartlett possibly say, Your Excellency? As I've told you repeatedly, I am sure this letter is a forgery. Master Bartlett has been a valued member of my suite since we left New York, and his conduct at all times has been above reproach. I cannot and will not believe that he is an impostor."

Jeremy thanked her silently. This was by far the tightest spot he had even been in, but with her help he might be able to pull through. "I—I am astonished at the intelligence you have received," he managed to say to the governor general, but could not bring himself to add the word "Uncle."

Sir Arthur ignored him and spoke directly to the Duchess. "Your Grace's loyalty does you much credit," he said, "but I am afraid it is my duty to disillusion you."

"You cannot, Sir Arthur," she replied with heat. "I trust Master Bartlett implicitly."

The governor general straightened himself with an effort. "I have tried to be both honest and fair in all my dealings during a lifetime of service on behalf of the Crown," he said wearily. "So I am doing a service to myself as well as to you by exposing this man as a charlatan."

"The letter must have been forged." Her righteous indignation seemed so genuine that Jeremy could not help admiring her ability to play-act, and for an instant he forgot his own peril.

Sir Arthur rose to his feet and faced the young gunsmith. "We shall soon see," he said. "Young man, if you are truly my nephew and not an impostor, you can prove it to all of us very quickly. What is the name of the manor house in Kent where you, as my nephew Terence, spent your childhood?"

Jeremy's shirt felt clammy against his back, and he touched his dry lips with his tongue. "I—I have a very poor memory for names," he said.

"I see. I see. And what was the nature of the disease that killed your mother?"

"It—it was the Great Pox." Jeremy stabbed wildly.

"It was?" Sir Arthur laughed without humor. "She was thrown from her horse while riding in Hampton Court Park, and she expired the following day when a clumsy surgeon bled her overmuch." He paused and looked sadly at the Duchess. "Do you need more proof, Your Grace?"

Caroline seemed overcome for an instant, and tears welled up in her deep blue eyes. "If it be true that he is an impostor, Sir Arthur, I beg you to be merciful toward him. He is a high-spirited young man, and I am sure he meant no harm."

"He has committed a grave offense, Your Grace. I need hardly remind you that you are a Stuart and that an impersonation of this sort, perpetrated against a member of the royal family, carries with it a severe penalty." He glanced past Jeremy at the young lieutenant still standing beside the door. "Mr. Crosby," he snapped, "place the impostor under arrest."

There was at best a faint chance to escape, but Jeremy took it. The windows on the far side of the divan were open, and if he could leap through them and break his fall on the shrubs beneath, he might be able to run through the garden and leave by a rear gate before a pursuit could be organized. It was a desperate gesture, but the moment called for extreme measures.

He dashed around the settee, brushing close to Caroline, and raced for the windows. But one of the cavalrymen was too

quick for him and dropped him to the floor with a flying tackle. They rolled over and over, pummeling each other unmercifully, and Caroline screamed.

But Jeremy did not hear her, nor was he conscious of anything other than that he had been trapped, that he had ruined his life beyond repair. He was as angry at himself as he was at the man whose fists were pounding into him, and the very wildness of his frustration gave him added strength. He managed to break free and jumped to his feet.

But before he could move, the other two troopers closed in on him. They were too close and they thrashed him too insistently for him to draw his sword, so he defended himself as best he could with his fists. One of the soldiers landed a particularly heavy blow against his right temple, and the sheer force of the punch dropped him to one knee. The cavalryman who had tackled him was up again; his saber was drawn and he grasped it by the blade, near the top, as he advanced. Then he brought the iron hilt down on Jeremy's head, and the world went black.

## CHAPTER EIGHT:

# March 1692

**D**IRK FRIENDLY was upset and angry, and the longer he paced the length of the tiny sitting room of the suite in the Golden Bucket, the worse his mood became. Jeremy had not returned to the suite in thirty-six hours, and Dirk could find out nothing about him. It was possible, of course, that he had been sent on a mission of some sort into the interior, but Dirk doubted it, for he knew Jeremy well enough to believe that he would have sent word if he intended to be away for any protracted period. But one who was allegedly no more than a manservant could not properly investigate the disappearance, and for all Dirk could tell, Jeremy might be staying at King's House for a time. However, he had finally made up his mind that something had to be done, and he had been awake since dawn, had dressed quickly, and had then kept the door of the suite open, waiting for some sign of activity from the rooms of Lord Murray, at the opposite end of the long, gloomy corridor.

Half an hour ago the young noble had appeared, adjusting

his sword belt, and Dirk had sauntered into the hallway. A casual encounter and an offhand question, he had determined, could do no harm. He had bade Lord Murray good morning, then had asked if his lordship had seen Master Bartlett.

The young nobleman's face had been bland, and he had smiled in a bored, faintly amused manner. "I've seen no one this morning but my valet and my barber," he had remarked pleasantly, then had swept down the stairs and out of sight.

Dirk's anger at himself continued to grow. If only he had worded his query differently. If only he had thought in advance what to say! Instead he had blundered and had been fobbed off with a reply that told him nothing. Meanwhile Jeremy might need him, but there was nothing he could do but pace the floor—and wait.

An unexpected tap on the door awoke him to the present, and he hurriedly lifted the latch. To his amazement, Janine Groliere stood in the frame. Her face was very pale, and she glanced quickly behind her.

"Please," she said, "may I come in?"

Silently Dirk allowed her to precede him into the sitting room, then carefully closed the door. Of all members of the Duchess's entourage, he trusted her least, for all that he admired her beauty. He could not forget that it had been she who had exposed Jeremy as an impostor. He waited for her to speak, wishing fervently that he might this once be subtle and facile. The girl, he noted, was deeply perturbed and was out of breath, as though she had been running.

A scarf was tied around Janine's head to protect her hair from the sun, and she tugged at the ends absently while struggling to gain her composure, "We've never met, Master Friendly," she said at last. "But you know me——"

"I know ye," Dirk interrupted grimly. "What brings ye here?"

"It's your master. The one who calls himself Terence Bartlett. He's in trouble—I don't know what's become of him, what they've done to him—and it's all my fault!"

Dirk was indifferent to her agitation. "Tell me what ye know," he said harshly.

"I—I shouldn't be here. If anyone should see me—if anyone should report that I've come——"

The big American's normally placid features were strained. "Ye're here, girl, so there's no sense a-stewin' about that. Now, tell me!"

"I will—if you'll be civil. It happened night before last," Janine said, speaking softly and rapidly. "Master Bartlett—I don't know what else to call him—came to King's House. Sir Arthur and Her Grace and the others were waiting for

him. I was right in the very next room, and although the doors were closed, I could hear most of what they said. They've arrested him."

Dirk rubbed his left arm with his huge right hand. "I told Jerry somethin' like this was goin' t' happen t' him," he muttered.

"Jerry? Is that his real name?" She peered at him anxiously through wet lashes.

"Never mind that," he commanded brusquely. "Go on with what happened."

"The next thing I knew," the girl continued, "the Duchess came into the little room where I had been sewing and told me he had been arrested. I—I think she wanted me to—to let you know, though she didn't say it in so many words. Then she warned me not to get mixed up in any efforts to help him. She said that as her lady in waiting I must be above suspicion or reproach."

"That was near two days ago," Dirk said testily. "What——"

"Since then I've heard nothing more. Yesterday Sir Arthur and Lady Bartlett took us to Spanish Town. We spent several hours there on an inspection and came back by sundown, of course, for we hear the Maroons make travel dangerous after dark. Then, after tea——"

"It don't matter a damn what them fancy, murderin' folk did or what they ate for their supper!" Dirk had begun to pace the confines of the little room again. "What about Jerry? What have they done t' him?"

"I don't know." Janine stared at the floor. "I haven't seen him, and no one has even mentioned his name. It's as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up. And I'm to blame, Master Friendly. If he's been killed, I killed him as surely as if I'd run him through with a sword!"

For the first time Dick realized that she was suffering; he took pity on her and patted her clumsily on the shoulder. "Don't blame yerself. That there Duchess, she knew from b'fore ye left New York that Jerry wasn't Terence Bartlett. He told me that himself while we were still on board yer pa's boat."

"Then——"

"I dunno any more'n ye know!" he burst out savagely. "But I aim t' find out. 'N' it won't be a-doin, anybuddy any good if ye 'n' me just chew on a slab o' bear rind t'gether. Wait here, ma'am. I'll be a-comin' back in two shakes o' a jackrabbit's tail."

Janine's hands went up to protest. "I can't stay here, Master Friendly!" she cried. "Her Grace sent me into the High Street on an errand, and if I'm not back soon, she'll be angry."

**This is the first chance I've had to come here, and unless I'm careful the governor general will know I've——"**

**"Ye have no idee how careful ye've got t' be, ma'm," Dirk replied grimly. "Heed my words 'n' don't ye budge!"**

**"I can't stay here another minute, Master Friendly! I won't!"**

**"Ye'll be sensible if I have t' beat sense into ye!"**

Further argument was futile, and Janine knew it. **"That will not be necessary,"** she said coldly. **"I'll wait."**

He dashed out the door, closing it carefully behind him. Janine moved to the window and looked down into the road. The sun was high now, and only a handful of natives were to be seen, the majority of them women who carried baskets of vegetable produce on their heads. Suddenly the door opened again, and she turned sharply, only to feel an immeasurable relief when she saw Dirk.

**"We're a-goin' now,"** he said. **"I had t' find out somethin'."** He strode to a chest, opened it, and removed two large pistols, which he jammed into his belt. **"It's only a couple o' town squares, so we'll be there in next t' no time."**

**"Where——"**

The giant took her arm and propelled her to the door. **"We're a-goin' t' somebuddy who c'n help us. I hope."**

The girl drew back and stopped. **"I've already run too great a risk by coming here. I won't be involved any more deeply——"**

**"Y're in already, all the way round yer pretty little neck."** Dirk looked at her compassionately. **"See here, ma'am. Ye wouldn't have come t' me if ye wasn't a-tryin' t' help Jerry. Ye can't stop now. 'N' anyways, ye don't know but maybe ye was bein' followed into the High Street. Ye've been right kind, 'n' now it's my turn t' try t' protect ye a mite. Come along."**

Janine's opposition melted. **"Where are we going?"** she asked as they walked down the stairs.

**"Wait until we're out o' this here place."** When they reached the ground floor, Dirk swiftly piloted the girl through a back corridor that led through the kitchen, which was deserted at this hour. A few seconds later they found themselves in a garbage-littered alleyway.

The American whispered to the girl to wait, then sprinted to the end of the alley. After intently peering first up, then down the road that ran at right angles to the little lane, he seemed satisfied that no one was loitering in wait for Janine, and he motioned to her to join him.

**"Turn right at the corner, then left at the next one, 'n' after that I'll tell ye where t' stop,"** he muttered. **"Meantime just keep a-goin'."**

Janine's confusion increased. "Wait, Master Friendly!" she cried, clutching his arm. "Where will you be while I'm——"

"Walkin' along a couple o' paces b'hind ye." Dirk chuckled at his own surprising cleverness in a moment of crisis. "Ye're somebuddy, but folks hereabouts think I'm nothin' but a gentleman's monkey. We'd set tongues a-waggin' good if'n we was t' be seen a-strollin' t'gether. 'N' mind ye, ma'am, walk plenty slow. Nobuddy in Port Royal runs this time o' day, 'n' ye want t' cause as little notice as ye c'n cause."

She nodded, and her red curls bobbed up and down, but she was still not satisfied. "I must insist on knowing where you're taking me, sir!"

"There'll be time a-plenty for talk after we get there! Keep a-gabbin' here much longer 'n' we'll both end up with poor Jerry in a graveyard or a prison!"

The girl needed no further urging and started off down the road at a sedate pace. Falling in behind her, Dirk could not help marveling at her sudden and unexpected poise. Having made up her mind to a course of action, she was quite obviously determined to see it through in the best possible style, and nothing in her manner indicated that her heart was pumping—or that she was betraying the royal government for her own conscience's sake, or for a man. She seemed to be out for a stroll, and a small, closed parasol attached to her left wrist with a green ribbon swung idly to and fro as she sauntered. Dirk would not have been surprised had she started to hum or whistle.

A few natives were wandering about, and here and there a seaman from one of the *boucanier* ships in the harbor was idling away the time. The latter invariably showed an immediate interest in the beautiful red-haired girl whose appearance was so different from that of the town's overpainted, under-dressed trollops, but without exception they turned away quickly after staring at her. Janine did not suspect that Dirk's great hulk and fierce scowl were responsible for the sailors' quick departure.

Following instructions, she turned right, then left, a fixed smile on her lips. Suddenly two horsemen appeared from around the corner, riding at a rapid trot. Both were in uniform, and as they approached both lifted their hats to her and bowed low in their saddles. Her step almost faltered, but she managed to return the salutation and to keep going. Once they had passed out of sight, Dirk called to her softly.

"Who was they? I didn't dare look at 'em for fear they'd see my face 'n' maybe recognize me."

Janine answered without turning. "One was Colonel Martin,

**Her Grace's chief military aide-de-camp. The other was the brigade adjutant here."**

**"Fryin' Jehos'phat! That sad Airedale Martin knows me sure without a-seein' my face. Oh well. It don't really matter. Ye can't go gack t' King's House anyhow."**

The girl was not prepared to have her future settled in so summary a fashion, and she would have pursued the point, but at that instant Dirk directed her to turn in at the gate immediately ahead. She walked through a small garden ablaze with hibiscus to a modest single-story frame house painted white. Dirk joined her and pounded on the door. After what seemed to be an interminable wait a man opened it, and to Janine's infinite relief he was dressed in the sober black of the clergy.

Dirk wasted no time. "C'n we come in, Mr. Pennywell? This here is Mistress Groliere, lady in waitin' t' the Duchess, 'n' we got somethin' t' tell ye."

"By all means, by all means!" The minister's face showed both pleasure and astonishment. "It isn't often the gentry condescend to visit me. I am humbly pleased to receive you into my home, Mistress Groliere. 'The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.' Proverbs, 15."

Beyond a tiny entrance hall was a small, severely furnished drawing room in which several plain chairs of bamboo predominated. Bamboo-slat blinds were lowered to keep out the sun; the floor, after the manner of most Jamaican homes, was bare of rugs and the walls were without ornamentation. Esther Mary Pennywell, attired in her shirt, ragged trousers, and belt, was curled up on a window seat, sucking a pulpy local fruit known as star apple. Her dog, sprawled on the floor, paid little attention to the new arrivals. And Esther Mary remained where she was, indolent and insolent, as her uncle introduced her to Janine Groliere.

As Dirk began to explain the reason for the call, the two girls studied each other covertly from beneath lowered lids, but the expressions of both remained blank and innocent. Then the big American asked Janine to tell her story, and the atmosphere changed at once. Lost again in the horror of her tale, she forgot her immediate and instinctive hostility to the unusually dressed brunette, and Esther Mary dropped her pose of boredom, lifted a blind and pitched her apple into the yard, then sat upright, her eyes blazing. When Janine finished, there was an instant of shocked silence.

"'We wrestle . . . against spiritual wickedness in high places.' Ephesians, 6," Reverend Pennywell murmured.

Janine stared at him. "Master Bartlett may be dead by now," she cried.

"His name is Jeremy Stone," Dirk shouted, "'n' I wish t' Hades—beggin' yer pardon, Reverend—that ye'd stop a-sayin' he's dead!"

Esther Mary and her uncle exchanged a long glance. "I think," the brunette said slowly, running a strong but feminine hand through her crop of short hair, "that I'd better find out what has really happened to him."

Dirk jumped to his feet, beaming, and slapped her on the back with such force that he almost knocked her from the window seat. "I knew ye'd help us!" he boomed.

Coughing, Esther Mary glared at him. "I'd like to help a man who has certainly been foully treated and who may have been murdered. I'd try to help you too if you were in trouble, Master Friendly." She rose abruptly and started for the door, her dog at her heels. "Wait here until I come back with information. I don't know how long I'll be gone."

She was almost out of the room when Janine stopped her. "Mistress Pennywell! Please! I can't stay here! If I'm not back at King's House in the shortest possible time——"

Esther Mary eyed her coolly and tried without much success to keep her annoyance from her voice. "You have technically committed the crime of treason, Mistress Groliere," she said. "If the governor general and his butchers have any notion that you came to—Jeremy Stone's friend—and told him of the incidents of the other evening, your petty neck might be stretched on a gallows before the sun sets tonight. I have no way of knowing whether you've been seen or not. Neither do you. If you care to take the risk, you are certainly free to leave here at once. On the other hand, if you value your life, I think you'll agree to the wisdom of accepting Uncle Jonas' hospitality for a few hours."

She grinned impishly and slipped through the door.

As the long hours of the day dragged on, Janine sank deeper into a lethargy of gloom despite the efforts of the Reverend Pennywell to comfort her. An impulsive gesture dictated by her conscience had placed her outside the law, and she saw with painful clarity that she had jeopardized her whole future. No matter what might have happened to Jeremy Stone, she could not remain in Jamaica now, and it was probable that neither England nor any English colony would ever be a safe haven for her.

She wished fervently that her father would return to the island and spirit her away in the *Bonnie Maid*, but the mere thought of the wrathful explosion that would occur when he

discovered what she had done made her shudder. Gone now were his dreams for her of a brilliant future and a life as a lady. At best she could hope for an existence of sorts in France, and she had no illusions as to what would be expected of a maiden without family or background in a land where the manners of Louis, the Sun King, were copied slavishly at every level of society.

As her sense of despondency increased, her worry over the missing Jeremy Stone became greater, too. While it was true that she was in an unenviable position, it had been one of her own making, and because of a man whom she believed she had every reason to despise. Yet she did not hate him, and knew that she could not. On the contrary, despite every effort to put him out of her mind, she suspected that she loved him.

She could think of no other logical reason for her behavior; she had known from the moment that she had decided to go to Dirk Friendly that she was taking great risks, but she had not cared. And as she thought now of Jeremy, the same giddy feeling of exhilaration that she had felt so often before flooded her again. But the sensation lasted for no more than an instant.

For all she knew, he might be dead, and she could not picture life without him. The uncertainties of her own future were insignificant when she tried to visualize what he might be going through, and she realized that nothing really mattered except his safety.

A sense of panic welled up in Janine, despite her attempts to curb it, and she dug her nails into the palms of her hands to keep herself from crying hysterically. At last she grew a little calmer and with a great effort managed to push her anxiety over Jeremy into a far corner of mind. She would learn something about him eventually, perhaps all too soon.

In the meantime there were immediate problems. By now all of King's House surely knew that the Duchess's lady in waiting had been disloyal, and an alarm had undoubtedly been given. So it was logical to assume that a search was already under way, and in a community as small as Port Royal it would be only a matter of time, and very little of that, before they found her. Every instinct urged her to flee, but she did not know where to go or how to get there. Her money, her clothes, and her few personal belongings remained at King's House; her fate was in the hands of total strangers who were concerned over Jeremy Stone and were giving no real thought to her problem.

She looked at Dirk Friendly, who fidgeted restlessly as he roamed about the first floor of the little house like a caged buffalo. Across the room Reverend Pennywell sat peacefully reading from a worn leather-bound Bible, apparently in no

way concerned, and Janine could restrain herself no longer.

"Reverend Pennywell!" she said sharply, and the clergyman looked up and favored her with a beatific smile. "How can you, a man of God who is sworn to uphold law and order—how can you be a party to something that—that——"

Marking his place with a wood shaving, the minister put the Book carefully on a small table beside him and folded his hands in his lap. "'Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.' Romans, 14. I am sworn to preach the Word of the Lord, Mistress Groliere. And I am under His command to treat others as I would myself be treated. Master Stone has done a wrong and grievous thing to pretend that he is someone else. But Her Grace of Glasgow and her cohorts have been equally wrong in permitting his masquerade to continue after learning of it. If he is to be punished, they too should receive punishment. However," he continued dryly, adjusting his spectacles carefully on the bridge of his nose, "it is seldom possible to achieve the punishment of royalty in this world, despite the indisputable facts that the Stuarts seem more vulnerable than most of those who wear the purple."

Janine's anger grew, for he was undoubtedly enjoying his discourse, and she could neither share his detached viewpoint nor appreciate his academic approach. "You have not answered me, sir," she exclaimed. "You are breaking the law! You break it when you harbor me here. You break it when you allow your niece to seek information about a man who has committed a criminal act. And if it should be possible to help him——"

"Your thoughts move faster than events, Mistress Groliere. Let me remind you that our impetuous Master Stone has been condemned in no court of law for his impersonation. Further, what may or may not be done will depend, I dare say, on what news Esther Mary brings us." Reverend Pennywell paused and wet his lips with the tip of his tongue. "You accuse me of breaking the law, Mistress Groliere. Whose law, that of man or that of God? 'Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?' John, 7. I do not believe in physical punishment of any sort, Mistress Groliere. I do not and cannot believe that the Lord God intended that man, whom He has made in His image, should abuse and beat, torture and incarcerate, spit upon and mistreat his fellow man! 'The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression.' Numbers, 14. I do the work of the Lord. I——"

The front door opened and shut, and the reverend broke off abruptly. Dirk reached for the pistols in his belt, and Janine

jumped to her feet. Esther Mary walked into the room slowly, weariness showing in her face and in every line of her body. Her dog, panting, followed her and moved to a corner. The girl's glance flickered past Dirk and Janine; she caught her uncle's eye and addressed herself to him.

"He's alive."

"May the Lord be praised." The clergyman sank back into his chair.

Relief cracked Dirk's stern-set features into a grin, and he started forward eagerly. "Where is he, Mistress Pennywell? How d' we get t' see him? Is he all right? C'n he join me here?"

"One thing at a time, if you please." Though drooping with fatigue, Esther Mary continued to stand. Only now did the others notice that her hands were grimy with dirt and that a small but angry welt appeared on the left side of her forehead. "He's little more than alive, I'm afraid. They're according him the treatment they reserve for the most vicious and unregenerate criminals." She caught her breath, then plunged on: "They've taken him to Death Island."

"This is monstrous!" Dread as well as indignation was registered in the minister's voice.

Janine spoke for the first time since Esther Mary had entered the house. "What is Death Island?" she asked faintly.

Esther Mary's eyes shone with hatred. "It's a tiny bit of land, hardly more than a sandspit, located about two miles out into the Caribbean. There was nothing on the island until Henry Morgan became lieutenant governor—nothing, that is, save decaying fish washed up by the sea, and the ants who feed off them. Sir Henry had his own notions of justice, which he learned in his *boucanier* days. He built a score of bamboo cages." Her face was drained of color and she shivered. "You tell them, Uncle Jonas. I can say no more."

Reverend Pennywell cleared his throat. "In each cage there are four stakes driven securely into the earth. A prisoner is shackled to these posts, lying on his back——"

"Spread-eagled?" Dirk's face was crimson, and his blue eyes glittered.

"Yes, young man. Spread-eagled. As there is no roof, the prisoners are left to the mercy of the elements. They are given no food, no water. Fortunately the poor wretches who are taken there lose their minds in a very short time and survive only a few days at most."

"Ye mean t' say that's where Jerry is right now, with his arms 'n' legs tied down 'n' the sun a-fryin' his brains out?"

Esther Mary nodded, then swayed dizzily, but when Janine moved to her and would have given her support, the minister's niece angrily shoved her away. For a full minute or more there

was a silence in the little room. Dirk wanted to ask how Esther Mary had acquired her information, but refrained. For the moment, at least, it was sufficient to know that his friend's neat scheme had ended in complete disaster and that Jeremy was dying.

Janine lifted her chin and threw back her shoulders. "If I were to go to the Duchess Caroline and beg her to be merciful——"

"You'd find yourself in the cage next to that of the not so clever Jeremy Stone." Esther Mary was curt, almost contemptuous. "And you'd have the lot of us out there with you in a day's time, for no one is supposed to know what has become of Stone, so you'd be tortured until you revealed the source of your information. More is involved now than the safety of your own skin, girl, so you'll do what you're told from now on."

"I'll do as I please!" Janine looked as though she would make a break for the front door.

"As far as I'm concerned, you can rot." The minister's niece controlled her temper with difficulty. "But it's possible, just barely possible, that certain delicate and complicated operations will be successful. If they are, I have plans for you."

"How dare you!" Janine's face was scarlet.

"Because I'm thinking of Jeremy Stone—and of certain others, too—I dare as I please. And I'm thinking ahead. I won't bother to explain now, but there is a remote chance that you will prove useful. Should it be possible to rescue the prisoner, he would need someone to nurse him, to wait on him. I've chosen you for that particular task."

Janine could stand it no longer. That a total stranger should decide her relationship to the man for whom she had risked her whole future was infuriating beyond measure. It was plain to her, despite her rage, that Esther Mary intended to present herself in a flattering light to Jeremy by posing as his rescuer, and that she wanted to make light of Janine's efforts and sacrifices by making her appear as an unglamorous household drudge.

Though barely able to articulate, Janine drew herself up proudly. "You, madam, may go to blazes."

Esther Mary's fatigue was forgotten. She sprang forward, raised her hand, and deliberately slapped the other girl's face. Janine reached out, clawing wildly, but a huge figure stepped between the two girls, and two enormous hands reached out and lifted them up into the air, then set them down several feet apart. "We got too much t' do t' be a-wastin' ourselves on a fight b'tween she-cats," Dirk observed, and there was a

faint suspicion of humor in his flat statement. He turned to face Esther Mary. "How many guards be there on this here Death Island?"

"Guards? There is no one there but the prisoners—and the ants. Their Majesties' sloop of war, the *Duke of York*, pays four visits to the island each day, but no one else is there, and no one ever goes there. The *Duke of York* is always changing her schedules, so that friends of the condemned who might have notions of organizing rescue parties never know when they might be discovered—and sentenced to the same treatment."

"Roarin' Jehos'phat! D'ye think I aim t' set still knowin' the best friend I ever had is bein' tortured, havin' the life squeezed out o' him every minute?"

"You'll oblige me by obeying instructions, too, Master Friendly. On one previous occasion a man was spirited away from Death Island, and with any luck the feat can be repeated." Esther Mary turned to her uncle and smiled wanly. "Just this once do you suppose I might have a small swallow of that brandy you keep for emergency use?"

The clergyman's eyebrows lifted. "I've never opened the keg, but I dare say the occasion and your exertions of the day might warrant it," he replied. Rising from his chair, he walked to the inner wall, pushed aside a chair, and slid back a panel set in the woodwork. Then he gingerly brought out a small wooden keg and a pewter mug, from which he blew a cloud of dust. Removing a wooden stopper with some difficulty, he poured a small portion of liquor into the mug, handed it to Esther Mary, and watched in stern disapproval when she downed the brandy in a single gulp. Then he replaced the plug with great care and methodically restored the little keg to its hiding place.

Color returned to his niece's face, and she walked to the window seat. The others watched her, and she took her time before addressing them again. "Plans have been made," she said. "It is better if you do not know these plans or who will carry them out."

"Let me tell ye," Dirk rumbled, "that no wench is a-goin' t' tell *me* I can't have a hand in rescuin' my friend 'n' maybe crackin' a few heads I been achin' t' crack."

"I hate to contradict you, Brother Dirk." Esther Mary's tension suddenly evaporated and she laughed, almost gaily. "But you're going to do precisely what a wench tells you to do. And I'm afraid you're not going to like your instructions, but that can't be helped. When darkness falls you'll leave this house, taking care that no one sees you. You'll go at once to the Duchess or her chamberlain, and you'll be quite

worried. You'll say that you've had no word from your master, and you'll ask them if they know what has become of him. Is that clear?"

"It's clear." Dirk's fingers curled around the throat of an unseen enemy. "'N' then I'll choke the life out o' them——"

"Listen to me!" Esther Mary's voice carried authority, though she spoke no more loudly than before. "They'll tell you they don't know where he is, either. You'll complain that you a.e without funds and that you need a job. I happen to know they believe you to be a simpleton and they have no intention o' molesting you. They'll tell you they're sorry for you, but they have no work for you. So you'll return to the suite of rooms at the Golden Bucket, and tomorrow you'll go out to look for work. You'll go several places, and finally you'll make your way to the Rainbow, on the waterfront. There you'll be given work of a sort, helping to keep order when the seamen who frequent the place become overly boisterous."

"That there is the craziest idee I ever heard," the big American growled. "I'm stronger'n most, 'n' if anybuddy is a-goin' t' help Jerry, I want——"

"You've made very clear what you want, Brother Dirk." Esther Mary was enjoying her power. "But you'll be watched from this time forward. And if the rescue attempt should be successful, every move you make, everyone you see, everything you do will be observed."

Dirk's impotent frenzy grew. "If'n ye spirit Jerry away, ye aim t' hide him somewheres, that's sure. So why couldn't I help? Answer me that!"

"I will. You don't know Jamaica. If you were to set foot outside Port Royal you'd be lost in five minutes. What's more, the attempt to rescue your friend is being organized in such a way that no trace or hint of suspicion on the part of the authorities will be aroused. And your mere presence would create such an alarm that the whole brigade of troops would be ordered to fall in and chase you."

Reluctantly he sat down and smiled wryly. "Ye're smarter'n me, wench, 'n' there's no denyin' it. I want Jerry t' be helped, not hurt worse, 'n' the last thing I aim t' do is t' give away anythin'. So I'll do like ye say. But only this once, mind ye. I'm not a-goin' t' have a wench a-pushin' me around. If'n I wanted that, if'n I was a-hankerin' t' jump ev'ry time a female cracks a whip, I'd find me somebuddy purty, with the temper o' Satan, 'n' then I'd ask the rev'rend here t' fix up a weddin' for me."

Esther Mary accepted his capitulation gracefully. "I think you'll find life far more exciting than you imagine it will be. You're going to be useful, Brother Dirk."

Janine, who had fallen silent after the other girl had struck her, was still trembling with indignation. "I suppose you have my future all plotted too," she snapped.

The clergyman's niece twisted around on the window seat and nodded imperturbably at her recent antagonist. "I have. You'll remain here as the guest of Uncle Jonas and of myself for the present. Under no conditions are you to set foot outside the house. If a search is made for you, there will be soldiers at our door, of course, but this is one of the last places they'll look, and by that time you'll be elsewhere."

Digesting the information in silence, Janine's fury mounted. "Am I permitted to know the location of 'elsewhere,' my good woman?" she asked frigidly.

In no wise upset, Esther Mary wasted no words. "At the present time you are not," she said succinctly.

"You're very kind." Janine's tone was blistering.

Esther Mary smiled politely. "That is my intent," she replied, then turned to the minister, who was fidgeting uncomfortably in his chair. "Uncle Jonas," she said, "you look a bit peaked. It would do you good to take a holiday tomorrow."

"I knew it," the reverend muttered. "'A man's foes shall be they of his own household.' Matthew, 10."

"On the contrary," Esther Mary said sweetly, "I am thinking of you, as always." She repressed a grin, then added lightly, "A day of fishing will do you good, Uncle Jonas. A great deal of good."

## CHAPTER NINE :

# March 1692

AT DAWN two huge Negroes, barefooted and clad only in trousers, appeared at the modest little house of Reverend Jonas Pennywell. Disturbing no one, they quietly entered a small shed in the rear and soon were hard at work calking the seams of a large and cumbersome rowboat with a waxlike putty. They completed their task in a short time and came out again into the yard, where one of them shinnied expertly up a breadfruit tree, picked several ripe fruits and threw them down to his companion, then slid easily to the ground. The pair crouched in the shade of a spreading banyan tree and silently devoured the raw fruit.

Perhaps thirty minutes later the house came to life. An elderly Negress appeared from inside and took no notice of the men as she placed kindling and four dry split logs in a brick oven located on a bare patch of ground a few yards from the back door. She started a fire, returned to the house, and emerged a few moments later with two frying pans, a large kingfish, and a basket of eggs. Neither she nor the men seemed to see each other, and she obviously regarded their presence as nothing out of the ordinary. As she continued her preparations, she sang softly and unconcernedly:

*"We come to de new land on a big boat,  
Many die on de trip, t'row dem in de sea,  
Sinners' bodies sink, angels' bodies float,  
Praise de Lord, none of dem bodies me!"*

The odors of fried fish, eggs, and strong coffee floated into the house, and after a short time the voices of the reverend and his niece could be heard, his subdued, hers cheerful. Occasionally a third person spoke, too, and the two Negroes looked at each other questioningly, then shrugged. The guest was plainly a woman and young; she had a faint foreign accent and she seemed angry. But the men were disinterested, for they were hungry and the breadfruit was rich and heavy.

At last the reverend appeared in the back door, wearing his usual clerical garb with the addition of a broad-brimmed straw hat which sat squarely on his head. In one hand he carried a long bamboo fishing pole and in the other was a packet of hooks and bait. He blinked in the strong sunlight, then waved cheerily to the Negroes.

"Good morning, Gabriel, Michael," he called. "It's very good of you to give me this day's holiday."

The men rose, stretched, and grinned pleasantly. They did not cower as the blacks of the island usually did in the presence of white men, nor were they in any way servile. Not only did Reverend Pennywell's attitude indicate that he considered them as equals, but they themselves behaved with dignity and a lack of self-consciousness. The man addressed as Gabriel replied for the pair.

"Not so good of us, Master Preacher," he said in a rumbling bass. "Michael and me, we like to fish. And maybe you tell us de story of dat Daniel who didn't git et by de lions, and de story 'bout dose t'ree boys who went into de fiery furnace and come out alive."

The cleric beamed. "Nothing would give me more pleasure, Gabriel," he said. "It is written in the prophets, And they

shall be all taught of God.' John, 6. It will be my joy to instruct you in the Word of the Lord."

"Michael, we git de boat now." The Negro turned away from Reverend Pennywell and started for the shed, his companion at his heels.

A few moments later they emerged, the upturned boat between them as they carried it by prow and stern on their sturdy shoulders. With the minister leading the way they proceeded at a leisurely pace to the harbor, their progress impeded by the popularity of Reverend Pennywell. Virtually everyone whom he passed called a greeting to him, and three or four times he stopped for a brief chat with a seaman, a merchant's apprentice, or a tavernkeeper. When they arrived at the docks, the Negroes righted the boat, untied the oars that were secured to the locks with ropes, and dropped the cumbersome craft into the water. Michael jumped in and steadied the craft while Reverend Pennywell stepped in gingerly and made himself as comfortable as possible in the stern seat. Then he removed a large pack of sandwiches from one pocket and flask of water from another and, after placing them carefully under his seat to protect them from the sun, nodded brightly.

Gabriel leaped into the boat, and a few seconds later the two Negroes were bending rhythmically over the oars. A warm, moist sea breeze was blowing, and from the direction of the Citadel the sloop of war, *Duke of York*, approached under full sail. A dozen soldiers in scarlet jackets and white shakos lounged in attitudes of boredom at the rail on the tiny deck while the seamen busied themselves in the cockpit. Gabriel grunted under his breath and Michael's black eyes became slightly glazed, deliberately expressionless.

But Reverend Pennywell did not lose his smile, and as the sloop passed close by he cheerily returned the wave of Lieutenant Commander Hardy, the captain of the ship. Hardy shouted some pleasantry, but his words were lost across the water. A few seconds later the *Duke of York* was on her way out to open sea. No one in the rowboat said anything, and there was no sound save the creaking of the oars in their locks and the gentle lapping of wooden blades cutting through the clear, warm water of the Caribbean.

Sir Arthur Bartlett sipped a glass of wine and smiled. Looking at the Duchess of Glasgow and her chamberlain as they sat across from him in his well-appointed study, he thought that although he disapproved of their high-flown manners and their artifice they were pleasant companions. Only this morn-

ing his wife had commented that Caroline and her party had brought so much gaiety to King's House that she would be sorry to see them leave. However, there had been no mention as yet of a departure date, and Sir Arthur felt it would be bad manners as well as a gross abuse of protocol to speak of the matter until the Duchess herself broached it. He sipped again and leaned back in the damask-covered chair, relaxing.

Glancing at Caroline, he remembered his wife's description of her and thought it was perfect. The Duchess was exactly what every British subject thought a member of the royal family should be. Gracious, charming, yet never forward, she invariably conducted herself with decorum. What was more, she was probably the handsomest of the Stuarts. The simple white linen dress she wore now was a masterpiece of simplicity, and although she undoubtedly knew she was startlingly attractive, she modestly gave no indication of it.

Sir Ian was speaking, and the governor general coughed politely behind his hand. "You'll forgive me," he said, "but I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to repeat yourself, Sir Ian. To be truthful with you, my mind was wandering."

"I find myself often afflicted in the same way," the Scotsman replied smoothly. "We who have lived our lives in a temperate climate have our difficulties in adjusting to this heat. Only the slaves seem to thrive here. . . . But to return to what I was saying. Her Grace and I asked for these few minutes before luncheon because of a matter that we call to your attention with considerable reluctance."

Caroline fingered a necklace of matched pearls, and a faint frown wrinkled her brow. "We all want to forget the misguided young man who masqueraded as your nephew, Sir Arthur, but I am afraid we cannot."

The governor general sipped his wine. "I can well understand the hurt Your Grace is suffering. Your naturally delicate and tender nature shrinks at the thought of the punishment that has been meted out to him. But there was no choice, you will recall. As Sir Ian so rightfully said after I explained the principle of the administration of justice to you both, it is the King and the Commons who make the laws, and we who serve Their Majesties must enforce those laws. It is sometimes unfortunate, as in the case of a young man who seemed both personable and efficient, but there was no choice." His jaw line was firm and his voice uncompromising. "It was even more difficult for me than for you. I had grown fond of him."

"You and Lady Bartlett have had my sympathies," Caroline replied gently. "And I would not bring up such a sore subject again if it were not necessary."

"However," Sir Ian interposed, "we are not concerned over our young impostor. And when we receive the report in the next day or so that he has died, I'm sure we shall drop him out of our minds."

"That is true, Ian." The Duchess nodded her agreement, then turned the full power of her deep blue eyes on the governor general. "I am vastly concerned over my lady in waiting, Your Excellency."

"Mademoiselle Groliere?" Sir Arthur was vastly surprised. "I hope she has not become involved in this matter. She seems such a quiet and sensible little person——"

"She is a woman." Caroline smiled wryly. "And with all due respect to my sex, I fear that most of us allow our hearts to rule our heads. Especially when we are as young and impressionable as Janine Groliere. I have learned from various members of my entourage that she was in love with the pretender who called himself Terence Bartlett."

"Very much in love with him," Sir Ian chimed in.

"And I fear she is foolishly trying to help him in some way, for she has disappeared."

"Disappeared?" Sir Arthur was shocked. "But that is impossible. We are on the threshold of the eighteenth century. We are decidedly not living in the Middle Ages. And people do not simply disappear, Your Grace."

"Nevertheless, that is what has happened to my lady in waiting. I sent her yesterday to order me a bolt of cloth of silver for a new gown, and she has never returned. As you can guess, I am much upset."

Sir Ian smoothed a small wrinkle in his breeches. "Lord Murray and Colonel Martin have made discreet inquiries," he said, "but they can find no trace of her. The colonel recalls seeing her fleetingly in Port Royal yesterday morning, and as he remembers it, he passed her in the High Street, but he isn't positive. In any event, we can't find the girl, Your Excellency."

"How very unfortunate." Sir Arthur, deeply perturbed, set his wineglass on a table. "It is possible, of course, that she may have been abducted, for there are many unsavory men roving the streets of the town, unfortunately."

Caroline crossed her ankles, and a quick warning glance at her chamberlain indicated that she would be the spokesman henceforth. "I have already considered your suggestion, Sir Arthur," she said slowly, "and while it is indeed possible that Mademoiselle Groliere was abducted, I consider such an eventuality highly unlikely. When we consider that she is in love with the scoundrel who stole your nephew's good name, it is an almost inevitable conclusion that she is trying to assist

him in some way. Being inexperienced as well as young, I fear she might act impulsively."

The governor general felt old and weary. Rising stiffly from his chair, he walked to the nearest window, opened the blind, and stared at two nearby palm trees. There was no breeze, and the fronds drooped listlessly. "Those who govern must be merciful as well as just," he said heavily. "Even if we were to learn that the girl is embroiled in some futile scheme to secure her lover's release, I would be inclined to forgive her and to permit her to go unpunished."

Behind his back Sir Ian was about to reply, but the Duchess shook her head in a fierce negative. "I agree with you wholeheartedly, Your Excellency," she said to Sir Arthur, "on one condition—that she has done nothing that will call the case of the unfortunate impostor to the attention of the public. If it should become generally known that he has been condemned to Death Island and that she is attempting to rescue him, the authority of your regime would be badly shaken should she escape the law unscathed."

Sighing deeply, the governor general turned back and faced Caroline. "You have a habit of being right, Your Grace. We must find the girl before any real harm is done."

"That would be wonderful!" Caroline cried. "And if you are successful in locating her and bringing her back, I shall allow her to resume her position as my lady in waiting."

Sir Ian could contain himself no longer. "I cannot agree to the wisdom of returning Mademoiselle to Your Grace's employ," he said sulkily.

The Duchess flashed her most brilliant smile at him. "I was sure you would not, Ian. But I cannot be as stern and heartless as you men. Oh, you may give her one of your dour sermons, but I tell you I *will* have her with me again, provided she is found in time."

Sir Arthur Bartlett gazed at her admiringly. "You are remarkably generous, Your Grace. But we will accomplish nothing unless and until we can locate Mademoiselle Groliere. With your permission I shall withdraw to give instructions. A thorough search will be made for her immediately."

He stalked out of the study, looking very old and tired. The couple remaining in the room said nothing, but Caroline's eyes were sparkling, and a trace of a smile appeared on Sir Ian's thin lips. Simultaneously they lifted their glasses, silently saluted each other, and drank deeply.

It was very quiet in the living room of the little frame house, and even the cook was silent as she padded about in the rear. Esther Mary Pennywell lounged in her favorite window seat

and now and again peered up at the sky, judging the hour by the position of the sun. Janine Groliere sat equally silent in a straight-backed chair, staring tensely but blankly at the bare wall opposite her. At last she stirred and raised her head.

"It's midafternoon, Mistress Pennywell."

"Call me Esther Mary," the dark-haired girl snapped. "I think we can dispense with formalities—under the circumstances. And it's later than midafternoon, for your information."

"You needn't bite my head off." Janine had thought herself drained of emotion and was surprised to find she could be irritated.

"I'm thinking of more than you and your delicate feelings."

"I can assure you, Mist—Esther Mary, that my thoughts are not centered on you, either."

"No such assurance was necessary, Sister Janine. I already knew it."

"Oh?" Janine stiffened.

"Of course. You're thinking of Jeremy Stone. You've thought of him constantly for a very long time."

Janine forced a laugh. "As a mind reader you do very poorly, my dear. It is true, of course, that I wonder if the attempt to rescue him will prove successful. But as you have told me nothing about what is being done, or by whom, I am left to the devices of my own imagination. What is more, I have had no experience in this sort of thing—at which you appear so adept—so I have little on which to draw."

Esther Mary rubbed her scalp with the knuckles of her left hand and was about to retort, but thought better of it. Again she looked at the position of the sun, then dropped back into a moody silence. But the French girl was aroused now and was not content to let the conversation rest. She watched the minister's niece for several minutes and then laughed again, tauntingly.

"Why," she asked carefully, "should it matter to you if I care to spend my time thinking of Master Stone?"

"It doesn't matter in the least." Esther Mary pretended that she had barely heard, but her eyes were smoldering.

"Really? Your own interest in Master Stone seems to be rather extraordinary, you know."

"In what way?"

Janine took her time replying. "You're risking a great deal, it seems to me, to help a man you've met only a few times."

"That isn't why I'm trying to help him. You'll learn about that soon enough. And if you're by any chance trying to find out whether Jeremy Stone and I have a romantic association—we have not."

"It's a matter of indifference to me whether you do or don't, my dear."

It was Esther Mary's turn to laugh, and she did, quite naturally. "Unlike so many who have been brought up to think it is ladylike to be reticent, I say what I think and feel. And I don't mind telling you I'd not object if he found me desirable. I find *him* attractive. And interesting."

"Oh, then you admit——"

"I *admit* nothing!" The clergyman's niece was on her feet, legs planted wide apart, arms akimbo. "I have made a flat statement, without evasion or hesitation. I tell you freely and frankly that I would like to sleep with him. What's more, so would you!"

Janine jumped up too. "The thought has never crossed my mind!" she said in an abnormally loud voice.

They glared at each other balefully, and although Janine knew she was no physical match for the bigger girl, she felt an insatiable desire to force the smirking leer from Esther Mary's face. And in return, conscious of her boyish attire and short hair, Esther Mary wanted to rip the dainty gown from her antagonist's shoulders, smear dirt on Janine's fragile features—and, above all, cut off those long, fiery curls.

Janine was the first to realize that she was behaving as no lady should, and she sat down primly and smoothed her skirts with a hand that trembled. Esther Mary continued to stare at her for a moment longer, then dropped onto the window seat with a thud and twisted around until she was facing the partly opened blinds. Her back was rigid, and though her hands were steady, her breathing was rapid.

Once again there was absolute silence.

It was near dusk when the cumbersome rowboat pulled up to a small wharf on the Port Royal waterfront. Seamen from a merchant ship that once had been a Spanish frigate milled about, getting their land legs, and dock hands grunted and strained under the load of heavy crates containing salt fish, metal tools, and table delicacies which had come out of the merchantman's hold. A foreman recognized Reverend Pennywell and caught the line which Gabriel threw to him. He held it steady while the clergyman clambered ashore and watched with interest as the two Negroes sprang to the dock, then lifted the heavy boat out of the water and onto their shoulders as though it were made of the thinnest sandalwood.

Fishing pole tucked beneath his arm, the minister started up the pier, smiling and bobbing his head at those who called greetings to him. Despite his broad-brimmed straw hat he had picked up a sunburn, and his nose was very red. His outing

had apparently done him good, for his eyes were clear and sparkling, and if he suffered any discomfort from the burn, he did not show it.

As he stepped off the dock onto dry land, Gabriel called to him: "Which way we go? Harbor Street best, I think."

The clergyman did not slacken his pace. "No, Gabriel," he said unconcernedly. "We'll take the waterfront route. It's by far the quickest."

"But——"

"I'm hungry, Gabriel." Reverend Pennywell chuckled. "You and Michael are accustomed to life in the open, but I'm not—and I'm ravenous. And there's nothing I crave so much as one of these fine fish we've caught today!"

Before they had walked one hundred yards, the reason for Gabriel's objections became evident. The *Duke of York* was riding at anchor in her berth, and her captain, Lieutenant Commander Hardy, was standing in the midst of a small knot of officers, one of them an army man. Their conversation was earnest and seemed somewhat heated. The two Negroes instinctively began to increase their tempo, but the minister deliberately slowed his pace.

"Good day, Mr. Hardy," he called. "Gentlemen, greetings!"

The master of the *Duke of York* seemed to welcome the opportunity for a brief respite from the talk of his companions, broke away from them, and hurried to the clergyman, hand outstretched. "Good day, Reverend Pennywell," he said. "What luck have you had today?"

"'The life is more than meat.' Luke, 12. Nevertheless, my harvest was excellent. Michael, Gabriel—set the boat down upon the ground, if you please."

The two men did so, their faces wooden, and the reverend pointed with considerable pleasure to the strings of fish still wriggling and flopping on the planking of the bottom. Commander Hardy leaned over and examined the catch, his face alive. It was obvious that the sport of fishing held a considerable interest for him.

"Well!" he boomed. "You've had damned—excuse me, Reverend—exceptional luck. Half a dozen kingfish, a great mound of snapper——"

"The parable of the loaves and fishes is not without parallels in our own day, Mr. Hardy. Or so it would seem." Reverend Pennywell's eyes were twinkling merrily. "May I offer you a portion of the catch? My niece and I can eat but a small share before it spoils, and even these two brutes with their great appetites can manage to make but a small dent in the total."

Commander Hardy beamed with pleasure. "Reverend," he

said enthusiastically, "this is damned—exceptionally kind of you. It so happens I'm very partial to freshly caught snapper, so if I may I'll take advantage of your generous offer, I will. I will indeed, sir!" He examined the fish critically, then hauled out a string of four plump snappers. "Wilson," he bellowed, "come over here! On the double!"

A seaman lounging at the water's edge ran up and saluted sloppily. The commander handed him the fish and spoke to him slowly, as one would to a child. "Fill a large basin with water and put these fish into it. As they've just been in the sea, they're still alive—and I must congratulate you, Reverend, for not destroying the delicacy of their flavor by allowing them to fry under the sun's rays at the bottom of your little craft all day. But remember this, Wilson—you are not to drop them into the sea at the end of a line, for the cutter that operates in the bay has reported that the roads will be full of sharks tonight. Place them in a large container of water in the *Duke of York's* galley."

"Aye, aye, sir." Again the sailor saluted and hurried off.

Without waiting to be told, Gabriel and Michael picked up the rowboat and once again balanced it on their shoulders. Reverend Pennywell shook hands with the commander, who was still thanking him profusely as the minister started toward home. A gentle smile lighted the cleric's face, then he suddenly pursed his lips and began to whistle. The tune was an old Crusaders' hymn, "Marching to God."

## CHAPTER TEN :

# March 1692

ESTHER MARY PENNYWELL was standing in the door as her uncle strolled up the front walk of the little house, and Janine was somewhere behind her, where she would not be seen by a passer-by on the road. Neither girl spoke as he entered the house, and although Janine had no real idea of what possible connection the minister had with the effort to rescue Jeremy Stone, she was as tense as Esther Mary. The reverend placed the fishing pole against the wall, and for once he refrained from citing biblical quotations.

"I've never enjoyed a more successful day of fishing," he said succinctly. "I'm very proud of my day's catch."

"Where are your fish, Uncle Jonas?" Esther Mary worded her question with great care.

"In the shed. Gabriel and Michael are cleaning them. You'll be happy to see the size of my haul if you have time to wander out there."

"There's nothing I'd like better." Esther Mary was already stalking through the house to the back door. "Come along, Sister Janine," she called over her shoulder.

It was growing dark when the two girls burst into the shed, and they stood for a moment in the doorway to accustom their eyes to the gloom. Michael was tossing strings of fish into a wooden pail and Gabriel was on his knees in the dirt, leaning over the edge of the boat and doing something with the sharp end of an ax. Esther Mary laughed quietly, and her relief was evident. The two Negroes looked up from their work and grinned, but neither spoke.

Janine, peering over Esther Mary's shoulder, crowded closer. To her utter amazement, she saw that Gabriel was prying up the flooring of the boat, and she caught a glimpse of a patch of human skin. The rowboat had a false bottom, and between the flooring and the hull there was a narrow space, just big enough for a man.

Esther Mary broke the silence. "Michael, help him!" she commanded.

The husky Negro hastened to obey, and in a few seconds the upper half of Jeremy's body was revealed. The skin on his arms and chest was blistered, his eyes were closed, and his face was bloated and raw. In the dim half-light it seemed to Janine that he had stopped breathing.

"Is he—still alive?" she asked faintly.

Gabriel did not pause in his work. "Him alive," he answered shortly. "But sick. Plenty sick."

Esther Mary knelt beside the boat and first felt Jeremy's forehead, then pried open his eyes and examined them critically. "He's sick, all right," she said. "I can't be sure in this light, but I think he has the Yellow Death." She stood, squared her shoulders, and jammed her thumbs into her belt. "It can't be helped, he'll have to be moved regardless. The *Duke of York* makes at least one more trip this evening, and when they discover he's disappeared, they'll scour the town for him."

Michael, who had apparently been paying no attention to the conversation, pried up a board and looked at Esther Mary, his dark eyes filled with deep concern. "Can't keep him here till he better, Mistress Essie?"

"No, Michael." She frowned and shook her head. "There's no place to hide him here, and when he grows delirious he's

likely to shout and scream. You've seen people with the Yellow Death before."

"Me see. And me know this one maybe not live if take him someplace now, Mistress Essie."

Esther Mary's lower lip trembled, but she did not waver in her decision. "Bury the boards of the false hull in the usual place, lads," she said. "And be ready to travel in ten minutes' time. Keep an especially sharp watch for patrols along the Palisades, in case the news is already out that Master Stone has escaped." She swung around to face Janine. "It will be your task to try to keep him alive," she said brusquely, "for if he stays here he'll surely die."

"I?" The developments of the past few minutes had been too much, and Janine could only stare stupidly.

"You. What's more, you can't travel in that party gown. Come along and I'll give you one of my shirts and a pair of trousers."

A mop of red hair swirled in defiance. "Perhaps you'll have the kindness to tell me where we are being taken. And I'd like to know how long I'll be forced to——"

"Naturally, you're going into hiding." The cleric's niece spoke curtly, almost contemptuously. "How long you'll be there depends on many factors unknown at the present time. And I certainly will not tell you where you're going. Should you be captured, it will be better for you as well as for others if you have no information to reveal. Now, come along! And hurry, Sister Janine! Unless you want all of us to be hanged!"

The narrow strip of land known as the Palisadoes curved in a gentle arc and formed the outer ring of a great bay that separated both Port Royal and the peninsula itself from the main body of the island of Jamaica. A lush tangle of undergrowth made progress difficult, and when the travelers passed through groves of mango trees and banyans they barely crept forward, as small, deadly coral snakes might be overhead, waiting to drop down on the unwary.

A half moon was reflected in the calm waters of the bay, which gently lapped against the hard rock and earth of the Palisadoes, but despite the presence of hundreds of stars the night was far from bright and the Southern Cross was occasionally obscured by clouds. Here and there the weeds rose as high as six feet, and small trees of soursop, wild cotton, and sweetsop were everywhere. Occasionally there were sandy, barren patches, and elsewhere pools of slimy, stagnant water appeared in the places where the ground was hard and where the rays of the sun never penetrated behind the thick screen of foliage.

Owls called mournfully to each other from treetops, and somewhere in the distance a pack of wild dogs howled and barked. Every once in a while a vulture circled overhead, then disappeared into the night, and an occasional rustle in the rank-smelling brush indicated the presence of some sort of small animal.

A cool breeze from the direction of the Blue Mountains relieved the oppressiveness of the atmosphere, but Janine Groliere was nevertheless perspiring heavily as she plodded behind Michael, who glided ahead of her tirelessly, a cutlass in his right hand. A few paces behind her was Gabriel, who carried Jeremy Stone in his arms as one would carry an infant. Despite his burden, Gabriel showed no sign of fatigue, and he moved methodically, his footsteps never faltering. The shirt Esther Mary had loaned Janine was drenched. There were rips in it and in the faded blue trousers, and her arms and legs bore innumerable scratches. It seemed as though they had been walking for hours, and she was sure they had covered many miles, yet neither of the Negroes had stopped to rest, and whenever Janine stumbled, one or the other remonstrated gently, "Hurry, mistress, hurry."

As the minutes dragged by, the girl became increasingly convinced that she was experiencing a nightmare and that she would soon awaken to find herself safe and secure in her own bed. Twice Michael had raised his cutlass in warning, then had hurled himself headlong into the thick weeds, and Janine had forced herself to follow his example. Gabriel had done the same, laying down the unconscious impostor directly behind her, and both times she had looked full into Jeremy's flushed face. There had been a faint trace of froth around his mouth, and his breathing had been labored and rasping.

Michael's alarms had apparently been groundless, because on both occasions, after listening intently, the big man had jumped to his feet and quickly resumed the march. Janine prayed fervently that she would not again be made to lie prone in the brush, for she had heard numerous tales of poisonous scorpions and centipedes, and in her imagination she could see these small, deadly enemies hiding behind every thick stalk of jungle grass and under every pile of rotting vegetation.

Neither stop had given her a chance to rest, for she had been tense and strained as she had listened for the sound of human voices and human footsteps, and her relief on each occasion had been followed by a feeling of complete exhaustion. She knew that if the men did not give her an opportunity to pause and regain her strength soon, she would be unable to continue, and it became acute torture to lift her

feet and put them down on what seemed to be an endless trail that led nowhere. Yet when the Negroes gave no indication that they would halt, she called on reserves she had not known existed, and somehow she managed to keep going.

Slung over her shoulder was an oiled pouch in which were meat, bread, and a flask of water. She was thirsty, but Gabriel had forbidden her to drink while walking, for he insisted she would be sick. As for the food, she had no desire to eat, for fear had numbed her appetite, and the brackish odor of the mangrove swamps and jungles made her ill.

Above every other concern was her worry for the sick man being carried behind her. Deliberately forcing herself to face facts, she had to admit that it would be a terrible blow to her if he died, yet she could not imagine what relationship she could have with him in the future if he lived.

As an impostor and an outcast he represented the lower depths of society from which her father had dragged himself, and she knew that the captain would never consent to a marriage with a penniless adventurer who had a price on his head. Remembering Esther Mary Pennywell's bland admission that she would welcome an affair with Jeremy, and wondering what it would be like to become entangled with him herself, Janine blushed, amazed at her own thinking.

Gabriel's voice cut through the night as he called softly to Michael in a language that Janine did not understand, and the silent one of the team nodded in agreement and promptly swung toward the left. They climbed a steep embankment, then started down through a particularly wild tangle of brush toward the bay. When they reached the water's edge, the girl was infinitely relieved to see Gabriel lay his burden down on a small shelf of rock that jutted out into the water. She looked at the Negro inquiringly, pleading silently for a respite, and he nodded.

"You sit, mistress," he said cheerfully, then turned to his friend, who stood beside him, cutlass in hand. "You go look, Michael. Only for soldier patrols. Nobody but soldiers with Jamaica guides come this far."

Silently the bigger of the two men glided off through the weeds, and a few moments later he was lost from sight. Janine, sitting on the hard rock, massaged her aching legs and feet and was further upset when she noticed that her shoes were splitting and would soon fall apart. A racking cough shook the unconscious man beside her, and she reached out quickly and laid her hand on his brow. Though she couldn't be sure, his fever seemed much worse, and she first opened the oilskin pouch and removed the water flask, then lifted Jeremy's head to her lap.

Gabriel was watching her. "No give him water to drink," he said vigorously. "Water bad for man with Yellow Death. Make sickness much more bad, mistress."

Janine wanted to protest, for she had often discussed diseases with the surgeons aboard her father's ships, and she firmly believed that water was the best medicine for someone suffering from a fever. However, she knew nothing about the ailment known by the name of the Yellow Death and conceded that Gabriel might be right. In any case she could not take the authority into her own hands, as she knew she would never forgive herself if the patient died. So she pulled the stopper from the flask and soaked a square of linen she had been thoughtful enough to stuff into the pocket of Esther Mary's borrowed trousers. Then she carefully placed the dripping cloth on Jeremy's forehead, and an instant later he sighed almost imperceptibly. Looking at him intently, the girl felt a thrill of gratification.

Only then, despite her own burning thirst, did she think of herself. She turned to Gabriel, but he anticipated her question. "You drink now, mistress," he instructed. "Eat, too. No chance again to eat."

"I'd rather not eat now," Janine protested. "I'm not the least bit hungry, and——"

"You eat!" The Negro's voice was rough and stern. "Maybe you no hear Gabriel tell you what he tell you, mistress. Very long night still come, and this last chance to eat. Bad enough to carry one sick. Gabriel plenty much strong, but have only two arms, mistress. If you sick, have to leave you in swamp. Gabriel can't carry more than one sick."

Considerably chastened, Janine removed a slab of bread and a chunk of jerked beef from the pouch and began to eat. She had never before tasted meat that had been cured in so crude a manner and she found it tough and salty. But she was surprised, after the first swallow or two, to discover that she was ravenously hungry and she immediately forgot her fastidiousness and began to eat with a will. She looked up to find Gabriel grinning at her.

"Much walk make for empty inside," he said companionably. He had finished his own meal in an amazingly short span of time.

"That's true," Janine agreed. "I thought I couldn't walk another step, and I'm beginning to be refreshed already." She wondered what her companions at Mistress Ormsby-Blake's Seminary for Young Ladies would think of her if they saw her now. She was somewhere in the steaming hinterlands of a tropical jungle, her arms and legs smarting from thorn scratches, her lap heavy with the head of a very sick fugitive from the

representatives of the Crown. And her dinner companion was a half-savage Negro giant!

She started to laugh quietly, but the sound became a scream of terror as something dark and vile smelling swooped down out of nowhere, brushed against her face, and became enmeshed in her long hair. She ducked her head and tried to cover her face with her hands, but at that instant the creature broke loose. Shuddering, she touched her cheek and removed a small quantity of what appeared to be a downlike fuzz.

Gabriel regarded her with compassion. "That just a little rat-bat, mistress," he said. "Bats no hurt you. But," he added more forcefully, "soldiers on night patrol hurt plenty much if they hear scream and catch. Next time let rat-bat make nest in hair, but no scream again!"

Janine nodded but knew that she would not be able to control herself if another bat touched her. Jeremy moaned under his breath, and she poured more of her precious water supply onto the handkerchief. The high color had drained from his face, and in the dim light he looked deathly pale. Some of the bloat had disappeared from his cheeks, and she was astonished that a man who had been in such robust health only a few days before could be so emaciated. It would truly be a miracle, she felt, if he survived the night.

As she watched, his eyelids fluttered, he stirred slightly, and his lips parted. A faint sound came from the back of his throat, and Janine bent her head closer, thinking that he was trying to speak. But Gabriel was on his feet in an instant, and before the girl quite realized what he was doing he took hold of the hair on the top of her head and jerked her head upright.

To her astonishment, Gabriel's expression was mild, his eyes grave but serene. "Mistress not come too close to face of sick one," he announced imperturbably in his deep bass. "When Mistress put face too near, spirit of Yellow Death leave sick man and enter body of Mistress."

"But he was trying to say something, Gabriel." Janine was very much disturbed. "I think he was trying to tell me something, and——"

"Sick man not know what say. Evil spirits have hold of inside of head of sick man. If someone try to speak, not sick man who talk, only evil spirit. Much more better you not listen."

Believing neither in spirits nor in the power of the Yellow Death to communicate itself from one individual to another, Janine wanted to protest. But she was suddenly afraid for her own safety if she offended the superstitious credo of this semi-barbarian. Her heart pounded violently, and she was unable to reply, so she again devoted herself to ministering to Jeremy,

taking good care, however, not to allow her face to approach too close to his.

Somewhere in the deep weeds nearby a cricket began to chirp, and within a few moments a score of his fellows took up his song. Their noise was harsh, but the girl felt strangely soothed; the familiar buzzing, reminding her of happy, snug nights she had known in France and England, was comforting.

The shrill double cry of a parakeet sounded in the distance. Gabriel sucked in his breath and grinned to himself, and Janine watched him as he walked to the far end of the rock, cupped his hands over his mouth, and repeated the call. His action was so unexpected that it took the girl an instant to realize that someone had signaled to him and he was replying. He said nothing to her but peered out across the water, waiting.

A few moments later a long canoe floating close to the shore line glided up to the rock, and she saw Michael sitting in the stern, guiding the craft dexterously and silently with a double-ended paddle. Gabriel chuckled, but his friend in the boat was wooden-faced. "No soldiers near," he said tersely. "Boat where we left her. Nobody find. Get in now."

The craft was easy to handle despite her heavy load and responded instantly to Michael's bidding. Janine's foot touched something hard, something that rattled against the hull, and she unthinkingly reached out a hand, then drew it back when she saw a long, two-edged cutlass.

The air was cool but caressing, and on the open water it was almost chilly. There was a different perspective of both the island mainland and the Port Royal peninsula from here, and Jamaica seemed to fill the world. There was something brooding, almost sinister, about the thick foliage that rose along the shore line on every side in a black, seemingly impenetrable mass. And directly ahead, behind the gently rising plateau known as the Liguanea Plain, stood the Blue Mountains, Jamaica's towering, unexplored guardians. As always, a few clouds drifted above the visible crests, and behind this screen, unseen and silent, stood the tallest of the peaks, rising seven thousand feet and more toward the sky.

Then, without warning, Jeremy Stone moaned, and the spell of the tropics was broken. Janine came back to the realities of the present.

The shore opposite the Palisadoes was directly ahead now, and the girl thought the canoe would be beached in a few moments. But Michael changed directions suddenly, swinging the craft parallel with the approaching shore and proceeding west at a reduced speed. She could feel the tension of the men behind her, and she became nervous too. For another ten minutes or more not a word was spoken, then Gabriel chuckled,

and when he spoke Janine could tell that even this phlegmatic man was relieved.

"Back there old Spanish fort," he said. "Sometimes English King have soldiers in stone house, sometimes not. We stay away and not find out." He leaned forward, tapped Janine on the shoulder, over the prostrate body of Jeremy, and pointed a thick index finger toward the shore. "Over there village," he announced contemptuously. "Poor-fool fishing people live there. Call damn-fool place Kingston. Nobody but crazy fishing man ever live there. No place for town, never have town there."

Janine looked inland and saw nothing but the inevitable thick, tall trees and high weeds. If there was indeed a fishing village back of the shore, the inhabitants kept their dwelling places well concealed. She squinted hard as the canoe swept on, but still saw no sign of habitation. Michael was hugging the shore closely now, and the boat was moving so slowly it seemed to be drifting.

Then, almost directly ahead and around a slight promontory, there sounded the double call of a parakeet. Gabriel answered it at once and the canoe picked up speed, rounded the little peninsula, and shot with full force toward the land. There was the grinding of stones under the wooden hull, and the prow rose onto black sand. Another portion of the journey into nowhere had apparently come to an end.

Two men appeared with dramatic suddenness from behind a gnarled bamboo cluster, reached out and beached the boat. Strong black arms lifted Janine out of the craft, then she was forgotten as both of the Negroes stared with interest at Jeremy. One addressed himself to Gabriel, and they conversed rapidly in the harsh, guttural tongue that the girl could not understand. A sudden flurry of activity followed.

Michael, who had started to get out of the canoe, climbed back in, and one of the unidentified Negroes moved silently into the brush, then reappeared leading a small but sturdy pack horse. He picked up the feverish Jeremy and quickly, efficiently strapped him onto the animal's back, with a thin blanket beneath him as a saddle. He tied the sick man's legs and torso with thick leather thongs in such a manner that, although Jeremy's head slumped forward until his face rested at the base of the beast's long neck, he could not fall off.

Suddenly she became aware that Gabriel was speaking English now and that he was addressing her. "I'm afraid I didn't hear you, Gabriel," she said, smiling apologetically. "My mind was wandering, and——"

"No more wander tonight, mistress," the Negro responded sternly. "Much travel still to come. Bad Arawak Indian in

country where Mistress and sick one go. Bad men who run away from boats ahead, too. Mistress better stay plenty much awake!"

"I'll do whatever you tell me, Gabriel," she said meekly. "And I give you my word I'll cause no trouble."

"You go with these two fella," Gabriel said. "They take you and sick one to fine place where you be safe for all time." His face glowed with enthusiasm and his eyes took on a faraway look. "You have wonderful life there. Sick one, too. If he not die. Good-by, mistress. You keep very quiet on trail, please. Speak no word."

He bowed to her rather awkwardly in a burlesque of what he had seen gentlemen do in Port Royal, then addressed a final word to the two guides and started back to the boat. But Janine, suddenly panicky, halted him. "Wait, Gabriel," she called. "You and Michael—aren't you coming with us?"

"Commander, him order us back to Port Royal."

"But——"

"Commander plenty much smart. Many in Port Royal see Michael and Gabriel go fishing trip with man of God. Then, quick like tiny bird that vanish in banana tree, sick man gone from Death Island, Mistress gone from all place, Michael and Gabriel gone from Port Royal. King of London have many smart ones in Port Royal. They scheme in heads, pretty soon they know Michael and Gabriel help sick one, help Mistress. But Michael and Gabriel be in Port Royal tomorrow, work at ship docks, help unload salt fish. Plenty many see Michael, see Gabriel. Never know what happen this day, this night."

Staring at him, the girl marveled. These two men had spent a full day and the better part of a night in backbreaking, nerve-fraying work, yet they were prepared to return to town across the Palisadoes jungle, then labor as stevedores for another full day. But Gabriel was in no wise dismayed at the prospect, and Michael, sitting patiently in the boat, was equally unconcerned. Janine felt vastly ashamed that she had thought of either of them as savages; never had she encountered two human beings with greater courage, greater patience, greater cheerful willingness to help others at no personal gain to themselves.

Abruptly she held out her hand to Gabriel. "Thank you," she said simply. "You've been—well, thank you. And you, Michael. Will I—see either of you again?" The future seemed devoid of savor without these two loyal stalwarts.

For the first time the silent Michael delivered himself of what was, for him, a lengthy speech. "Mistress going to see us plenty much," he called out happily. "Pretty soon Mistress going to see us so much she want us never again around, going

to get tired look all the sunlight hours at Michael and Gabriel, Gabriel and Michael. You have pleasant journey, mistress. We not worry about you. Like three young men in fiery furnace, Lord God going deliver you from hand of evil. Goddamn! Pretty soon you be plenty much safe!"

Gabriel jumped lightly into the canoe, and one of the guides touched Janine on the arm and beckoned to her to follow him. She plunged into a thicket and on the far side was surprised to see a small clearing in which three mules were tethered. The guide motioned to her to mount one, and she did so, rather gingerly. But the animal, after turning its long neck and surveying her for an instant with liquid brown eyes, promptly lost all interest in her.

The second guide led the pack horse bearing the unconscious body of Jeremy Stone into the clearing and, keeping a tight grip on the reins, seated himself on the remaining beast. The man in the lead started inland, and Janine's mule followed the first animal blindly. Behind her rode the second guide, and the pack horse brought up the rear.

There was something monotonous about travel by muleback across mile after mile of raw, undeveloped country in the hours between midnight and dawn, and Janine found herself half dozing as her beast jogged along steadily. It was only with the greatest effort that she managed to stay awake, and even her worry over the hapless Jeremy gave way to a desire for sleep. What she could see of the gently rising plateau known as the Liguanea Plain did little to arouse her interest, either, for it was uniformly dull. There were patches of jungle which her guides skillfully avoided, river beds empty of water, and great stretches of bare, red clay from which the tropical rains of centuries had washed all topsoil. Nothing grew here and nothing lived here. The area was so desolate that the girl felt an almost overwhelming urge to weep.

In later days Janine could remember but little of the remainder of the trip. She was able to recall vaguely that the countryside became wilder, the hills more frequent, more rugged. And the foliage became increasingly dense, too, until there was once more a solid wall of jungle on every side, underfoot, and overhead. Then, as the first streaks of daylight were muddying the sky, the caravan halted abruptly.

A man materialized on the narrow trail in front of them, seemingly out of nowhere, and made his way straight to Janine. Naked to the waist, he wore a pair of ragged trousers and soft moccasins. Into his belt was stuck a curved cutlass, and in his pierced ears he wore two large gold hoops. His hair was long, almost shoulder-length, and was held in place by what appeared to be a strip of tree bark that had been

dyed a brilliant red. Not until he stopped a scant yard from Janine did she see that his eyes were blue; then, and then only, did she realize that he was a white man.

"Welcome, Mademoiselle Groliere," he said in perfect English as he favored her with a short bow. "Welcome to the Land of the Maroons."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN:

# March 1692

**N**UMEROUS frame buildings, some of split bamboo, others of heavier wood, were scattered among the trees on the far side of the crest of a high hill, and the houses had been so carefully placed behind camouflages of jungle that not one was visible from a distance of two hundred feet. The site for the community had been chosen with great care, for even the hill itself served to protect the dwellings from the prying eyes of outsiders who might venture this far into the wilderness of the Jamaican interior.

Janine Groliere was dazed and so weary that she could barely lift her feet as she followed the white man who had greeted her so unexpectedly in the jungle fastness. Almost innumerable questions needed to be answered, but she was too tired to ask them; indeed, it was all she could do to absorb a few of the simpler facts about the village in which she found herself. Most of the houses were small, but a short distance down the hill there were three long, low buildings, each of which was large enough to accommodate at least fifty persons. In an open clearing were five large pits, and as they walked past them Janine saw that each was lined with charred bricks. These, she surmised, were used for commercial cooking, and even as the idea occurred to her she saw three women approaching, each carrying a large bundle of dried sticks.

To one accustomed to relatively modest European attire, the women were shockingly dressed: barefooted, they wore plain skirts of thin, unbleached wool that hung only an inch or two below their knees. From the waist up they were naked, but all wore heavy necklaces and thick hoop earrings of gold. Two of them, Negresses, were quite young, and the third, who seemed to be an Arawak Indian, was of indeterminate age. They returned Janine's breathless stare with bright smiles as they

continued about their chores, and all seemed unconscious of their lack of clothing.

Nor was the white guide disturbed by their nudity. Turning, he called over his shoulder to Janine, "We arise early in the Land of the Maroons, mademoiselle. Before the sun climbs much higher the whole town will be awake, but I doubt if even the noises of our children at play will disturb your sleep. Now, before I show you to your quarters, I wonder if you might be tempted by a bite of breakfast."

The girl smiled wanly. "As you can imagine, sir, I'm not very hungry. However, I'm worried about Jeremy Stone, who is very ill, and I cannot wander off like this and leave him——"

"Never fear, mademoiselle. He is in the best of hands. Our principal obeah man has been anticipating his arrival and, I'm sure, is even at this moment examining him." The man stopped and waited for Janine to catch up with him.

"Obeah man?" Her fatigue was so great that the nearest buildings seemed to lean toward her.

He laughed as he guided her through a lane of trees toward a small hut. "You who are unfamiliar with the ways of our people would call him a witch doctor, I believe."

The girl's skin crawled, and she looked up at the man in utter horror. "Surely you don't intend to place someone as sick as Jeremy in the hands of a superstitious, ignorant——"

"I assure you, Master Stone will receive the best of all possible treatment. We are not unfamiliar with the ravages of the Yellow Death, and our obeah man is unequaled anywhere in the Caribbean. Perhaps the commander will wish to explain in greater detail when he receives you later, but in the meantime you must take my word. I beg you to think only of yourself now and to rest long and well, or you will fall ill too."

They had arrived at the doorway of a tiny building, and the man held aside a flimsy curtain made of long strips of dried grass. He bowed Janine in and she preceded him into the room. What she saw was hardly encouraging. The walls were made of split-bamboo sticks, and dried red clay filled the gaps between them. An opening had been cut for a window, and already sunlight was pouring in. The roof was a thatched mass of jungle weeds, and there was no furniture of any kind. In fact, the only object in the house was a curious strip of loosely woven cloth, about three or four feet wide, that was slung horizontally at a height of about four feet between two stout poles driven into the dirt flooring some six feet apart. The weird contraption took up the greater part of the space in the cramped cell.

But the man apparently thought there was nothing unusual

about the room or its furnishing, and he smiled soothingly at Janine. "Sleep for as many hours as you can, mademoiselle. I will send someone who speaks English—or French, if you prefer—to attend your needs. Should you want her, merely call and she will come in. Rest as long as you can, and remember that time means nothing in the Land of the Maroons."

"Thank you." Despite her exhaustion, Janine's green eyes flashed. Had she been captured by the governor general's troops she would have been housed in a prison cell that boasted greater comforts than this crude hut, and she would have been given at least a straw pallet. After all she had been through, it was too much to ask her to make her bed on the hard dirt floor. "I wonder if it would be too much to ask," she said, "and if so, I apologize for inconveniencing you, but I'm unaccustomed to sleeping on the ground. I would appreciate the luxury of a blanket to spread over the mud."

To her surprise, the man threw back his head and laughed, and there was no doubting that his amusement was genuine. "Your pardon, mademoiselle." He chuckled again. "I had forgotten that you are new to Jamaica and unfamiliar with the ways of our Indians. You see your bed before you. It is an Arawak invention called a *hamoc*, and you'll find it not only as comfortable as a down mattress, but considerably safer, for we are much afflicted here at Stony Hill with scorpions and coral snakes, and I fear they would make life unbearable for you on the floor. Try the *hamoc*, mademoiselle, and you will bless the Arawak for the rest of your days."

It was late afternoon when Janine awoke, and pine-scented breezes swept across the Maroon village on Stony Hill from the direction of the Blue Mountains. Yawning lazily, she started to sit up and found that her *hamoc* was swinging violently. Before she was quite aware of what was happening she tumbled to the ground.

The thud apparently attracted attention outside the hut, for the dried grass covering the doorway was pushed aside and a young girl of about fourteen slid into the hut. She was black-haired and dark-eyed, her skin a deep golden color and her bearing erect, almost regal. Like the women Janine had seen that morning, she wore only a skirt, and her young breasts were high and firm. She surveyed Janine for a moment, and as the white girl arose she advanced and held out her hand after the manner of men.

"You awake, mistress. You have plenty much long sleep. Feel better now. I Bella. My father white overseer, my mother Arawak slave. I Bella good Maroon woman, free like you!"

She shook Janine's hand, and though she was shorter and more slender than the French-English girl, her grip was firm and her fingers powerful.

"How do you do?" Uncertain of the etiquette to be observed, Janine smiled uncertainly.

"You plenty much hungry, Bella wager." Two even rows of small white teeth appeared as the half-breed grinned cheerily. Then she spun around, raced to the window, clapped her hands together twice, and shouted something. Turning back into the room, she examined the white girl critically, and Janine became conscious of the sorry state of her clothing. Esther Mary's borrowed shirt and trousers were bramble-torn and perspiration-stained; in fact, they were little better than rags. It was no wonder after the hazardous journey of the preceding night, but the excuse was small comfort at the moment. Sympathy showed in Bella's large eyes, and she lifted her hands to her face. "You need water bath, new dress, many thing. But no worry, mistress. Bella attend while you eat. Maroons not rich, but share all."

The soft patter of running feet sounded outside, and an instant later the curtain of grass parted to admit a small boy of about ten, who skidded to a stop. Stark-naked, he might have been taken for white had it not been for a rather hazy undercast in his skin and the texture of his very short curly black hair. In his hands he carried a large steaming bowl and a shelled coconut into which a hole had been punched. He offered them shyly to Janine, then backed hastily out of the hut. Bella peered into the bowl, picked a short wooden spoon out of it, and lifted a small portion of the contents to her lips.

"Ahh," she said, satisfied. "Salt fish and ackee. Best of food for hungry ones. And coconut milk stop thirst. Sit, mistress." She indicated the ground with a sweeping gesture. "Sit. Eat."

Janine needed no urging and, squatting on the floor, she began to devour the unusual dish. The ackee, she knew, was a yellowish fruit found nowhere in the world but Jamaica; she had often heard her father praise this strange, waxen delicacy, which could under no circumstances be picked until ripe and which would cause violent illness if eaten raw. Prepared with heavily salted codfish, she found that its bland flavor was a perfect balance for the pungent fish, and she concentrated on the meal in unconscious defiance of all her past training. No lady, she had always been taught, pretended that food was anything but a bore. But no lady had ever been quite so hungry. Finishing in a remarkably short time, she lifted the coconut to her lips and drank the sweet, pale milk. Never had a dinner in London or Paris been half so satisfying.

So completely had her attention been riveted on appeasing her hunger that only now did she realize that Bella had departed, then returned with two buckets of water. The half-breed stood waiting, a handful of soft, mossy twigs clutched in her right fist. The desire to be clean was stronger than Janine's modesty, and after a swift debate with herself she decided there was no harm in appearing unclothed before a member of her own sex.

The conclusion reached, she unbuttoned her shirt and peeled off the ripped, filthy garments. Then, before she quite knew what was happening, Bella stooped down, emptied half of one of the buckets of water over her, and began to scrub her energetically with the twig. Janine tried to protest, but the half-breed girl paid no heed and continued to apply water and the twig brush vigorously. At last she was finished, and Janine, skin tingling, felt truly refreshed for the first time. The bath water had already soaked into the ground, and she herself was drying quickly. Apparently towels were unknown here, and she shivered slightly in the late afternoon breeze.

From within the folds of her skirt Bella produced a long tortoise-shell comb and a small square of highly burnished metal, which she handed to the white girl. Janine took them eagerly, and after several minutes of untangling snarls her long red curls began to fall into place. At last she was satisfied with her work.

Bella was pleased, too, and looked at the cascading tresses with interest. "Only one other in town of Maroons have hair that color," she volunteered. "Myra, woman of Arnold Rifle-Shoot, have red hair." Without waiting for a reply, she scooped up the sodden rags that had been Janine's clothes and whisked them out of the hut before the startled girl could object.

In a moment she was back, carrying one of the Maroon skirts of thin, unbleached wool. She moved quickly to Janine and wrapped it around her waist three times, then tied it with two strips of cloth that had been sewn to the skirt top. From a pocket in her own skirt Bella then produced a long strip of thin but strong white silk. This she wound three times around Janine, knotted the ends in back, and critically surveyed her handiwork. Janine's breasts, though covered, were displayed with a prominence shocking to her more civilized standards. "Now you good Maroon woman too. Come to meet Commander, mistress."

Janine felt as though she had received a heavy blow on the top of her head, and her bare toes curled and dug into the ground. "You—you want me to go out—like this?" she cried, aghast. "I can't set foot out of this room without my clothes!"

"Old clothes no good any more," Bella replied calmly. "Now

you have good Maroon dress. Come now. Commander waiting to make talk with you."

"I couldn't consider seeing anyone unless you supply me with a dress—or at the very least—with a shirt." Humiliated and frightened, Janine fought to stem a flood of tears. "You surely can't expect me to—to expose myself like a savage!" The words were out before she could stop them.

But Bella took no offense, if indeed she was aware of the slight. "Commander let you wear much more clothes than other Maroon women," she said stolidly. "Commander say you dress like this. All here do as Commander say. Him wait for you now, and none in Land of Maroon keep Commander for to wait. So you come."

"I will do no such thing!" Janine was growing panicky, and her voice rose hysterically. "Just because you people are without decency is no reason why I must reduce myself to your gutter level. You can tell your commander for me that I absolutely——"

She had no opportunity to say what it was that she wished repeated to the leader of the Maroons, for Bella swept around behind her, strong young hands took hold of her waist, and Janine was propelled bodily out of the hut. She staggered into the open and stood for a moment as in a trance, mortified and fearful. Then ineffectually she tried to cover the narrow breast-band with her hands and arms, but Bella did not allow her even that small comfort. Appearing at her side, the half-breed took hold of her elbow and led her firmly toward the open area at the center of the village.

Scores of children ran about noisily, and men and women were everywhere, moving purposefully about various chores. Some were carrying baskets laden with freshly picked vegetables and fruits, others were driving swine or sheep before them. The atmosphere was one of a community where no one was idle. But Janine was completely unaware of the spirit of the people; her consciousness of her own situation was so enormous that she could think of nothing else. Her sole desire was to run into the jungles and hide, but that was out of the question, so she knew that her best course was to cause as little commotion as possible and to appear as unconcerned as she could in order not to draw attention to herself.

It required great will power to drop her arms to her sides and to walk as naturally as she would have done had she been fully clothed. She made the effort, however, and though her head was spinning and she could feel her face flaming, she held her head high. Bella led her past the long buildings she had seen that morning, and she realized dimly that both were empty.

"This house for men who have no women," the half-breed said, pointing to the closer barracks. "Other for women who no have men."

Janine nodded dumbly, totally disinterested. Never again would she be the same person who less than twenty-four hours before had been a conventional and proper young woman. It was slightly heartening to discover that the men she passed paid virtually no attention to her, though a few of them, white and black, Arawak and cross-breed, smiled an impersonal and friendly greeting. They were, it seemed, far less conscious of her near nudity than she herself was, and they favored her with no more than a casual glance. Perversely, she was somewhat annoyed, for she was secretly proud of her figure and knew it to be far superior to that of the brawny women whom she could see going about their tasks.

At last Bella stopped before a cottage somewhat larger than most, an edifice made of heavy logs and boasting a conventional wooden door. The half-breed girl knocked, and a male voice called out something in a foreign tongue. She entered at once and beckoned to Janine to follow. The interior was startling, a strange contradictory hodgepodge in which the civilized warred with the barbaric.

Animal skins thrown across the dirt floor served as rugs, and in the center of what was apparently the living room of the dwelling was a highly polished, handsomely carved mahogany table that would not have been out of place at King's House. On it stood two ornate gold candelabra, each of which held nine blazing tapers. On the walls were hung grotesque masks that reminded Janine of some of the paraphernalia her father had long ago brought home to her from his slave-raiding expeditions into the African interior. And on the far wall stood two sharp-tipped spears, beneath which was hung a modern long rifle similar to those she had seen in New York.

Most amazing of all was a gilded chair placed on a raised platform beneath the spears and rifle. A long, silver-fringed velvet cloth of scarlet was thrown across the back of the chair, and beside it stood a rack holding a rapier and a curved, two-edged cutlass. On the other side was a small table on which rested a delicately filigreed decanter partly filled with wine and three or four exquisite glasses that could have been made only by master artisans in Venice or Prague. This, then, was the state chamber of the chief of the Maroons.

As she looked around, a door to an inner room opened, and a man entered slowly. Once again Janine fought down an impulse to cover her breastband with her arms and elbows. But a single glance at the remarkable creature who was approach-

ing her with a slow, dignified walk was sufficient to convince her that he would not molest her.

The commander of the Maroons was a very old man, and his short, kinky hair was a dead white. Shorter than Janine, he was exceptionally frail and weighed no more than one hundred and twenty-five pounds. His once black skin had faded to a deep mottled gray, and in his face it was possible to see the outlines of his skeleton. Barefooted, he wore the inevitable Maroon trousers, and over his shoulders was thrown a brilliant cloak of reds and oranges, greens and blues and purples, made from the feathers of many hundreds of birds.

His face indicated both sensitivity and intelligence. His dark eyes were large, shrewd, and sympathetic, and he wore metal-rimmed spectacles which rested a short distance down the bridge of his sharp nose. His lips were rather thin, somewhat pale, and heavily lined at the corners. There was an intricate network of wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, too, as well as across the broad expanse of his high forehead. His hand, as he extended it to the French-English girl, was long and thin, and on the index finger he wore a great ruby ring.

"I bid you welcome, Mademoiselle Groliere," he said in faultless English, then turned to the other girl before Janine could recover from her surprise. "Thank you, Bella," he added. "You will not be needed any longer."

The half-breed bowed low and departed quickly without a backward glance. She had spoken no word in the commander's presence, but the expression in her eyes indicated the respect, even awe, in which she held him. The old man waited until she had closed the door behind her, then turned to Janine again with a broad, tolerant smile.

"If you will be indulgent for a moment," he said, "I think I can make you comfortable." Without waiting for a reply he darted into the inner room and returned carrying a large split-bamboo chair, which he placed near his throne.

Waving her toward it, he was about to seat himself in the large gilded chair but thought better of it and first unfastened the cape of feathers, which he handed to her. "Your customs are different from ours," he said with seemingly casual indulgence, "and I believe you will feel more at ease with this to cover you while we talk."

Overwhelmed with gratitude, she donned the cape and hugged it to her. For the first time in many minutes she felt comparatively secure. "Thank you, sir," she said, near tears.

The commander reached down and patted her hand. "I must apologize to you for what has undoubtedly been an ordeal for you, mademoiselle. But I acted in your interests when I ordered that you be attired in a manner similar to that of our

own women. Although the scarf you wear is not the customary attire here, our women are known to don such a garment on occasions, so your dress is not so unusual by our standards that it will cause particular comment or notice. I have permitted you to have it, of course, so that the break with the conventions of your own world will not be too great. It has been my observation that the unusual arouses interest while the commonplace does not. You are new here, and it appears likely that you will be our guest for some little time. It may eventually be your desire to spend your life here. But until our people come to know you, there is little question that you will be the subject of considerable curiosity. Had you been seen in clothes such as those worn by the women of your world, our men would have lusted after you. That would have resulted in fights between them, perhaps bloodshed—and the need on my part to administer punishment. It might have meant harm to you as well. But when you conform to the Maroon pattern, they lose their desire to molest you.”

Janine could only stare at the old man; never would she have believed it possible to find such wisdom, such gentle understanding and authority in this unlikely and outlandish place. But neither his race nor the semi-savage décor of his wilderness “palace” mattered. In a few short minutes she had become convinced that here was truly a leader of men. “You—you make it easier for me,” she said. “And I must thank you—and all of your people—for being so kind to me and to Master Jeremy Stone.” She searched his face as she mentioned Jeremy’s name, but as he was watching her with the same intent look of sympathy and concern she plunged on: “Is there any improvement in his condition? May I see him? Is he——”

The commander removed his spectacles and blew an invisible speck of dust from the right lens. “Master Stone is a very sick man, and as you can imagine, mademoiselle, the arduous journey of last night did not help him. But he will recover in time, for the signs are favorable and the gods will smile on him.”

Janine felt as though the breath had been squeezed out of her lungs. This man who only a few seconds before had seemed so intelligent was now talking sheer gibberish. “Signs?” she asked faintly. “Gods?”

Smiling benignly, the commander folded his arms across his thin chest. “I know what you are thinking, mademoiselle. You are a Christian. Many of our Maroons are also Christians. But there are occasions when they heed the call of Obeah, particularly in times of distress. Your Master Stone is gravely ill, and if your Christian doctors bled him and your Christian preachers prayed over him, he would die as surely as I have

seen many others die from the Yellow Death. But our obeah man is already preparing him for the ceremonies. And I believe he will live."

"Do you believe in occult magic, Commander?" Janine was growing indignant, and if necessary to protect Jeremy from superstitious nonsense, she would take a strong stand.

"Let us say that I believe he will recover." The old man compressed his lips and stared out over the top of her coppery hair. "In another night's time he will be ready for the ceremonies. In the meantime he is comfortable, for he does not know if he is in this world or another. Who is to say whether his spirit is with us or whether it has fled elsewhere for a time? Let it suffice that he will return to us in full consciousness of himself and of this world."

"Please—may I see him?" The girl felt trapped, and her voice rose shrilly.

"Indeed you may not. The spell induced by our obeah man permits none but those versed in the arts of deep obeah to approach the sleeping one. I say this for your own protection, mademoiselle. It is too dangerous for you."

"A man has been cruelly abused," Janine snapped, "and he is critically ill. Surely he will have a better chance to live if he is treated by a competent physician. And I can place no faith in the brews of an ignorant witch doctor——"

"Those who do not know the power of Obeah may scoff at it," the commander replied evenly. "But those powers are not diminished because you fail to recognize them. There are many in Port Royal who do not believe the black man or the red man to be the equal of the white man. But we who live out our lives in the Land of the Maroons have proved that all are equal. I am the commander here, yet I was once a house slave in London, bending my back before a tyrant who taught me to read when he was sober but who beat me with a whip when he was drunk. And when my time comes to join my ancestors in the glades, I will be succeeded by Arnold. He is the man who greeted you when you arrived here this morning. Arnold was once a felon and was held in chains for many months. Though his skin is as light as your own, he was considered unfit company for other whites. Yet he will be a courageous and wise commander of the Maroons. I tell you these things so you will understand, mademoiselle, that life is not always what it appears to be, and even those things which we know are true often prove false."

His sweet, reasonable tone was as infuriating as his calm, and Janine needed all of her self-control to keep from shouting or screaming. Jeremy would die, and there seemed to be nothing that she could do to help him. Certainly a show of

continued opposition would get her nowhere and might even result in her imprisonment. She was virtually a prisoner now in this remote hide-out of savages, where she herself was being forced to dress like a savage, and she would need all of her wits and all of her cunning if she was to be of any assistance to Jeremy.

"I do not believe in your gods, Commander," she said slowly, "and I have no faith in the powers of your Obeah. But I will do as you ask and I will not interfere."

"You are wiser than you know, mademoiselle. And you will not regret your decision. Just as surely as Master Stone was taken from Death Island and brought to this secret place, so will he recover. And if you are tempted to think of the Maroons as pagans, remember that Reverend Pennywell, a most pious and devout believer in your Christian God, was the man who made possible the marvelous rescue of Master Stone from the petty tyrants who would have killed him. Perhaps all of us believe in the same God, don't you agree? Is it not possible that we may simply call Him by different names and worship Him in different ways?"

## CHAPTER TWELVE:

### March 1692

**M**YRA, the woman of Arnold Rifle-Shoot and mother of his three children, had once been an exceptionally attractive woman. No more than thirty-two or thirty-three years of age, she still showed vestiges of prettiness, and although her figure had coarsened and thickened, she remained supple and graceful. English-born, she could both read and write, and despite more than a trace of London's East End in her accent, her demeanor was ladylike.

It was she who either assumed or was assigned the responsibility for showing Janine Groliere around the Maroon settlement, and the French-English girl drew considerable comfort from the presence of the older woman. The mere fact that Myra was white and English and that she was totally without self-consciousness in appearing half naked before others gave Janine the courage to adopt an air of increasing sang-froid. Shortly after dawn Myra had arrived at the cottage where Janine was housed and had immediately taken the girl off to

her own home, a spacious and airy dwelling of six rooms. There Janine had breakfasted with Myra, Arnold, and their three boisterous sons on a meal consisting of slices of papaya melon and a porridge made from a local wild bean known as the gunga pea.

Immediately after the meal Arnold had disappeared to conduct a target-practice session with musket, bow and arrow, and machete, attendance at which, he had explained, was compulsory for all the young men of the community. The children had departed, too, and Janine was amazed to discover that they had gone to school. As she and Myra lingered over gourds of thick, rich cocoa she learned many things about the unique world of the Maroons that astonished her.

Myra explained that all fugitives were welcome here, no matter what their crimes, provided they swore to obey the laws of the Maroon elders, to be loyal to the Crown of England though not to its local representatives, be they civil or military, and to do the will of the commander and his assistant. The majority of the people in the village were second- and third-generation Maroons, but each month saw a steady stream of new arrivals, the majority of them escaped Negro slaves, Arawak Indians who had been taken into captivity and had managed to slip away, and white indentured servants, both male and female, who found life intolerable on the isolated plantations where the owners and their overseers were laws unto themselves.

Each Maroon was given a plot of land to cultivate for himself and his family, and each was given some additional occupation that would benefit the community as a whole. A former indentured man who had spent two years during his earlier life as a student at Cambridge University was the schoolmaster; an *ex-boucanier* who had served half a lifetime before the mast supervised the making of dugouts and canoes; an elderly Negress who had been chief seamstress in one of Port Royal's fancier bordellos was in charge of the making of clothes.

Every man was required to give over some portion of his time for training in the arts of war. However, the Maroons were a pacific people and fought only in self-defense. They were so strong and well organized that they had nothing to fear from the roving bands of Arawak who lived in the deep interior, and their only enemies were royal government representatives and their soldiers. Punitive expeditions were sent into the hills every few years, but the majority of these attacks were formal, feeble gestures, and the Maroons had never suffered a major defeat.

It was true, Myra said, that some forty years previous there

had been government spies in the Maroon camp and it had been necessary to move the community deeper into the mountains; since then the village had never been seriously molested. Arnold, as the second man of the Maroons, was charged with the responsibility of maintaining security, but in the past ten years he had lost no more than twenty of his followers, these in small skirmishes. Myra hinted that there were outposts between the village and Port Royal and that communications were maintained between these stations by drumbeaters who had learned their trade in Africa. But Arnold's woman had been rather vague on this topic, perhaps deliberately so, and when she had answered several questions evasively, Janine wisely changed the subject.

The Maroon women, like women everywhere, kept their homes, cooked, and cared for their children. A man and woman were considered to be married when they appeared before the commander and swore they would be faithful and true to each other. Once such a "marriage ceremony" had been performed, it was considered binding for life, and when a couple was caught in improper dalliance, the man was executed and the woman banished from the Land of the Maroons.

Myra knew nothing of Janine's background and hence assumed that the girl had come to the village as a permanent settler. When assured with considerable vehemence that the opposite was true, the older woman's thick reddish-brown brows rose high on her tanned and freckled forehead, and she made the flat statement that never within the span of her memory had any female found mere temporary refuge with the Maroons; when a woman came here, she stayed. She added, almost lightly, that it was a law in the community that no woman could remain single for more than two years from the date of her arrival. If she was unable to choose a husband for herself in that time, she was given to the man who made the best case for himself before the commander. It had rarely been necessary to invoke this law, Myra concluded laughingly.

Now, in late morning, after an examination of the farms and the communal slaughterhouse, the spinning and cloth-cutting room, the arsenal and the hall used by the elders for their solemn deliberations, they were en route to the school. Janine found herself fascinated by this unusual experiment in living, and she eagerly drank in all that she saw.

Despite her repeated inquiries, Myra had given her no information on Jeremy and had seemed more than a little uneasy when he was mentioned. Janine was as determined to help him as she had been during her interview with the commander the preceding evening, but she knew she had given herself a task that would be next to impossible to accomplish, for a lone

female could do very little to rescue a very sick man from those who seemed determined to force him to undergo some sort of pagan ritual.

Myra seemed so kind, so sympathetic, that Janine had several times been tempted to confide in her and to enlist her support. But she decided to bide her time and to make sure of her ground before asking for assistance. As the woman of the second most important individual in the Land of the Maroons, Myra might well report to Arnold any attempt to secure her aid, and in that case Janine would either be watched constantly or would be actually imprisoned while the barbaric ceremonies took place. Although almost sure that these kind people would do her no permanent harm or injury, she was equally certain that they would allow nothing to interfere with the performance of the rites that the commander had mentioned.

Directly ahead now, on a tree-shaded path leading uphill from the hall of the elders, stood a conical-shaped building with an open roof; a stream of smoke was pouring almost vertically from the aperture, for there was no wind of any consequence. The scent of fire lingered in the air, and Janine's nostrils smarted from the pungent, spicy odor. Glancing idly at the building, she saw that, despite a circumference of approximately twenty feet at its base, it was windowless, unlike every other dwelling place she had seen in the village.

"What's that house?" she asked, indicating the strange log structure with a nod.

Myra's deep green eyes darted toward the weird dwelling, and she smoothed back her reddish-brown hair with a quick, nervous gesture. "That is not for us," she said with forced casualness. "No visitors are permitted there. And we'd better hurry, my dear, or the children will be coming home for their dinners before we've had a chance to visit the school-house."

Janine half guessed the truth, half divined it from the other woman's attitude. "That's where Jeremy Stone is being kept!" Before Myra could stop her she sped down the path, then circled around to the far side of the conical house, where an opening was cut into the wood and made a door shaped like an inverted V.

Jeremy Stone was laid out on what appeared to be a high bier, and at first glance he seemed to be dead. He was flat on his back, his legs and arms stretched out straight, his eyes closed, and his skin shining with a pale, yellowish translucence. He was resting on a slab of rock which was mounted on a four-foot-high pile of bricks which were hollowed out in the center at ground level. In the hollow a small fire was burning.

and boughs, green and fragrant, which rested on the top of the flaming mass of wood, gave off the delicate but pungent odor.

On the walls were huge, hideous masks, caricatures of human faces, and each denoted a different expression of human suffering or sorrow. At the foot of the bier, only a few inches from Jeremy lay a slaughtered lamb; the animal's throat had been slit from one end to the other, and a trail of blood dribbled down the bricks to the earth beneath.

Transfixed and utterly horror-stricken, Janine could only stare. Then feeling came back with a rush, and her first instinct was to flee. But instead she raced forward and stood with her face close to Jeremy's as she peered at him. She could feel that the bricks and the stone slab had picked up some of the fire's warmth, and she now saw something that had escaped her attention at first—Jeremy was perspiring profusely, the sole indication that he was alive.

A wave of infinite tenderness engulfed Janine as she looked at him, and all the emotions she had controlled during the trials and dangers of recent days bubbled to the surface. She burst into tears and placed her cheek against his. "Oh, Jeremy, Jeremy," she sobbed, "what are they doing to you? Get well, please! Please! I——"

A low growl sounded directly behind her and strong hands gripped her arms. Startled, she looked around and found herself staring up into the burning eyes of two huge Negroes. Carefully painted with broad stripes of white and vermilion, they were naked except for a breechcloth, and each carried a spear. One of them snarled something at her in the harsh African dialect that was used as the community's second language. Then she was lifted bodily, whisked from the building, and deposited with a thump outside, where both men continued to glare at her menacingly.

Myra, shaken and pale under her tan, addressed the Negroes briefly in their own tongue, and they stepped back a few feet but continued to stand alert and ready to spring as they eyed Janine. Myra, badly upset, turned to the younger woman furiously. "You fool, you little fool!" she cried. "Don't you realize the obeah man could have you executed for what you've done? Don't you know you could be flayed and then burned alive for upsetting an obeah ceremony? Come with me immediately—straight back to my house! I'm not letting you out of my sight for the rest of the day!"

There was no choice but to obey. Janine fell in beside Myra, noting as she did so that the two gaudily painted black warriors followed them carefully. With a sinking heart and a mood that fringed on hysterical despair she realized that her

opportunity to help Jeremy, if indeed there had ever been one, was now irrevocably lost. Critically ill, perhaps closer to death than to life, he was at the mercy of ignorant savages who intended to attempt his cure with jungle rituals.

By sundown the village began to buzz with excitement and there was an increasing sense of a holiday atmosphere. Women bathed, carefully combed their hair, and anointed their heads and bare breasts with coconut oil. Men stopped work early, scraped the whiskers from their faces with sharp machetes and cutlasses, and donned clean trousers. At least thirty of the younger men were now painted and attired in loincloths, and they stood at intervals of five to ten feet from each other in the main clearing of the community, forming a hollow square as they rested silently, their spear butts touching the ground, their faces impassive.

Inside the square a score of workers wearing high, strange headdresses fashioned from laced twigs and spliced with wild flowers were mixing the contents of three huge kettles which were suspended from poles above blazing fires. A black, oily smoke poured from one of the kettles, and another gave off a peculiar odor, powerful and sour and penetrating. But the workers seemed oblivious to the fumes and stirred the contents industriously as they occasionally added to the brew from various casks and rough burlap bags strewn about on the ground.

An atmosphere of excitement pervaded the home of Arnold and Myra, and it was apparent that despite the tender years of their children the little boys were going to be permitted to attend the ceremonies. Arnold had shown tolerant amusement when he had heard of Janine's entrance into the conical hut where the unconscious Jeremy was being held and had made light of the whole affair. He had even tried to arouse the French-English girl from her gloom, and when that had failed he had suggested to Myra that she bedeck Janine in some of her own jewelry. The effect had been just the opposite of that intended, for with a heavy gold chain around her neck and thick loops on her ears, Janine felt partly like a pagan, partly like the trollops of Port Royal. And far worse than her own degradation was the fact that she would be forced to watch while Jeremy Stone's life was slowly snuffed out by well-meaning people who substituted ignorance for medical knowledge, superstitious gibberish for a surgeon's skill.

As the sun sank over the rim of hills to the west, hundreds of flares were lighted in the clearing, and eight men seated at one side near a row of poinsettia bushes began to tap out a soft rhythm on heavy drums, each of which was about five

feet in diameter. Without conscious effort the drummers kept time together perfectly.

Arnold, wearing a sapphire-hilted sword, a faded army officer's shako, and a watered-silk ribbon of scarlet over his bare chest, walked out of his house and strode toward the clearing, his family and Janine straggling behind him. Everyone in the village was gathering, and Janine was surprised to see the number of people present; from the size of the crowd, she estimated that the Maroons numbered at least one thousand persons in all.

On the north side of the open space a dais had been erected, and the commander was already seated there, waving and smiling benignly as his people took their places just outside the hollow square of spear-armed guards. Arnold turned to his woman, said something to her, then hurried to the commander and stood at the foot of the platform, to the right of the old man.

Myra found places for herself and Janine in the front row of spectators, and they sat down on the ground while the children scampered off to join a group of boys and girls who were dashing in and out of the trees, playing tag. At this stage of the proceedings, apparently, it did not matter if the youngsters paid close attention. Men and women, whites, Negroes, and Indians, chatted amiably, and here and there a laugh was heard above the hum of conversation. The flares were burning brightly, and the tempo and volume of the drums were increasing gradually, so slowly that the change was almost indiscernible.

Janine Groliere, the girl from another civilization, another world, sat in numb silence, waiting for the sacrifice of a human being on the altar of stupidity. She could no longer think of Jeremy as someone she loved; she was hemmed in by wild pagans, virtually all of them escaped slaves, criminals, murderers, trollops, and their festive mood only increased her own sharp sense of stark desperation.

There was a sudden stir in the crowd, and an incredibly tall man wearing a hideous purple-and-white mask over his head approached the throne of the commander. A flame-colored cape covered his body from his neck to his knees, and he walked with an awkward, almost grotesque gait. Looking at him, Janine realized that he wore wooden clogs at least eight inches high and that these, together with his mask, contrived to give him the appearance of great height. He stopped before the commander, raised his hands high over his head, then his arms descended slowly to his sides. There was a flash of color as he turned toward the assemblage, and Janine realized that his hands were painted a bright gold.

"That is the obeah man," Myra murmured softly.

Again his hands were lifted, and the crowd became very quiet. The children stopped their play, and Myra's sons crept to her and sat meekly on the ground, huddling together. The sound of the drums grew louder, and the obeah man lifted his left hand to the mouth of his mask. At this signal a large group of young women arose from their places all over the area and hurried to the kettles in which various brews were still bubbling. Each girl held a large gourd, which she dipped into a kettle and carried to one of the spectators seated around the square.

Janine watched individuals sip from a gourd, then pass it to the person on his or her left. Soon a score or more of the gourds were moving from hand to hand and from mouth to mouth. As each became empty, one of the maidens took it to a kettle, refilled it, and started it around the assemblage again.

Myra took a deep swallow from a gourd and handed it to the French-English girl, who stared dubiously at the contents. "Drink!" Myra hissed. "Do as the others do or you will be in great danger. The obeah man will not tolerate another insult!"

Hastily Janine lifted the hollow gourd to her lips and sipped experimentally, then almost gagged. A rank-smelling mixture slid down her throat, burning fiercely. She shoved the husk into the hands of a middle-aged Negress on her left and gasped for breath. Before she could recover, Myra handed her another gourd, then still another a moment later. Although she tried to imbibe as small a portion of the raw alcoholic liquors as she could, it was impossible not to take something each time, for Myra watched her closely.

She soon lost count of the gourds that were handed to her, but she felt giddy and was afraid that if she was forced to drink much more she would become sick. The steady pounding of the drums was more insistent, and the beating of her heart seemed to synchronize with the steady throbbing. As she glanced around the square, trying to focus on the people sitting on the far side, she saw that the Maroons continued to remain quiet; there was no conversation, and people looked neither to the right nor the left.

Although the gourds were not offered to the children, the youngsters seemed to absorb the mood of their elders, for they sat soberly, neither conversing nor laughing. Only the commander and the obeah man among the adults refrained from drinking, however, and Janine saw that Arnold, who was being served separately by one girl, was draining large quantities of the vile brew. Suddenly and without warning the obeah man uttered a high, shrill scream, and the maidens hastily collected

the gourds, then carefully threw them onto the fires that blazed beneath the kettles.

Swaying slightly, Janine put one hand on the ground to steady herself, and as she gulped in large quantities of fresh air she thought hazily but with infinite relief that this portion of the ceremony was past. However, she was in no way prepared for what came next. Four men, each heavily daubed with white paint and each holding aloft a huge, flaring torch, headed a procession that moved with slow, solemn dignity through the gathering and into the clearing. Behind them came six others, jointly carrying something wrapped in white cloth.

The torchbearers approached the commander and saluted. The white bundle was placed carefully on the ground; the obeah man stepped forward and whipped off the cloth. Lying on the ground was the body of Jeremy Stone.

He had been dressed in a loincloth, and his face and body had been painted with alternating stripes of black and white. Some obeah treatment had obviously been administered to him already, for his arms and legs—indeed, his whole body—seemed rigid and strained.

Janine almost fainted, and only by the greatest exercise of will power was she able to retain consciousness. She wished herself elsewhere, yet she could not take her eyes from the pitiful figure whose life was at stake in these weird rites. She was vaguely aware that the drums had stopped, but even as she realized it they started again, and now the tempo was rapid and ominous. The entire assemblage seemed to hold its breath as the obeah man slowly approached the body of the unconscious man. There was an instant when the drums again stopped, then the witch doctor slowly sprinkled a fine powder over Jeremy, covering him from head to toe, while from behind the grotesque mask came the penetrating, high-pitched singsong of a macabre incantation.

As he chanted, two figures detached themselves from the throng at the far side of the crowd. These men were painted as was Jeremy, and on their heads they wore smaller versions of the obeah man's mask. They carried something between them wrapped in a snowy-white cloth, and as they reached the body of the young gunsmith they stopped abruptly. The witch doctor reached out a golden hand and snatched the cloth away.

Beneath it was revealed a small white kid which struggled valiantly in the grip of its captors. The drums grew louder still, and their tempo again increased. Janine, scarcely able to think, discovered that she was breathing hard, and despite the knot of fear at the pit of her stomach she was possessed by a strange sense of excitement that made her body tremble.

The obeah man began another incantation, and the kid bleated; a golden hand reached inside the red cape and reappeared holding a long, thin-bladed knife. In almost the same motion the witch doctor reached out with the knife and expertly slit the animal's throat. Then, as the blood gushed forth, he held the kid over Jeremy. The crimson flow spilled onto the unconscious man's body, and the two assistants started to shout in unison.

"Mak-ra dal!" they screamed. "Mak-ra dal!"

Voices here and there in the crowd joined in, and soon the entire assemblage was chanting, "Mak-ra-dal! Mak-ra-dal! Mak-ra-dal!"

Janine was astonished to find that she was shouting as loudly as the rest, though she had no idea of the meaning of the words. But she was gripped by a strange and restless frenzy, and even the sight of the dead animal's blood on Jeremy's body did not bother her. The steady beat-beat-beat of the drums seemed to have become a part of her own body, a part of her own brain, and she could not refrain from swaying back and forth to the wild rhythm from which there was no escape.

For the first time the commander became more than a mere spectator. He arose slowly, a frail and incongruous figure in his feathered cloak. He brought his open hands together three times, and though the drums drowned any sound he might be making, the signal was apparently a prescribed part of the ceremony. One of the torchbearers marched to the obeah man and held his bundle of burning rushes high over the ugly mask; the flaming reeds were attached to a long green pole, and in the light of the fire the witch doctor looked like a singularly evil devil. He repeated the commander's gesture of slapping his palms together, and the drums fell silent.

A young man walked into the clearing, a Negro of magnificent build who appeared to be in his mid-twenties. He was clad only in a loincloth, but on his head he wore a red piece of stiff wool cut to resemble a rooster's comb. An expectant shudder and sigh seemed to travel around the square as he marched up to the commander and bowed low, then turned and bowed again to the obeah man. He was followed into the clearing by a handsome young Negress dressed in the Maroon fashion save for one detail: her skirt was so long that it almost touched the ground and was made of pure-white cloth. She too bowed to the commander, and the obeah man then faced the young man. They were no more than three feet apart, and both remained as motionless as statues.

With no warning the drummers began to pound again, and

**this time their tempo was furious, relentless. The couple in the arena began to dance, and although their feet were bare and there were numerous rough patches in the clearing, they flew back and forth, never faltering, never stumbling. Their bodies did not touch at any time, nor did they join hands or arms. But they seemed to sense each other's steps and gestures in advance of execution, and their co-ordination was perfect as they leaped and pranced, glided and whirled together.**

The drums were approaching a climax, and the men who played them were glistening with sweat. It seemed to Janine that the dancers would drop to the ground exhausted, but instead they grew more abandoned, more frenzied. Their arms flailed, their bodies twisted and writhed sinuously as they moved with speed and grace from one end of the clearing to the other, never losing a beat.

There was a mild commotion of sorts near the commander's throne, and Janine tore her gaze away from the dancing couple long enough to see that the obeah man, who was now standing at the Maroon leader's left, was holding a large white rooster in his hands, and the bird was flapping its wings in resentment. The dancers circled toward the dais, and as they reached a point directly in front of the commander the man threw his arms high above his head, screamed at the top of his voice, and collapsed in a graceful heap. Without pausing, the girl reached out and plucked the rooster from the hands of the obeah man and, holding the protesting creature before her, she continued her mad whirl.

The crowd seemed to be caught up in a fever of tension, and Janine watched the dance with parted lips, breathing heavily; she had forgotten everything but the dancer and the white bird. The pounding of the drums was so rapid, so loud that the sound was almost unbearable, yet it blended into the dance completely and became one with the almost unbelievable spins and leaps of the Negress.

No one could keep up such a pace for long, but the dancer was inspired, tireless. The rooster no longer fluttered, but held its wings still, its head quiet. Now as the girl danced she rubbed the bird's feathers against her face, and although it was impossible to hear her voice, she seemed to be singing or chanting to it. Without a break in her footwork she transferred the rooster to her right hand alone, then rhythmically slid it up her arm and caressed her throat, her breasts, her belly with its soft plumage.

At last she danced directly before the prostrate body of Jeremy Stone, her whole body contorting spasmodically. Her free hand reached inside the top of her skirt, and she brought forth a tiny poniard with a narrow blade. She raised the

weapon to eye level, and for an instant Janine thought she was going to plunge it into her own heart. Instead she severed the head of the rooster from its body with a single, deft stroke and deliberately played the fountain of blood that gushed forth on her own body.

Then she flung the dead bird from her, dropped to the ground, and for a second seemed to hug Jeremy. The drums decreased their tempo, then stopped. The Negress fell back, away from Jeremy, and from her appearance she was deep in a coma; her eyes were closed, her body was awkwardly rigid, and a froth of spittle covered her lips.

The obeah man stepped forward and said something over the head of the girl. The male dancer, who had all unnoticed risen to his feet, walked forward slowly, picked up the girl, and stalked off with her into the night. The obeah man moved over to Jeremy and stared down at him through the unchanging features of his grotesque mask. Then he straightened, reached inside his cape, and brought out a small golden flask.

The assemblage had become utterly quiet, and there was no sound save the deep breathing of those who had not yet regained their equilibrium. The commander arose from his throne and spoke briefly in the harsh African dialect. Then he looked straight at Janine and seemed to be addressing her alone, in English.

"He who was ill is ill no more. He whose soul had fled has found his soul again, and that soul has returned to us who are alive in this world of the living flesh," he intoned.

From behind the obeah man's mask came a pleasant, liquid voice which repeated the commander's words in the African tongue. Then he too spoke in English. "He who was ill is ill no more. He whose soul had fled has found his soul again, and that soul has returned to us who are alive in this world of the living flesh."

Slowly he removed a stopper from the little flask, poured the contents into the palm of his other hand, and dropped the container to the ground. He rubbed his hands together, and a dry white powder sprayed over Jeremy. Then abruptly he wheeled around, walked rapidly as he made a detour around the dais, and disappeared from the sight of the crowd.

The ceremony seemed to be over, for people were rising, stretching their aching limbs, and beginning to converse in low undertones. Family groups gathered and started to move off toward their huts. The drummers shouldered their cumbersome instruments and carried them away. Arnold Rifle-Shoot, after a brief conversation with the commander, who remained standing near Jeremy Stone's body, hurried to his wife and children.

It was his coming that awoke Janine from her near trance. Weary beyond measure, she shook herself like one struggling to consciousness through black layers of sleep. She jumped to her feet, and her one thought was for Jeremy.

Although he had been the reason for the obeah ceremony, no one in the crowd was paying him the slightest heed. People were departing, talking aloud and laughing together without bothering to glance in his direction. All but a few of the torch-bearers and other stalwarts who hovered behind the commander were wandering off, and Jeremy seemed totally forgotten.

Janine ran toward him, and the commander stepped forward, blocking her path. He was smiling, but his eyes were sad. "You have witnessed a rite that is usually forbidden to outsiders, my dear," he said softly, "and I hope that you will learn a lesson from it. That is why I permitted you to see the things you have seen and to hear the things you have heard tonight. Remember hereafter that those things which we fail to understand are not necessarily false, that the unknown need not be the untrue."

He stepped aside and motioned the girl toward Jeremy. She knelt beside him and looked at him carefully. Although his eyes were still closed, the color of his face was normal where it showed beneath the daubs of paint, and his breathing was quiet. The blood of the kid was spattered on his body, there were smears of the rooster's blood as well, and flecks of the powder dropped by the obeah man clung to him. Janine put her hand to his forehead, and it felt cool under her touch.

She began to weep silently, but no tears came. Now, but not until his moment when she knew that he was past the crisis of his illness and that he would recover, did she fully realize all that he had come to mean to her. She felt at peace, and within her there soared a feeling deeper and richer than any she had ever before experienced. This was her man, today and forever, for all time.

Jeremy stirred and opened his eyes. He was in his right mind and he recognized her instantly. "Janine," he whispered softly. "Janine."

## May 1692

JAMAICAN spring meant rain, and there was a heavy down-pour daily, beginning in the mountains and foothills around nine or ten in the morning and continuing until early afternoon. Then the rain clouds drifted down to the Liguanea Plain and to Port Royal beyond, leaving behind a mist of steam over the jungles as the sun blazed mercilessly from a placid porcelain sky. Virtually no roof in the Maroon community was rainproof, and the solid sheets of water that seemed to drain the heavens found their way into almost every corner of every dwelling place. But the ground soaked up the moisture with an insatiable thirst, and within an hour of the passing of the clouds all was dry again. The older residents of the village assured newcomers that these were the "little" rains and that the worst deluges could be expected in October.

But Jeremy Stone, recovered now from his illness, sat near the banks of raging rivers that had been trickling brooks only days before and wished fervently that he would find himself elsewhere by autumn. At the moment, he was forced to admit to himself, his chances of going anywhere were virtually nonexistent. He was grateful to be alive, grateful for the miraculous escape plans that had proved so successful and had resulted in his presence here in the remote fastness of the Jamaican interior. However, as his strength grew he became increasingly impatient to become active again in the world, the outer world.

For all practical purposes he was a prisoner in the Land of the Maroons; no native-built boat was strong enough to sail any great distance, and even the greatest of good luck and fine seamanship—in which he was sadly lacking—could result in nothing more promising than an aimless, drifting voyage across the Caribbean to Hispaniola or some other Spanish or *boucanier*-held stronghold where he would be either killed or enslaved.

Rising and walking slowly back to the village, he shook his head as if to clear it of the thoughts that plagued him. To remain with the Maroons was to be buried alive, and he had to get away from the place. His sole chance to rehabilitate

himself was in Port Royal; the Duchess Caroline was there, and she might help him. Though the prospect of winning her assistance was slim, he was determined to see her—when he could. Of course, thinking back on all that had happened, he was almost positive that her defense of him before the governor general had been motivated by self-interest. Certainly she had wanted to conceal the fact that she had known right from the start that he was not the real Terence Bartlett. He could not imagine why she had permitted his impersonation in the first place, but she offered the only ray of hope.

The big problem at the moment was to find some way to leave the Land of the Maroons. Arnold Rifle-Shoot had told him that he could not return to Port Royal, that the Maroons had no desire to rouse the ire of Sir Arthur Bartlett by flaunting an escaped criminal whom they had helped. And Arnold had meant what he said: on three separate occasions Jeremy, fed up with his confinement, had taken a packet of food and had started south, in the general direction of the Liguanea Plain and the Bay of Jamaica. Each time a spear-bearing Maroon sentry had appeared out of the jungle fastness and had gently but very firmly forced him to retrace his steps to the village.

Meanwhile it was ironic that Janine Groliere, whom he had promised to protect, should be in an equally untenable position and should be in effect a prisoner too. Her situation was not as bad as his, for her father would someday return to the island, and when he did the Maroons could smuggle her into Port Royal and aboard the *Bonnie Maid*. Of that he had no doubt, just as he was certain that Philippe Groliere would refuse sanctuary to a man who had failed in his obligations. The captain had made a bargain with him, and Jeremy had accepted a trust as well. He had not only been unable to keep his end of the compact, but stood revealed as a miserable charlatan. Groliere might, with full justification, shoot him on sight.

But he wanted Janine; each of his long, hard debates with himself ended with the grudging admission that she was now more appealing, more attractive to him than ever before. He often thought of marriage to her, wondered what life would hold in store if she were his partner, the mistress of his house, the mother of their brood of growing, healthy children. Yet each time the idea occurred to him, he shrank from it.

And in those moments when he was completely honest with himself, he knew why. Esther Mary Pennywell was still in his mind, Esther Mary with her lithe, ripe figure, her unconventionally alluring face, her strange manner that made her captivating even when she was brusque.

Both of these girls had taken a strong hold on him, both held his interest, captured his imagination, tore at his loyalties. That he was unable to choose between them only increased his frustration, deepened his unhappiness, for in his present circumstances he was in no position to choose. In fact he was convinced that no pretty, intelligent girl who valued her future could or would feel anything stronger than pity for him.

Four or five Maroon men were clearing a patch of hillside jungle for agricultural use, and Jeremy paused to watch them as they moved systematically, rhythmically, first cutting down plants and weeds with the blades of machetes, then digging out roots with the points. He leaned against a banyan tree, and although he appeared to be lazy and at ease, his mind was working furiously as he eyed the weapons. Unless the Maroons relented and permitted him to leave, he would have no choice but to force his way out of their community. He wanted to harm none of these people who had been so kind to him, but a sharp machete might be useful if he had to bluff his way past the sentries who guarded the approaches to the village.

One thought now weighed heavily on his conscience, however, and was responsible so far for his delay in breaking free—what would become of Janine if he left her here? Obviously he could not take her with him and expose her to the dangers in which he would immerse himself in Port Royal, but it would not be easy to abandon her.

He remembered vividly the wide-eyed concern on her tear-streaked face when he had come to himself after the obeah ceremony that had restored him to the land of the living; how heartened he had been by the knowledge that there was someone in the world who cared whether he lived or died. And in the first days of his recovery she had been in constant attendance, feeding him, waiting on him, encouraging him. Now that he was strong enough to look after her as well as himself, it was not going to be easy to walk out on her, particularly when he recalled how much she had risked, how much she had sacrificed, how much she had suffered for his sake.

During his convalescence he had wanted desperately to convince her that his appreciation was boundless. But during those long days when he had been weak and confined to a *hamoc* in the room that was his home, the back chamber of Arnold Rifle-Shoot's house, the words had not come easily. As he had grown stronger, he had become increasingly uncomfortable in her presence. She had been so patient, so uncomplaining, so selfless, that his sense of shame had taken seed and sprouted as it had been borne in on him that her plight had been caused by his own rash attempt to take another man's rightful place in the world. Irrationally he had come to long

for the day when Janine would complain, would lose her temper with him, but when she had continued to be sweet and gentle, he had become all the more nettled.

In one way only could he truly demonstrate his regard for her; even though he was not sure he loved her, he could ask her to marry him. In all conscience, however, that was the one thing he would not do. A pauper and fugitive who would in all probability die with a royal infantryman's bullet in his heart could hardly ask a girl to become his wife, particularly one who already had given him so much.

During the past ten days since he had felt like himself again he had been vexed by a new and complicating problem. His desire for a woman had become increasingly strong, and he was far from blind to Janine's beauty. Quite the contrary, whenever he saw her he was doubly excited by the unorthodoxy of her dress. The Jeremy Stone who had pretended to be Terence Bartlett would have had no hesitation in seducing Janine, but the man he had become could not.

And there was still Esther Mary. Try as he might, he could not forget her. The very memory of her was disturbing, unsettling. But even as he deliberately conjured up pictures of the minister's unorthodox niece, he cursed himself. He liked to think of himself as a gentleman, insisted to himself as well as to others that he truly was a gentleman. If that representation of himself was genuine, sincere, he would—in the light of all that had happened—think of Janine, and of no one but Janine.

It was his duty to think first of Janine. It was his obligation to consider her welfare above all else. And it was bewildering when he realized that the objectivity of his thinking was clouded and confused by his persistent desire for her.

So for a variety of reasons he avoided her. And Janine, not understanding his seeming indifference, had been hurt and had therefore withdrawn into a shell of her own. Arnold told him that she busied herself in helping to teach at the school of the Maroon children while prayerfully awaiting word through the commander's secret channels that the *Bonnie Maid* had once again dropped anchor in the Port Royal roads.

Now the Maroon men paused in their labors and threw themselves on the ground to rest. Their inactivity annoyed Jeremy, and he continued down the path toward the village. He saw someone standing in the thin shade of a banana palm, and after thinking so much about Janine, it was something of a shock to see her, to know that she was watching him, smiling at him.

"I've been waiting for you, Jeremy," she called in greeting, and her gold loop earrings bobbed up and down.

"How clever of you to know I'd be at this particular spot at this particular time." He was not being deliberately rude, but her frankness and her eagerness to see him were disturbing.

"I've come to know your habits." Janine's smile deepened, but her green eyes were troubled. "Jeremy, I want to talk to you."

"All right." He stopped beside her, acutely conscious of her nearness, of her semi-nudity and her beauty.

"Not here, if you don't mind. It's too—public."

She giggled at her own description, for no one was in sight, and as the buildings of the village were hidden by trees, it appeared as though they were on a lonely trail in the middle of the jungle. But her laugh was infectious, and Jeremy grinned at her, the spell of tension suddenly broken. They walked in silence, and the young gunsmith realized that she was leading him to her hut. A faint tingle of alarm shot through him as Janine parted the fringe that covered the doorframe, but the feeling dissipated when he stepped inside.

He had not been in the tiny cottage in several weeks, and it was amazing to see all that Janine had done to it. A thick woven-grass rug covered the bare earth of the floor, scraps of bright cloth serving as curtains fluttered over the window, and beside the *hamoc* stood a table, on the top of which sat a variety of combs and other gewgaws essential to the feminine toilet. How Janine had managed to accumulate them in this remote and barbaric outpost of civilization was a mystery.

The girl wasted no time and faced him squarely, her hands on her hips. "You've been avoiding me lately, Jeremy. Why?"

The bluntness of her assault staggered him. "Why, I—that is, I——"

"Have I said or done something to offend you?" She tossed her red curls and looked at him steadily.

"No!" Jeremy protested, his embarrassment growing. "Quite the contrary, Janine, I assure you."

"Be honest with me. What *do* you think of me?" She seemed completely determined to settle the issue.

"I have a very considerable regard for you." It was becoming increasingly difficult for him to retain his equilibrium. The tiny room seemed to be filled with Janine's presence, and his resolves to keep away from her were vanishing under the intoxicating pressure of her nearness.

"Now you're evading!" She laughed, but was not amused.

Jeremy was slipping rapidly, and he knew it. "There is no girl who has ever meant more to me," he said, speaking more loudly than he realized.

Janine sighed, and her eyes were shining. "I guess my feelings for you are no secret," she murmured.

Jeremy controlled an impulse to sweep her into his arms. A reckless excitement was growing in him, and Janine was being far from helpful. "I don't think this is the time to discuss such things," he said desperately.

She put her hands on his shoulders, and their eyes met and held. "There has never been a better time," she whispered. "I love you, Jeremy."

He tried to tell himself that she didn't know what she was saying, but his last resistance was crumbling. "Janine dearest —"

"We belong together, Jeremy. And we both know it."

Inflamed, he could control himself no longer and drew her to him roughly, violently, and kissed her hard on the mouth. She responded instantly and their embrace tightened. Jeremy felt her breasts pressing against his chest, her firm but pliant body yielding to the tautness of his own flesh.

Suddenly he wrenched his head free and stared at her. And with a great soaring of emotion he realized that she was completely his, unafraid and unashamed. Again he bent to kiss her, gently and tenderly at first, then with mounting passion. They became unconscious of anything but each other, unaware of everything but their mutual desire.

An hour later, perhaps two, they discovered they were hungry, and Janine cut open two rich custard apples, which they ate sitting cross-legged on the mat rug. Never had Janine looked so radiant, so lovely, and as Jeremy watched her he felt an overpowering sense of guilt. While it was true that she had thrust herself at him, he had given in to his passion, and there was no security he could offer to Janine in return. He hoped she would not try to look too far into the future, but the wish was short-lived.

Smiling contentedly, she pushed back a lock of coppery hair. "When you receive your pardon from the governor general," she said dreamily, "we can be remarried in Port Royal."

Jeremy gaped at her, unable to say a word.

Janine laughed and patted his arm. "Oh, you'll be pardoned, Jeremy, of that I'm sure. I don't know how or when it will happen. We may have to wait until Sir Arthur Bartlett leaves and is replaced by a new governor general. But the time will come—someday. Meantime we can go through a Maroon wedding ceremony, and that will be good enough—until we can have a proper one performed."

He took a deep breath. "You certainly can't expect me to sit up here in these hills for years, Janine," he said, speaking more harshly than he intended. "Sir Arthur might stay in

Jamaica for another ten years. And after ten months in this Maroon country, much less ten years, I'll have rotted away. Can you see me spending my life here, living out my days in a community of fugitives and savages?"

Startled by his intensity, the girl drew back. "Surely you don't think it would be necessary to stay here that long?"

"I don't know how long I'd have to hide here, and I don't plan to find out."

Janine jumped to her feet and drew herself up proudly. "What you're trying to say is that you don't intend to marry me," she declared quietly.

He wanted to explain that he was in no position to marry her, that he was a hunted man without prospects of any kind. "Listen to me——" he began.

"I'd prefer not to listen to any excuses or lies." Janine's eyes blazed, and her fists were clenched. "Be good enough to leave this house at once."

Jeremy was on his feet, angry at her unreasonable attitude. "Will you listen to me?" he demanded.

"No!" She stamped her foot, and he thought she would strike him.

"Very well, then!" He turned on his heel and walked out into the blinding early afternoon sunlight.

Paying no attention to where he was going, he started in the direction of Arnold Rifle-Shoot's house. He would have vastly preferred not to part with Janine on such terms, but the choice was not his. It would have been better, too, if he had not been intimate with her, but the damage was done now. The net result of the day's emotional jumble was that Janine had been hurt. But, he reasoned, it was she who was being stubborn, and if she was suffering now, it was her own fault.

Several people spoke to him as he strode rapidly across the village, but he did not see them, and when they noticed the grim set of his jaw, the hard look in his eyes, they left him to himself. At last he arrived at Arnold's house and, impatiently brushing aside the long strands of dried grass that substituted for a door, he stalked in. Someone was sitting across the room, curled up on a crude chair near the window opening.

Blinking to accustom his eyes to the comparative darkness, he saw Esther Mary Pennywell smiling at him. She was, as usual, dressed in shirt and trousers, with a knife stuck into her high *boucanier* belt. She jumped to her feet, and they shook hands warmly.

"You're looking far better than the last time I saw you," she said, studying him with interest.

"Thanks to you. I've been hoping you'd come up here so

I could tell you how grateful I am to you." She continued to stand close to him.

"I'll admit your problem was more complex than some of the others." She grinned, running her fingers through her short blue-black hair. "In fact, it was one of our better accomplishments. Spiriting you and a lady in waiting to a duchess out of Port Royal and all the way up here is something we'll rate among our most impressive victories. Half of Port Royal thinks you're dead, of course."

"Glad to hear it." They sat down on a long, low bench covered with cushions made of fowl underfeathers. "What about the other half?"

"I've been told that your friend the Duchess doesn't believe you or little Sister Janine are anything but very much alive. But no one is searching for you any more, so you're safe as long as you stay away from the town."

"And what are you doing here?"

"I came to make a report to the commander. I'm leaving for Port Royal tomorrow morning." Esther Mary was suddenly tight-lipped.

"Oh?" He felt a quick surge of interest and hope. "You're rather friendly with the commander, I gather?"

The minister's niece grinned and deliberately avoided the question. "I promised I'd bring a message to you. From Dirk. He says, 'Tell Jeremy I'm sick t' death o' earnin' a livin' by the sweat o' my brow while he's a-settin' up yonder in the hills a-takin' life easy like the hifalutin gentleman he was pretendin' t' be.'" Her imitation of Dirk's accent was remarkably good, and she glowed as she spoke of him.

"I've thought of Dirk—often." It was true, he conceded to himself as he studied her, sensitive to her nearness, that his old friend had been much on his mind. But Esther Mary had been even more in his consciousness, and she was now only a few feet from him. It was true that his recent thoughts had been on Janine and not on her. But he was still angry—no, disgruntled and upset—over his argument with Janine, over her blind and stubborn refusal to understand his position.

And Esther Mary, more provocative than ever, was right here. It was an opportunity that no man, feeling as he did at that moment, could resist. He debated about the best approach to her, then swiftly decided on a bold course of action. "I've wondered often about you, too," he added. "If I had a shilling for every time you and I have had an—imaginary conversation, I'd be a wealthy man."

"Really?"

Watching her intently, he felt sure that the light appearing in her eyes was genuine. No woman could simulate so deep

an interest in a man. It was true, it must be true that she was as drawn to him as he was to her. There were moments when talk was superfluous, and this was one of them.

He moved to her quickly, confidently, and drew her to him. Esther Mary, surprised, offered no resistance, and for an instant she seemed to respond to his ardent, demanding kiss. Then, suddenly, her hands drew back from his shoulders and she struck her palms so sharply against his chest that he fell back a pace, surprised.

Breathing hard, they stared at each other in silence for a long moment. Jeremy, trying to regain his equilibrium, could not decide whether she was angry with him or whether she was merely playing the role of the chaste lady. Of one thing he was sure: there was neither animosity nor contempt in her eyes. He would have moved toward her again, but she held up her hand, and he stopped short.

"I beg your indulgence," he said stiffly. "I had no notion that you find me repulsive."

"I don't, I assure you." The dark-haired girl's breathing was even and regular again.

Her composure annoyed him intensely. "You find my love-making crude, then."

"On the contrary, Brother Jeremy. I find it expert—and pleasant."

"Then——"

"However, I'm not thinking exclusively of you and me at the moment. There are—many other considerations."

"Be good enough to name them!"

A flash of humor appeared in Esther Mary's eyes, but she considered carefully before replying. "I'll not insult you," she declared at last, "by saying that I'm somewhat different from what seems to be your preconceived opinion of me. However, let me point out to you that Arnold and Myra are likely to come home at any moment. What's more, it is not a desire for a breath of mountain air that brings me here. I have business of a very serious nature to transact with the commander."

"Oh yes. The commander," Jeremy murmured. It was painfully obvious to him that he had chosen the worst possible moment to press his attentions on her, and he searched for an avenue of graceful retreat. He might even be able to turn this situation to his advantage. "If I gather correctly, the commander is friendly to you."

"He is."

"Then perhaps you could do something for me."

"What would you like me to do?" Esther Mary jammed her thumbs into her *boucanier* belt and studied him casually.

"Ask the commander for my release. I'm a prisoner here

and I'll have no life, no future, unless I can reach the Duchess of Glasgow and get her to intervene with the governor general for me."

"I'd like to help, Brother Jeremy, but you ask the impossible." The amusement died out of her eyes, and her face became serious. "Now I'll tell you something. The reason I've come here is to warn the commander that Sir Arthur Bartlett is planning a military campaign against the Maroons. It isn't easy to get information from the brigade's headquarters, of course, but I understand that the troops will march in the next week or two."

The young gunsmith stared at her; suddenly he slapped his thigh and shouted exuberantly. "This is just what I need! I'm sorry for the Maroons—but they'll be able to take care of themselves, I have no doubt. Now—I can do what I've wanted to do!"

"Wait! Where are you——"

"To see the commander!" He raced out of the house and ran toward the home of the Maroon leader.

On sober consideration Janine Groliere decided she had been hasty. Although she was certain that Jeremy had no intention of marrying her, she had given him no chance to explain his reasons. And the undeniable fact remained that she loved him. Now, more than ever, she knew how empty her life would be without him, and she was determined, at all costs, not to lose him. So it would certainly be the better part of wisdom to go to him at once and apologize, even though she had little for which to beg his pardon. If she could soothe his masculine ego and listen to his reasons for rejecting marriage with her, it might then become far easier to deal with him, to soften him, to make him realize that he was as much in love with her as she was with him. Janine knew that he loved her, but the problem was to make him aware of it.

After washing tearstains from her face and combing her hair she stepped out of the little one-room hut and started toward the house of Arnold and Myra. She had seen Jeremy going in that direction, and if he should be with his host when she arrived there, so much the better. Out of common politeness he could not walk out on her again, and when he saw that she was properly abashed, she was sure he would sit down with her in private to discuss the matter reasonably and sanely.

As she walked rapidly up the path, she caught sight of a familiar feminine figure sauntering in her direction. Blinking in the sunshine, she saw that it was Esther Mary Pennywell. This would be their first meeting since Janine's dramatic de-

parture from Port Royal, and although she had no real liking for the minister's niece, she was nevertheless genuinely glad to see her and smilingly called a greeting.

Esther Mary waved and surveyed her so carefully that Janine blushed and felt even more naked than she was, painfully conscious that the dark-haired girl was wearing her habitual shirt. Esther Mary said, "Hello," then laughed insolently, patted Janine on a bare shoulder, and declared, "I was wondering if the Maroons could transform a real lady into a savage. It's good to know that you're human, Sister Janine."

With that she wandered off, leaving Janine inarticulate with rage. When she recovered her temper she hurried on to Arnold's house and, finding the place empty, flounced back to her own hut. She had not yet seen Jeremy, it was true, but one hard, final conclusion had crystallized in her mind as a result of her encounter with Esther Mary: Jeremy was absolutely right in his desire to leave the Land of the Maroons as soon as possible. She shared that view with him and was as anxious as he to return to civilization at the first opportunity. And when she did, there was a score to be settled with Esther Mary Pennywell.

The commander sat in a comfortable chair near a window on the far side of the room from his "throne," and as Jeremy Stone burst into his house he was immersed in the pages of a leather-bound book, seemingly at peace with the world. He glanced up slowly, and his spectacles dropped a fraction of an inch on the bridge of his nose. Completely unperturbed, he marked his place in the book with a dried leaf, closed it carefully, and turned slightly in his chair toward his uninvited, out-of-breath guest.

"Ah, Master Stone," he said calmly. "What can I do for you?"

"I've just heard that the governor general and his brigade of troops are planning to attack you," Jeremy replied without preamble. "Esther Mary Pennywell told me about it, and——"

"I see." The old man nodded his head sagely. "And you'd like to join our defense forces."

Flushing, Jeremy muttered something inarticulate. The idea of taking up arms to aid the Maroons had not crossed his mind, and he felt somewhat ashamed after all they had done for him.

"I cannot permit you to accompany our expedition, Master Stone," the commander said, removing his glasses. "I am sorry, but the decision is in your best interest and cannot be

reversed unless you plan to settle here permanently and to become one of us."

Taken aback, Jeremy tried to word his reply as gracefully as he could. "Frankly, the idea of making my home here has never occurred to me, sir. In fact," he added abruptly, "you've been aware for some time of my desire to return to Port Royal. You know I want to clear my name with the authorities, and——"

"It is not so simple a case as you would make it out to be," the old man interrupted quietly. "You are a Maroon guest, not a Maroon immigrant. There are so many charges against your name on the ledgers of the puny men who claim to represent the Crown that it is impossible for you to be granted a pardon or an amnesty."

"But there is such a possibility now, provided I can get the ear of the Duchess of Glasgow," the young gunsmith declared eagerly.

"Why is the situation so different now, young man?" The commander's voice was firm, but he looked very old and fragile.

"Arnold has told me—repeatedly—that I must stay here because you don't want Sir Arthur to use your many kindnesses to me as an excuse for making war on you. But if he is already committed to a campaign against you, I am no longer of consequence, and my presence in Port Royal will do you no harm, even if I am captured, which is farthest from my intention."

The old man shook his head. "You are wrong, quite wrong. Occasionally a military man in Port Royal conceives the idea of conducting a campaign against us. The idea is as senseless as it is fruitless, as devoid of meaning as it is lacking in ultimate purpose. The spirit of the Maroons is unquenchable, and the flame of our way of life cannot be extinguished. But it is one thing for a *routine* expedition to be sent against us, to become discouraged, and to leave us once again to our peaceful pursuits. It would be unwise," he continued with infuriating, unruffled detachment, "to give this man Bartlett a *valid* reason to fight against us. *You* would provide such a reason, Master Stone, and the brigade would try all the harder and all the longer to subdue us. So you see, I have no choice. Under no circumstances are you to leave the confines of the village. That is definite—and final."

A few moments later Jeremy stood once again under the hot sun. The commander's words had not deterred him from his goal, and his resolve to leave the hill village and return to Port Royal had deepened. He stood for several minutes, lost in thought. He knew the location of the Maroon arsenal and

how to get into the commissary. Equally important, he knew where Arnold Rifle-Shoot kept his maps. Looking up, he grinned broadly and began to whistle as he crossed the village. A chance, a real chance, to escape from this savage wilderness would soon be his, and when the moment of opportunity came he would be ready for it.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN :

# May 1692

**I**T WAS eleven days after Esther Mary Pennywell's warning that a drum message was relayed to the Maroon village, and an unprecedented wave of activity boiled up in the community with the intensity of a tropical hurricane. The commander, Arnold, and the elders gathered in secret conclave, and for the next few hours the drums were furiously busy. Arnold then issued a command to all men of the Maroons to stop work at once, and shortly after noon the entire population was called together in the central clearing. So great was the need for speed that no one bothered to erect the commander's ceremonial dais.

Jeremy Stone remained on the outskirts of the crowd and tried to look as inconspicuous as possible. This was no time to call attention to himself, and the less he was noticed, the better it would be for his plans. Suddenly he caught sight of Janine Groliere, who was standing one hundred feet or more away from him. She was watching him tenderly but with alert interest, and he quickly averted his eyes. He had not spoken to Janine since their argument in her little hut, and this was no time to become embroiled with her.

He became more uncomfortable than ever at the thought of going away without her; there would be a void in his life, and it would be strange not to have her near, not to be bolstered by the knowledge that he could see her whenever he wished. He even had to face the possibility that he might never see her again, but she would be safer, far safer, here in the Land of the Maroons. If his plans succeeded, he could come back for her, and keep his promise to her father. He didn't enjoy thinking of the captain and his pledge to him. On the other hand, if he failed, Janine would be secure here until her father came to Jamaica and rescued her.

Meantime, he tried to reassure himself that she was young, that she was resilient, and that perhaps the experience would not leave a permanent hurt. As for himself, he could not ignore the possibility that he might find solace, more than solace, perhaps, with Esther Mary Pennywell.

He stole another covert glance at Janine.

Angrily he tried to shut her out of his mind. The meeting was about to begin, and he concentrated on the proceedings. The commander, wearing his ceremonial feathered cape, walked into the middle of the great square and silenced the low murmur of conversation with a wave of his hand.

It was several seconds before he could overcome his emotions, and when he finally spoke, his voice shook. "My children," he said, "our people have fallen on evil days. We have lived in peace for decades, and we had long believed that the present governor general in Port Royal would not seek the blood of those who do not molest him.

"But we are wrong, our judgment has been proven wrong. Forces have been at work, evil forces, and he is no longer a man of peace. Those of you who are able to understand the language of the drums know that a punitive expedition has taken the field against us. The brigade has already left Port Royal, and those who serve us in the city report that the soldiers will make camp tonight on the Liguanea Plain. They intend to launch their attack against us tomorrow. I need hardly tell you that we have a few surprises in store for them."

A ragged cheer went up from the Maroons, but the old man again silenced them with his hand. "Our women, our children, and our elderly men will remain here in the village. Our younger men will repel the invader."

This time the cheer was louder, and the commander allowed himself the luxury of a watery smile. "May the God of the Christians and the many gods of Obeah favor our enterprise!" he shouted, and his voice was both strong and vigorous now. "We have the right on our side, for we wish harm to no one and only ask to be allowed to live in peace. Do not be afraid, my children. Be calm, be confident, for the right will triumph!"

Arnold Rifle-Shoot stood on a hillock deep in the jungle and peered out across the treetops below him toward the barren wastes of the Liguanea Plain. His blue eyes were cold and searching, and he neither moved nor spoke for many long minutes at a time. But the man beside him did not complain, nor did he find the silence oppressive. He was an Arawak Indian, clad only in a breechcloth, with a short bow and a

quiver of poisoned arrows slung over his shoulder; small and wiry, he too watched the plain for some sign of movement.

Finally it was the Indian who stirred. "Enemy must come soon, Arnold," he said in clipped, harsh accents. "Last drum message tell that army of Governor pass Twin River in early morning. Look at sun now." He pointed almost straight up.

"They're probably encumbered and can't travel any faster than their baggage train." Arnold stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I'm sorry they weren't foolish enough to bring their cannon with them, for artillery would be of no use to them in the type of battle we're planning. However," he added, smiling grimly but never taking his eyes from the plain, "Gabriel's drum message that they're bringing up many wagon carts ought to be enough to cheer us on a hot spring day."

"I wish Gabriel tell us how many soldier in enemy column," the Indian grumbled. "Three times I ask on drum. Three times Gabriel not tell."

Arnold laughed outright and wiped a stream of sweat from his face. "I should have thought of it before. Gabriel can't count. There's your answer, Sidney."

The Arawak was not amused. "Us have two hundred eighty men. Whole brigade have thousand, more than thousand soldier. If whole brigade come, we have plenty much hard time."

"Let's not borrow trouble." A faint cloud of dust appeared on the horizon, and Arnold leaned forward, straining, "What's that, Sidney?"

Sidney grunted. "Enemy come now." He pointed a stubby forefinger toward the dust, which was becoming thicker and more distinct. "Now we have plenty much damn good fight. I take Maroons down into Liguanea now."

"You do and I'll serve your head for supper!" Arnold roared. "Our men will stay right where they are! Why do you think I spent two hours before dawn hiding them in twos and threes in the thickets?"

There was no change in the Arawak's expression. "When big fight come," he answered imperturbably, "much more better we hit enemy first."

Arnold sighed and ran a finger across his sweat-soaked headband. "Be patient for a few minutes and I'll show you why you're wrong. The trouble with you Arawak who have grown up as Maroons is that you've lost your jungle instinct."

There was silence again, and the two men watched tiny dots appear on the horizon, then grow into recognizable figures. After several minutes they could make out the brigade's cavalry squadron in the lead of the march; the troopers were riding four abreast, their plumed metal helmets glinting

wickedly in the fierce sunlight. Suddenly the pair on the jungle hilltop heard the sweet strains of trumpets and the high, rhythmic tap of snare drums.

"Roast me in hell if they haven't brought their musicians with them!" Arnold gasped.

For the first time Sidney's stiff features relaxed into a grin. "Jamaica plenty much bad place for white man," he chuckled. "Sun and heat do strange things to white man's head."

"If their orchestra makes them happy, I suppose it's all right," Arnold replied, laughing. "But the worst of their insanity is to bring their cavalry up here. The horsemen can never ride in formation through these forests and jungles of ours. They'll be lucky if they can cut their way through the weeds on foot, leading their horses! Now, Sidney—can you see why I don't want our Maroons to meet the governor's men in the open? Now do you understand why I've ordered our lads to keep hidden?"

The Indian's eyes glowed fiercely, and he unslung his bow from his shoulder, then tested it with thumb and forefinger before replying. "Me know now," he said at last. "You plenty much smart, Arnold. Me Sidney, not plenty much smart. But learn. Enemy going to learn too."

It was the better part of an hour later when the vanguard of the approaching brigade came to a halt at the edge of the jungle. The troopers dismounted and were joined by the members of the trumpet-and-drum corps. Soon the governor general rode up, surrounded by a group of high-ranking officers, and after a brief consultation the companies of infantry were halted too. Foraging parties were sent scouring for dry wood, kettles and food were brought up from the supply wagons, and within a short time the cooks were preparing a hearty meal of beef stew.

The Royal Army of the Caribbean relaxed in style for more than two hours as the officers dined in comfort, served by their orderlies, and the men sprawled on the ground after eating their fill. Horses stood patiently, and the cavalymen took advantage of the respite by pouring water into sponges concealed inside their steel helmets. Sir Arthur Bartlett and his aides ate a leisurely meal on a snowy cloth spread out before them and drank a variety of wines with their dinner. All the while they conferred earnestly, and occasionally one or another of the party would rise, shade his eyes, and scan the hills.

Sir Arthur had set out in pursuit of an enemy, but he had no idea where to locate his foe. Ahead of him were spread thousands of acres of thick jungle, of rugged hills and high mountains. Somewhere in this silent and desolate fastness was a

group of men and women who defied his authority, but he would have to find them before he could fight them. He had hoped the Maroons would come out of their lair and meet him in open battle on the Liguanea Plain. As they had not, he would chase them into the deepest part of the jungle, follow them to the most inaccessible peaks of the mountains.

It was midafternoon before the kettles were sent to the rear and the companies re-formed. The men muttered uneasily when word was passed down the line that the march would be continued up into the hills, for they had heard rumors that the unseen men of the Maroons dabbled in witchcraft and were endowed with supernatural powers.

The cavalry was forced to break its rigid formation when it reached the soursop trees that marked the edge of the forest, and the squadron strung itself out in a single line behind a sweating, cursing sergeant who first tried from the back of his mount to cut away some of the tangled underbrush and the overhanging creepers but was finally forced to dismount and lead the way on foot.

One man armed with only a saber could not cope with the dense foliage, however, and soon half a dozen others joined in slashing away the thick growth. The brigade crept forward slowly, but it was dusk before the quartermaster and his supply train, bringing up the rear, left the open plain and plunged into the gloomy, sweet-sour-smelling tropical jungle. By this time the column was spread out over half a mile.

Without warning, there was bedlam. An infantryman, one of the first behind the advancing cavalry troopers, uttered a piercing scream, threw his hands high in the air, and crumpled to the heavily trampled weeds. Those behind him and in front of him needed only one glance to know that he was dead; from his neck projected the feathered tail of a six-inch arrow.

A second man screamed and fell, then a third. The cavalry promptly halted, and several officers fired their pistols. Farther back in the column jumpy soldiers raised their muskets and answered the fire, and for five minutes the brigade fought itself. Only the coolness of the captain of cavalry and two lieutenant colonels of infantry prevented the Crown troops from wiping each other out.

Orders were given to open fire to the left and to the right of the column, and the nervous soldiers responded with a will. For fifteen minutes their muskets made the early evening hideous with the sound of firing, and the leaves of the trees trembled. There was no answering fire from the unseen foe, however, and though the frightened men of the brigade were sure they saw shapes looming behind almost every tree, there was no positive indication that even a single Maroon was in

the black recesses of bamboo thicket or giant mushroom weed.

Sir Arthur, frustrated and angry, reductantly gave the order to retreat, and the brigade turned about and slowly worked its way back to the Liguanea Plain. Significantly, there were no more attacks on the column, and the meaning was lost on no one: the troops would not be molested if they remained clear of Maroon territory.

The sounds of musket fire were heard clearly in the Maroon village on Stony Hill, and a hush settled over the community. The women of the warriors remained in their homes, seeking to dispel their uneasiness by remaining close to familiar places and objects. The old men gathered in small groups and conversed in low tones, each trying to pretend a casualness he was far from feeling and each making valiant efforts to conceal his interest in what went on in the vicinity of the commander's house. So far no runners or messengers from Arnold had appeared there, but the elders were prepared to remain where they were and to indulge in meaningless conversation until such time as word arrived on the progress of the battle.

At the house of Arnold and Myra, Jeremy Stone hurriedly completed some simple preparations. In his pocket was sufficient dried beef and roasted, ground wheat for two days; this, combined with the fruits he could pick on his journey, would be enough food to see him into Port Royal. And inside his shirt, enclosed in a roll of heavy paper which he had oiled with animal fat, were the maps of the country which he had so laboriously copied from Arnold's.

His clothes were ragged and his Maroon-made boots were thin, but there was no chance to acquire more suitable clothing. Now, as he strapped on a long sword of fine Toledo steel that he had taken from the Maroon arsenal, he thought of the note he had written to the commander, promising to return the sword, a pistol, and an ornate powder horn.

All was in readiness, and he debated with himself fiercely and for the last time whether to say good-by to Janine. He could not take her with him, so it would be easier if he simply left without seeing her again. Tightening his belt, he blew out the stub of a candle and climbed through the window frame, then dropped noiselessly to the ground.

The night was dark, and heavy black clouds scudded across the skies, only occasionally revealing a distant star. Even so, Jeremy was taking no chances of being stopped; there was no way to hide the sword, pistol, or powder horn, and even the bulging food packet looked suspicious. So he hastily circled the house of Arnold and struck out toward the east, away from the center of the village. The next few minutes were critical,

for he passed numerous dwellings, and anyone glancing out of a window might see him.

At last he reached the final house of the clearing and moved in a semicircle until he was on the south edge of the community. Pausing for an instant, he took a deep breath and plunged into the jungle, sacrificing caution for speed. There were probably only a few sentries guarding the village tonight, as the majority of able-bodied men had accompanied Arnold.

Some of his tension dissipated, and he smiled softly to himself. Then, without warning, he heard approaching footsteps somewhere behind him. Drawing his pistol from his belt, he debated whether to flee or to remain where he was and hope that this pursuer would miss him. Quickly he decided on the latter course; it would be foolhardy to try to run from a Maroon who could make his way through a dense jungle in the dark as easily as Jeremy could cross an open field in the moonlight.

He moved closer to a broad, wild tangle of bamboo shoots that partially screened him; then, shaking his head ruefully, he jammed the pistol back into his belt. He could not shoot at one of the band who had saved him from captivity and death. He could make out the dim outlines of the other's form now, and tensed himself. The man was moving rapidly, and it appeared as though he would pass within inches of the bamboo thicket. At such a close range it would be virtually impossible for him to miss Jeremy. The pursuer was coming into focus now, and Jeremy gaped in astonishment.

"Janine!" he said.

The girl stopped short and smiled at him. She was wearing a pair of leather-thonged sandals, her Maroon skirt, and a loose-fitting man's shirt that revealed as much as it concealed of her full, young figure. From the waistband of her skirt there projected the stubby metal hilt of a short poniard, but she carried neither supplies nor weapons in her hands.

"You've been following me, Janine?"

"Of course. It hasn't required much imagination to read your mind, Jeremy. You made it very clear to me that you were going to leave the Maroons at the first opportunity. And when this war with the government came I was sure you'd take advantage of the lack of guards to escape. Then, when I saw you go into the hut they use as an arsenal and come out again with a sword and——"

"You've been spying on me?" It was more of an accusation than a question.

"I suppose you might call it that," Janine replied comfortably. "Be that as it may, I followed you tonight. I almost lost you—twice—but you make as much noise as I do in these weeds, so I was sure I'd find you again."

"And now that you have"—Jeremy tried to make his voice cold and impersonal—"I'll have to say good-by to you, and you can go back to the village." He wanted, desperately, to take her with him, to keep her close beside him. Her sudden appearance was almost too much for him to grasp, too good to be true, but there was more to be considered than his own wishes. Janine was only a girl, the road ahead was dangerous, long and arduous, and it was impossible to imagine that she possessed the strength or endurance to survive the journey. For her sake, not for his own, he must either persuade her or force her to return to the Maroons.

The girl stood very close to him, her long red hair cascading down her neck and shoulders. "Don't be stupid," she said. "I have no intention of going back to the Maroons any more than you have. I'm going with you."

"You're doing no such thing. I'm going down to Port Royal—unless I'm intercepted by Maroons or Crown troops or bitten by some crawling thing in this infernal jungle. I intend to see the Duchess of Glasgow in the hope that she'll intervene with the authorities on my behalf and secure a pardon for me. Port Royal is going to be an extraordinarily dangerous place for me. It would be equally hazardous for you, as you assisted in the escape of a convicted criminal."

"I'm going with you, Jeremy, and nothing you say to the contrary will send me back to the village."

"Don't you understand, you dull-witted female?" He curbed an impulse to slap sense into her. "You might lose your life in Port Royal! I can risk my own neck, but I'm damned if I can risk yours!"

"If I choose to accompany you, the risk is my own." She looked up at him defiantly, unshaken by either his arguments or his rage.

Never had a woman so infuriated him. "I'd take you back to the village myself. I'd carry you if necessary," he said, incautiously raising his voice, "but I'd never get away again. And I'm not going to take the chance of running into one of the sentries. So do as I ask—and go back. After I've cleared my name I——"

"We're wasting time," she interrupted, and when she smiled a dimple showed on her right cheek. "Please, Jeremy—can't we start now? It's a long journey to Port Royal, and I wouldn't imagine you'd want to lose any more night travel time than you can help."

Jeremy raised his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "All right," he growled. "If you're coming with me, you'll have to adjust your pace to mine. And just remember, I've warned you of the dangers. So be it on your own head."

He turned abruptly and started off through the jungle. Janine meekly fell in behind him, and there was no further conversation as they trudged warily across masses of weeds and rotting vegetation, exposed roots and creepers, fallen trees and hidden pools of scum-filled water.

For hour after wearying hour the pair from a more civilized world groped their way through the tropical forest, slid and stumbled down hills, and finally reached the Liguanea Plain, where travel was easier but where they might be seen more quickly by either the Crown brigade or the Maroons. Jeremy stopped and peered at maps in the dim light for several minutes, then edged toward the west. Instead of continuing in the lead, he now walked beside Janine, though he neither looked at her nor spoke to her. But he was constantly aware of her, and when she began to show unmistakable signs of fatigue he muttered a curse—and slowed his pace.

He knew that his annoyance was caused by more than her presence and his responsibility for her safety. He felt guilty, too, and that increased his anger; he had to admit that he was looking forward to the prospect of seeing Esther Mary Pennywell again. There was unfinished business between them, a relationship to be settled. But Janine's presence would, at the very least, complicate his association with Esther Mary. However, there were more immediate problems confronting him, and he made a resolute effort to put both girls and the state of his feelings toward them out of his mind.

The plain gave way at last to an area dotted with palm trees and towering shoots of cactus, so he stopped again, examined his maps as best he could in the dark, and at last decided they had come sufficiently far west. Thereafter he moved in a direction he believed was due south.

By dawn they had covered more miles than Jeremy had dared hope, but he knew that if they did not stop to rest soon Janine would be unable to continue. She was trying bravely to keep up with him, and despite his anger at her he felt a strong surge of tenderness and pity. Whenever he glanced at her obliquely, her expression showed meek penitence, and it was just as well that he did not see her turn her head away occasionally and smile to herself.

In the distance there was a rapid, echoing burst of musket fire; the battle of the preceding evening had again been joined. Jeremy murmured an apology to the girl, then increased his pace as he pushed deeper into the garden of palms and cactus. Patrols of infantry or cavalry might be abroad but probably would not stumble on them here.

Directly to the right now rose a small promontory known as Leonard's Hill, and Jeremy followed Arnold's map of the

region with care. He cut sharply back toward the plain and skirted around a patch of particularly ugly cactus. Though Janine was having trouble in keeping up with him, he left her to make her way behind him as best she could while he concentrated on the details of the trail. Turning south again, he found a narrow lane between two tall rows of cactus and, calling a warning to Janine, he proceeded cautiously, never taking his eyes from the long, jagged needles that reached for him on both sides.

If he stumbled, if Janine tripped, it would mean critical injury, perhaps death, for the needles were anywhere from ten inches to three feet long, and thousands of them pressed in on the couple. After silently counting fifty paces, Jeremy turned to the right again, and to his infinite joy discovered that he had not erred. Directly ahead was a little brook flowing down from Leonard's Hill, while four or five palm trees rose from a carpet of deep green grass. Here, literally, was a little oasis in a sea of cactus.

The young gunsmith waited until Janine joined him, then both threw themselves to the ground, too exhausted to speak for several minutes. At last they felt their strength returning, and after drinking deeply from the clear waters of the brook they opened the parcel of food and began to eat jerked beef and roasted wheat. Janine appeared so morose, so dispirited that Jeremy suffered a twinge of conscience and, hoping to humor her, pointed to a large kettledrum half hidden beneath a mound of dried grass and broken palm fronds.

"We can amuse ourselves with a bit of music when we've finished breakfast," he said lightly.

The girl glanced at the drum. "This must be one of the Maroons' hidden message stations," she replied, then felt the need to add something more. "You were very clever to find it from your maps."

Unsure whether she was being sarcastic, Jeremy changed the subject. "How do you feel after so long a walk?"

Now it was the girl's turn to read unspoken implications into his words. "I'm ready to start again whenever you wish," she said tartly. "We can't reach Port Royal too soon for my taste."

"Had the choice been mine, I would have undertaken to find a more pleasant and amenable traveling companion. Nevertheless, we're together, and as long as I have the unwanted responsibility of your presence, I shall have to make the decisions. No one could be more anxious to reach the town than I am. And although we might be surprised here by some of the Maroons, we need rest. What's more, it's too hot to travel now—and the danger of our being seen on the plain is

greater. So we'll stay right here until nightfall." He picked up another strip of beef and popped it into his mouth. "So I'm afraid you'll have to curb your impatience."

"As you wish," Janine replied with feigned indifference. "I'm in no position to disagree with you, am I?"

Jeremy flushed with resentment, glared at her, then suffered a pang of remorse. "I've been unkind to you and I'm sorry." He leaned toward her, and her appeal was stronger than ever. "Janine, I can't marry you. I can't marry anyone. I have no money, no tangible prospects of earning a living, and I'm a fugitive from the law."

Somewhat mollified, she averted her gaze, and the fingers of her left hand played with the hem of her short skirt. "Thank you for explaining," she murmured, then dropped her voice to a whisper. "You—you've never told me that you love me."

"I'm in no position to declare my feelings, Janine." He let his hand drop over hers.

"No! Please!" She drew away from him, and though her gaze was lowered he could see deep hurt in her eyes. "I—I am not just—one of your women, Jeremy."

Sucking in his breath, he stared at her. Janine was as forthright as she was courageous, as frank as she was sweet, as honest as she was beautiful. The better Jeremy knew her, the more aware he became that here was a girl of rare stature, that he had never placed a sufficiently high value on her worth. The young gunsmith's heart beat faster, and he reacted instinctively.

He reached out for her, but she twisted out of his grasp, stood up, and moved to the far side of the patch of green. Not looking in his direction, she stretched out on the grass, reached into her skirt top, and removed the tiny poniard. She drew it from its sheath and stuck it into the ground, then turned her back to Jeremy. The weapon stood in the ground, shimmering in the tropical sunlight.

The journey was resumed again at dusk, and four weary hours later the two young people saw the Bay of Jamaica shining dully directly ahead of them. Mosquitoes buzzed around them, and somewhere in the distance a giant frog croaked dismally. The countryside looked forbidding and deserted; there was no moon and the water appeared black and cold. In the distance the drums of the Maroons throbbed, relaying messages on the progress of the battle, but if there was still musket fire, neither Jeremy nor Janine could hear it.

The young gunsmith moved close to a giant gwango tree near the shore line and addressed his companion for the first

time in several hours. "I want you to remain here, Janine. Wait for me."

He would have started off along the shore line, but she put a detaining hand on his arm. "I'm not afraid to stay here, but don't you think I have a right to know where you're going—and why? I'm not a child, Jeremy."

"It would take too long to walk around the bay and approach Port Royal from the Palisadoes," he replied evenly. "We'd be another two days reaching the town. So I intend to borrow a boat. According to these maps, there's a little fishing village called Kingston on this side of the bay, and we can cross in a fairly short time—provided I can find a little craft, that is."

"I think you'd better take me with you, then," she said, and although her face was obscured he could feel the eagerness in her voice. "When you were taken to the Maroon country we passed Kingston Village. I think I'll recognize the shore line when we come to it, and you'll have difficulty finding the place, as it is completely hidden by trees."

"All right. I was trying to spare you, just in case the fisher-folk object to the loss, even the temporary loss, of one of their boats. But— Oh, come on."

He started off toward the east, and Janine quietly fell in behind him. Occasionally rocks jutted out into the water, and here and there patches of gray or black sand formed miniature beaches, behind which the jungle made a solid wall which seemed to seal off the island from the bay. It was easier walking along the shore despite a thick carpet of pebbles and small rocks, and they covered a distance of two miles in about thirty minutes.

Then Janine whispered a warning, and they proceeded slowly, cautiously, for approximately one hundred yards. Suddenly they came upon a small, curved inlet which was not visible from the bay and which the girl had consequently not seen when the Maroons, Michael and Gabriel, had paddled past the spot. The little fishing community lay on the other side of a fringe of trees, and they could dimly make out the outlines of a row of small huts.

A small fleet of boats bobbed up and down in the placid waters of the inlet, and Jeremy, scanning them hurriedly, suddenly spotted a clumsy but serviceable dugout canoe. Perhaps ten feet in length, the boat had been fashioned from a tree trunk, and lashed to her prow was a double-paddled oar.

The young gunsmith motioned to Janine; she obeyed at once, slipping off her sandals and wading to the boat through the chilly water. Meanwhile Jeremy tried to untie the rope

that held the canoe. It was fastened securely around a small tree and the knot was a complicated one. Fearing discovery, he drew his sword, slashed the bond, and followed Janine into the boat. After cutting the oar loose, he dug the blade cautiously into the water, and the craft leaped forward. Again he wielded the oar, and again the canoe responded. In a few seconds they were out of the inlet and in the open water of the bay. To the south and west lay Port Royal.

Neither spoke for several minutes, and Jeremy bent to his task with a vigor he had been far from feeling only a few minutes before. They were on the last lap of the journey now, and it was a blessed relief to be sitting, even in so primitive a boat. Janine apparently felt better, too, and she sat erect, her legs crossed comfortably beneath her. Together they had achieved the improbable and had crossed miles of hostile country without injury. Jeremy was proud of her, proud of himself, and for the first time in many days he felt happy, almost carefree.

"Janine," he called softly, "I'm going to try to land on the back side of the town if I can find it. There are a few fishing wharves there, and it'll be a blame sight safer than paddling in under the guns of the Citadel." He chuckled, then added, "I don't think I'd qualify as a member of your father's crew, but I think I can sail this great frigate into Port Royal in two hours, more or less. We should be there by daybreak."

"It's hard to believe." Her voice was cheerful but hoarse from fatigue. "Will you give me a chance to freshen up somewhere before we go to the Duchess, Jeremy?"

Instead of answering he plunged the oar into the water and pulled savagely. "You are not coming with me to the Duchess," he declared at last, and his tone was adamant. "I shall see her alone, and that's final. I'll brook no argument. I'm taking you to Reverend Pennywell's house, and if they'll take you in, you'll stay there."

"Esther Mary's house?" She was outraged. "I will not——"

"You'll damned well do what you're told from now on," he snapped. "I'm tired of your conditions and your objections. From this moment forward you'll obey my orders!"

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN:

# June 1, 1692

**A**LL WAS quiet in the vicinity of King's House, and no lights showed in the governor general's palace as the two fugitives hurried through Port Royal. The sight of taverns and private homes, shops and government offices, many equipped with glass windowpanes, was strange and slightly wonderful to the couple who had been so long in the primitive Maroon country. But they did not pause, as dawn was already breaking and their safety depended on their ability to avoid recognition. Their unorthodox, travel-stained clothes would call attention to them, and they had to be off the streets before the town awoke.

As they neared the High Street they heard several pistol shots, followed by loud curses and the unmistakable noises of a brawl. Hurrying on, they soon discovered that the clamor increased in the neighborhood of Queen Street, and at Jeremy's insistence, despite the loss of precious minutes, they avoided main thoroughfares and followed back lanes and alleys that led in the general direction of Half Moon Beach and the Citadel. Twice they lost their way, then found it again, and at last the huge stone towers of the great fortress loomed up ahead. Now Jeremy knew where he was, and in a few minutes he successfully guided his companion to the little street two squares from the waterfront.

Pushing open the front gate, they walked toward the open door. Janine seemed too weary now to mind the humiliation of being pushed upon Esther Mary Pennywell as an uninvited guest, and Jeremy's mind was too occupied to dwell on the niceties of the situation. A booming masculine laugh rose from somewhere inside, and the newcomers quickly moved toward the sound. They entered the dining room, and in front of them sat Esther Mary Pennywell and Dirk Friendly, enjoying a hearty breakfast.

The four young people stared at each other. Then Dirk whooped loudly, jumped to his feet, and he and Jeremy pounded each other enthusiastically on the back. "Jerry! Jerry, ye rascal! I might have knowed! Ye have a nose for trouble like a deer c'n smell a salt lick! Esther Mary, m' girl, we ought t'

have guessed that Jerry would be a-showin' his face hereabouts!"

Jeremy's mind was working with surprising clarity, despite his exhaustion, and he looked long and hard first at Janine, then at Esther Mary. Both girls had been constantly on his mind; for many weeks he had been torn between them, unable to decide which of them he preferred.

But now, seeing them together, his doubts were settled. Esther Mary was attractive, vital, intelligent, but she was as nothing compared to Janine. He let his gaze rest on the drooping red-haired girl beside him, and his blood pounded. Here was all he had ever wanted or needed, and he marveled at his own stupidity. It had taken him so long to make up his mind, and yet he should have known all along.

He wanted to take Janine in his arms then and there, to tell her what he felt and to apologize for the pain he had caused her. But there were others present, and she herself was swaying slightly on her feet, fatigued almost beyond endurance.

With an effort he turned back to his hostess and Dirk, who were watching him and Janine with bright and sympathetic eyes. The vague thought crossed his mind that his old friend and the minister's niece were on exceptionally close, easy terms with each other. It occurred to him that this, perhaps, was why she had not responded to him in the Land of the Maroons. His own feelings having crystallized, he felt relieved, particularly as he could wish Esther Mary no happier future than she would have with Dirk. He grinned, then tried to conceal a yawn.

Esther Mary shook hands warmly with both of her tired guests, and if Janine seemed rather distant, she pretended not to notice. "Uncle Jonas is out," she said. "There have been riots all over town for the past twenty-four hours, and with so few troops still in Port Royal it hasn't been easy to keep the peace. So he's trying to do what he can. Meanwhile Dirk has moved in here. Uncle Jonas insisted on having him here to protect me."

"Only it's a-workin' the other way round," the giant chuckled. "This here is the smartest girl I ever seen, 'n' she's been a-lookin' after me somethin' fine. But we don't want t' go a-jabberin' on like this here. What's brung ye down from the Maroon country?"

Jeremy told his story quickly, leaving out no essential detail. Esther Mary seemed sympathetic, and when he told her where he had hidden the beached dugout canoe, she promised that it would be returned to its rightful owners. And she accepted the responsibility of Janine's presence in the house so casually that the French-English girl's antagonism thawed slightly, to Jeremy's relief.

Only when the young gunsmith announced his intention of

seeing the Duchess of Glasgow did Dirk and Esther Mary object. "Sizzlin' Jehos'phat, Jerry!" the big American protested. "D'ye want t' get sent back t' Death Island? Is that what ye're a-aimin' t' do?"

"He needs some food and some sleep," Esther Mary said firmly. "We can decide the best course of action after he's rested."

Jeremy swayed on his feet but took a tight grip on the back of a chair. "I'll sleep first," he agreed, "but I'm seeing the Duchess. Today. Nothing will make me change my mind, so don't try!" He glowered fiercely at Esther Mary, who finally averted her eyes.

"He's very determined about this," Janine said softly. "And as he won't be satisfied until he's had the opportunity to persuade Her Grace to intervene for him with the governor general, I'm afraid we'll have to let him do it."

Esther Mary waved her guests to chairs, then pushed platters of broiled kingfish and hot bragadaps bread at them. Running her fingers through her short black hair, she nodded thoughtfully. Apparently the idea of Jeremy's going to Caroline of Glasgow was not as bad as it had first appeared to her. She was about to say something when Dirk, taking a bite of yellow fruit and swallowing quickly, jumped to his feet again.

"If Jerry's a-seein' that there she-wolf, I'm a-goin' with him. He got hisself into a heap o' trouble without me last time, 'n' he needs me around t' be a-givin' him a helpin' hand, so t' speak."

"You'll keep your nose out of this," Esther Mary told him succinctly.

The giant regarded her fondly. "Woman," he thundered, "there's nobuddy I got more respect for than ye, but this here is m' friend. A couple o' days ago I'd have swore I'd never set eyes on him again. But here he is, 'n' I don't rightly intend t' let him get away from me another time. If'n they send him off t' Death Island, he'll have comp'ny. Me. Ye're a smart wench, Esther Mary, 'n' we both know it, but there'll be no arguin' me out o' this!"

The girl was about to reply when she glanced at the new arrivals. Janine had fallen forward in her chair and was sound asleep with her head cradled in an arm on the table. Jeremy had slumped back and was snoring gently. Esther Mary jammed her thumbs into her *boucanier* belt and grinned. "I'd say we have a few hours in which to argue about your future course of action, Brother Dirk. Meanwhile I'd suggest you carry these two off to bed. Take Janine first and put her in my room. Then you can carry Brother Jeremy in to Uncle Jonas' bed. Try not to awaken him, for he has a hard road

ahead of him, far harder than he knows. And I have a few things to do myself."

"What kind o' things?"

Her eyes sparkled, and she laughed. "I shall need to find a few of my friends who'll guard your impetuous Jeremy. Remember that the cause of the Maroons comes first with me, and I don't want our former impostor to do or say anything that will cause the brigade to intensify its campaign against my people. As he's escaped from the hills, I can't deny him his chance to plead with the Duchess. In fact, his presence in town might even serve as something of a diversion and bring Sir Arthur Bartlett back here. I don't think Jeremy quite realizes what a prominent fugitive he is—or how much the government would like to get hold of him again. . . . You see, while we can't allow that to happen, we mustn't let the Maroons be hurt— Oh, never mind, Dirk. Do as I've bidden you, and let me do the worrying and thinking."

Vastly refreshed after a long morning's sleep, Jeremy ate heartily, repaired his travel-stained clothes as best he could, and started out with Dirk in the direction of the Golden Bucket, where, according to Esther Mary, the Duchess of Glasgow was spending the day. Janine Groliere was still asleep, and the young gunsmith was pleased, for it meant he would not have another unpleasant scene with her. By the time she awoke he would have had his interview with Caroline and would either return to her in triumph or would again be a prisoner. He had caused Janine enough anguish and he was determined to come back to her a free man or not at all.

He and Dirk stepped through the open gate of the Pennywell house, and as they swung into the road he fingered the ornamental hilt of his Maroon sword nervously. Dirk, he noted, was heavily armed: two heavy horse pistols were jammed into the big man's belt. Someone, Jeremy felt, was following them down the road; he looked over his shoulder and saw two tall, broad-shouldered Negroes, each holding a cutlass. His right hand slid toward the pistol he himself carried, and he whispered to his friend urgently.

"Dirk! There are a couple of men behind us! They don't look like government guards to me——"

"They ain't." Dirk chuckled and slapped Jeremy on the back. "Ye've got sharp eyes, Jerry. I was a-wonderin' when ye'd take note of 'em. I reckon we'd better stop so we c'n say howdy t' 'em. Michael! Gabriel! Come up here!" He stopped short, turned, and bellowed amiably at the two grinning Negroes. "He knowed ye was there—faster'n we figgered."

Ambling forward sheepishly, the pair extended their right

hands, and Dirk performed the necessary introductions. Jeremy gazed at them with interest. "I've been anxious to meet both of you for a long time," he said heartily. "I've been told how you saved my life and I've wanted to thank you. I don't suppose I'll ever be able to show you how grateful I really am, but——"

Michael waved a huge hand. "Us no want thanks," he declared. "Glad to help. That Death Island plenty much bad place."

"This is no time t' stop 'n' gabble," Dirk said. "We c'n talk later. If ye're a-goin' t' see the Duchess, let's keep a-movin' b'fore a patrol o' troops sees ye, Jerry—or we'll have a fight on our hands."

"But I want to say a word to Michael and Gabriel," Jeremy protested.

"Ye'll have plenty o' chance for that," Dirk replied calmly. "They're a-comin' with us."

"What?" Jeremy saw the three exchange meaningful looks.

"Missie say us come," Michael stated flatly. "So us come."

"That's right, Jerry." The big American agreed. "Esther Mary says they're t' stick close t' ye right straight through. The lads have been grindin' their teeth a mite b'cause they're ordered t' stay here instead o' goin' up t' the hills where they could fight the brigade, so they'll be kind o' handy if'n a scrap o' some sort d'velops. They wouldn't mind a chance t' use their muscles on some red-coated soldiers."

Exasperated, Jeremy glared at each in turn. "But this is ridiculous," he sputtered. "I can't ask the Duchess to see me while three armed men stand guard over me!"

The silent Gabriel spoke for the first time. "Missie tell us," he said succinctly. "Us do."

"That's right, Jerry, m' lad. Esther Mary said how things was t' be, so there ain't no good a-gettin' all worked up. We're a-doin' like she told us." He took hold of Jeremy's arm and started down the road despite his friend's continued objections.

Michael and Gabriel again fell in behind, their manner imperturbable, and in a few minutes the strange little group arrived at the Golden Bucket. Although this was an hour when liquor was customarily being served, the usually crowded garden was empty and the street on which the main entrance stood was deserted. Somewhere in the distance there was a burst of musket fire, followed by a loud, insistent scream. Jeremy, concentrating on his own problems, was only vaguely aware of the disturbance. He stopped just outside the ornamental bamboo door of the establishment and turned to Dirk.

"For the last time," he asked desperately, "won't you reconsider——"

"M' lad, I'd do it for ye if'n I could. But have we ever stopped t' figger that there might be more at stake here than yer neck, that maybe Esther Mary has asked us t' come along so's we could be sure the interests o' the Maroons won't suffer none?"

Jeremy stared at him for an instant. "All right," he said abruptly, "I suppose I can't be unfair to people who have treated me so decently. I don't see how you're going to be of help to the Maroons when I ask for Her Grace's intercession with the governor general, but I guess you know what you're doing, even if I don't."

He shoved open the door and walked into the inn, the others clustering close behind him. There was a conspicuous absence of people in any of the public rooms, but two men stood at the foot of the staircase leading to the private apartments above. One was a member of Caroline's party, a burly Scots guard, and the other was a thin, tall man who wore a *boucanier* belt and looked as though he had not washed in many days. Certainly he had not shaved in more than a week, and the grime was thick under his fingernails. Both were armed and stared at the newcomers suspiciously.

Smiling blandly, Jeremy sauntered up to them. "Good afternoon, Mason," he said to the wooden-faced Scot. "Where will I find Her Grace of Glasgow?"

The man recognized him but did not betray it by more than a flicker of interest in his eyes. "She's in meetin' oop there and is nae to be disturbed," he replied with a thick burr.

"But——"

"Be off, noo!" the Scotsman snarled, raising a musket.

Jeremy reacted at once and moved so quickly that the man had no opportunity to point his cumbersome weapon. The young gunsmith drew his own pistol and, using the butt as a club, brought it down sharply on the side of the guard's head. Meanwhile Dirk wasted no time, and two tremendous punches toppled the *boucanier*. It was the turn of Michael and Gabriel now, and they moved with a grace and speed that seemed incongruous in men of their size. It was work of only a few seconds for them to rip the shirts from the backs of Caroline's private sentries; they tore the cloth into long strips and expertly bound the hands and ankles of the pair, then used the remaining material as gags.

"Thank you, my friends," Jeremy said with a faint touch of irony. "I begin to see that it is an advantage rather than a handicap to have you as my companions. Now, shall we try our luck upstairs? I've gone to considerable bother and traveled a great distance for this interview with the Duchess, and I don't intend to be put off."

He mounted the steps two at a time, and the trio of giants was at his heels. It was dark on the landing, but two more men stood outside the door of what had once been the sitting room of Jeremy's own suite. Again one guard was a Scotsman and the other was of the brotherhood of sea robbers. Both leaned dispiritedly against the wall, and they viewed the quartet without alarm, for they had heard no sounds of the commotion below.

Jeremy decided to alter his tactics and, letting his right hand ride on his sword hilt, he swaggered up to the men. "I am here for my appointment with Her Grace and Sir Ian," he announced grandly, and before either could reply he pushed open the door and walked in. Dirk and the Negroes followed, and Gabriel shut the door firmly after they had all entered the sitting room.

In front of an open window, leafing through a large pile of papers scattered on a table, were the Duchess and her chamberlain. Caroline was wearing a deep-necked violet colored dress of some flimsy material with several layers of starched skirts. Sir Ian was in his usual black, and despite the intense heat he wore a broad-brimmed plumed hat. Neither looked up at the sound of the door opening and closing, obviously thinking that mere attendants were coming through. They continued to study the papers before them until Jeremy cleared his throat.

"Good afternoon, Your Grace." He made a leg carefully.

Caroline glanced up at the sound of his voice, and Sir Ian jumped to his feet. The Duchess, cool and immaculate as always, was completely unruffled by the unexpected appearance of the villainous-looking quartet. "Ah, Master Stone," she said in her clear, musical voice. "I've been wondering if I would have the pleasure of seeing you again. You have not disappointed me, though I dare say you encountered some slight difficulty in persuading my watchdogs to let you through to me."

The young gunsmith smiled and bowed again, meanwhile noting that his three companions had ranged themselves in a solid row just inside the door. "I have been known to be somewhat persuasive at times, Your Grace," he said easily, "and this has been one of those occasions."

Sir Ian MacGregor stood directly behind the table, a dueling pistol within reach. "You've left the Maroon country where you've been hiding and have come here with some of your bullies, I see. What do you want?" He made no attempt to conceal his venomous dislike for Jeremy, and his voice was cold and sharp.

Caroline, as always, was the complete mistress of the situa-

tion. "Sit down, Ian," she commanded sweetly. "It is plain that Master Stone tired of his life as a fugitive and has come to me because he believes me to be his friend, just as I know that he is mine."

"Thank you, Your Grace," the young gunsmith replied. "It's because you have been so kind to me in the past that I have come to you now. I have often thought of your spirited defense of me before Sir Arthur Bartlett."

She dimpled charmingly and motioned him to a chair. "Please sit down, Master Stone, and tell me how I can be of assistance to you. Meanwhile, your—ah—friends can wait for you outside. They may be assured that no harm will come to you here."

Jeremy forced a laugh and hoped his voice sounded light. "After a number of experiences which have been somewhat less pleasant for me, Your Grace, they are very reluctant to allow me out of their sight."

Sir Ian's fist crashed on the table top. "A request from a member of the house of Stuart is a royal command. Do these surly, disloyal wretches dare to——"

"Hush, Ian." Caroline was gently chiding. "I can understand their concern for their friend, and I have no objection if they wish to remain. Look at them, Ian. There are not many on this island with the brawn of those specimens." There was an undertone of meaning that escaped Jeremy, but the Scottish chamberlain understood it and he nodded slowly.

There was no need for further fencing, and Jeremy decided to come to the point at once. "Your Grace," he declared, "I've come to you in the hope that you will speak to Sir Arthur Bartlett on my behalf. I had no treasonable intent in masquerading as his nephew, as you are well aware. And I'm sure that a word from you will——"

"No, Master Stone. I will not go to Sir Arthur for you. I know much more about you than I did formerly and have even made certain inquiries about you through various sources in New York Town. And I most certainly will not plead with the present governor general on your behalf." Her chiseled features remained serene, and she voiced her refusal calmly, without a trace of apology or regret.

"Then I—I beg your pardon for this waste of your valuable time," Jeremy replied curtly. He was about to turn and walk out of the room when Caroline smiled at him with more than her customary warmth.

"Permit me to explain myself, Master Stone. If you intend to achieve the heights to which your ambition would lead you, then you must curb your impetuosity, for it is your worst

enemy. I prefer to have you with me than to see your talents wasted in the service of Sir Arthur."

Sir Ian stirred in his chair. "Be careful, Your Grace," he muttered sharply. "Don't say too much. Remember, there are four of them——"

"Nonsense, my dear Ian," she replied airily. "We've gone too far now to be squeamish, and in a few hours the whole island will know." She arose and circled the table, stopping directly in front of Jeremy. The scent of her perfume was strong and sweet, but he could feel the commanding personality behind her feminine blue eyes. "I want you with *me*, Master Stone."

There was a strange gleam in her eyes as he stared at her, unable to fathom her meaning. "You're very flattering, Your Grace, and you know I am always yours to command. But I——"

"If you serve me faithfully, with all of the vigor and cunning at your disposal, I shall create you a baronet and shall give you estates suitable to your rank. In due time, when you have further demonstrated your loyalty to my cause and my person, it is not too much for you to hope that I shall make you a viscount."

For an instant Jeremy wanted to laugh aloud, principally at himself. He had long been fascinated by Caroline; never had he encountered a woman more beautiful and glamorous, brilliant and charming. But he was being treated now to a vision of the real Caroline, unscrupulous and ruthless, demanding and unyielding. Though it was true that she had the power to bewitch a man, the workers on the New York waterfront had a name for such a woman. It was a short, ugly word, but it fitted.

It was interesting to see the Duchess as she was, but he could not allow himself to concentrate on so relatively minor a matter. There was too much at stake, and he tried to absorb all the implications of what she had just said to him.

The prospects she held out were glittering, and Jeremy's pulse pounded. Here, within his grasp, seemed to be all he had ever wanted, and more. But a hard core of doubt and suspicion was forming inside him, and he curbed his excitement. "You refer to your 'cause,' Your Grace," he began tentatively, aware that Dirk and the two Negroes were listening avidly to every word.

"I do, Master Stone. My cause has long been in preparation, and the day of action has come at last. I will only say that it is no accident that Sir Arthur and most of his soldiers are many miles away in the hills. Nor is it accidental that there it rioting and pillaging all over Port Royal, as you are no doubt aware

if you have spent even a few minutes in the town within the past few days."

The implications of her statement were overwhelming. The idea that one of the house of Stuart might be stirring up an insurrection was almost too much to grasp, yet there was no mistaking the meaning of the casual words of this handsome young woman with the regal bearing and manner. "You are inciting a rebellion, Your Grace?" He felt a compulsion to bring the matter into the open.

Sir Ian laughed hollowly, without mirth. "We do not choose to think of what we are doing as the making of a rebellion, impostor. Let us say instead that we have perfected a plan, based on that which is right and just, and that we are now putting that plan into operation."

Caroline's smile broadened. "You have a genius for the abstract, dear Ian," she said affectionately, then turned again to the young gunsmith. "The crews of eleven *boucanier* vessels are in the town of Port Royal at the present time. In other words, there is available a force of four hundred and fifty men, all of whom know how to use firearms and a sharp blade. I have bided my time and have waited until these men dissipated their money on wenches and gambling and drink. I have won their captains to my cause and I have now provided the men with certain sums of money. There will be more to come for them. Therefore, they have all been won over to my cause."

"And what is your cause, Your Grace?" Jeremy was annoyed at the mystery that Caroline was creating and at her enjoyment of his bewilderment.

"I intend to take over the government of the island of Jamaica by force," she replied calmly. "My men and I will do this while the brigade is occupied elsewhere. Lord Murray will capture King's House, and Sir Ian, who is a soldier with considerable experience, will take the Citadel and will assume full command of the fortress in my name."

Dirk Friendly stared at the Duchess openmouthed, and Michael and Gabriel were equally incredulous. But Jeremy hung onto his reeling wits and tried to appear as blandly unconcerned as Caroline. "In other words," he said bluntly, "you are intending to steal a portion of the realm that belongs to your royal cousin and her husband."

"I intend," Caroline replied merrily, "to take possession of a great deal more than this steaming little pimple of an island. My operation has begun here, but only through necessity, as the largest garrison of troops assigned to colonial service is stationed here. You'll be interested to hear that after Jamaica

has been conquered I intend to subjugate all of England's North American possessions and to proclaim myself ruler of a new kingdom in the New World."

Sir Ian stirred restively and he glared at the Duchess. "You're saying far too much," he stated flatly.

"On the contrary, dear Ian," she replied loftily, "I intend to say more, much more. You allow your personal dislike of Master Stone to cloud your thinking. As you yourself have admitted many times, he is as resourceful and fearless as he is energetic. The others do not concern me. Master Stone's men will do as he bids them to." She turned to Jeremy, her most dazzling smile on her lips. "You see, Master Stone, it was the funds of Sir Ian and Lord Murray that have made this whole venture possible, but dear Ian sometimes forgets that he is not in over-all command. He forgets that without me he has nothing and will have nothing. It is sometimes difficult for him to obey instructions. Nevertheless, he is learning. Yes, he is learning rapidly." She patted her chamberlain's arm soothingly and a trifle condescendingly.

Jeremy could not conceal a grin; it was only a petty triumph to see the Scotsman humiliated, but it was a victory of sorts, and he enjoyed it. Yet when he found Caroline looking at him with that penetrating glance that made him feel she could read the innermost secrets of his mind, he hastily straightened his features. "You are very ambitious, Your Grace," he declared, "and although it seems logical that frigates of war and tens of divisions of troops would be sent from London to thwart your scheme, I am sure you've foreseen that eventuality and have some plan to counter it. Therefore, I shall concentrate on the immediate problem, my personal problem. You wish my help and that of my associates."

"That is correct, Master Stone. Serve me as I wish to be served, and there will be no limit to what you may become, no limit to the wealth and prestige and power you will accumulate."

Nodding, Jeremy placed his left hand behind his back, waist-high. With his thumb and forefinger he made a circle and hoped that Dirk Friendly saw and remembered the signal, which had been used by the gun-foundry apprentices when trouble was brewing in New York waterfront taverns. "And if I refuse, Your Grace?"

"Then I am afraid you will not leave this building alive." Caroline still spoke pleasantly, conversationally.

Jeremy leaped forward and around her as he replied, "I'm sorry to contradict you, Your Grace." In one sweeping motion he picked up Sir Ian's pistol and flung it through the window.

With his other hand he pushed the baronet in the chest, and Sir Ian, who had jumped to his feet, fell backward onto the floor with a clatter.

Meantime Dirk and the two husky Maroons had sprung into action, had opened the door and somehow disposed of the two guards outside. The trio had a head start on Jeremy as they sprinted down the corridor, and the young gunsmith, following, was forced to hurdle the prostrate bodies of the Scots sentry and his *boucanier* fellow-in-arms. There were sounds behind him, but he did not look back. Later he recalled a snatch of something Caroline said, her voice as unperturbed as ever: "Let him go, Ian. How can one fugitive criminal harm us?"

Dirk Friendly's intimate knowledge of the geography of the Golden Bucket was put to immediate use, and by the time Jeremy caught up with him and the Negroes, they had started to race down the servants' staircase. Although they made considerable noise, no one approached them, and when they reached the kitchens they found the place deserted. At Jeremy's suggestion they slowed to a walk, and when they came out the back door, two evil-appearing cutthroats, obviously guards who were posted at that entrance, paid them little heed other than to nod curtly. These men patently thought that the roughly dressed quartet were members of their rebel force, and Jeremy and his companions did nothing to disillusion them. Returning the salutation calmly, they strolled to the end of the alleyway, and only when they were in the adjoining road, out of sight of the Golden Bucket, did they increase their gait.

Jeremy hurried on for two town squares, then paused in the battered entrance of a once prosperous shop that looked as though it had been looted. Dirk was at his side, but neither spoke until Michael and Gabriel caught up with them. All four looked at each other and grinned, then Dirk laughed loudly. "Jerry," he said, "ye had me scairt for a spell there. I thought ye was a-aimin' t' take on the job for her high 'n' mightiness. I don't mind a-tellin' ye, I was all set t' pick ye up 'n' carry ye off—until ye gave me the alert sign b'hind yer back."

Grave but exhilarated, Jeremy shook his head impatiently. "We can talk about all that later, Dirk. Right now there are things to be done. A great many things."

"Ye c'n bet yer boots on that. First off, we'll go tell Esther Mary——"

"You can do what you please. I'm leaving at once for the hills. I'm going straight to Sir Arthur Bartlett and tell him the news of this conspiracy against the Crown."

"Ye're *what*?" Dirk stared at him incredulously, and both Michael and Gabriel gaped at him. The idea that a fugitive

would go to the man who had ordered his punishment was incomprehensible to them.

Ignoring their reactions, the young gunsmith continued to speak hurriedly. "While I believe there is less than a good chance of Caroline and her scheming gentlemen taking over the North American colonies, there's no doubt they can cause considerable damage on this island. So I'm going to lay their whole plan before the governor general. I know it's a wild idea, but I'm going ahead with it. Call me a patriotic idiot who is willing to risk his neck to prevent an act of treason. Or call me a selfish madman who sees a chance to win a pardon for himself. It doesn't matter. But I'll tell you this—the brigade will call off the campaign against our friends, the Maroons, and will come scurrying back here!"

"Ye'll hang, Jerry, ye'll hang sure as ye were borned," Dirk declared grimly. "That is, if ye're lucky. It wouldn't s'prise me none if that there gov'nor sent ye back t' Death Island."

"That's the risk I'll have to take, Dirk." Jeremy's voice rang out. "I can't look at myself with much pride. I've done nothing commendable in a very long time. Well, I have my duty to perform, and nothing is going to stop me."

"I reckon if ye've a mind t' be a fool, I c'n be one too." Dirk's eyes were milder than ever, and his tone was deceptively soft. "I'll come with ye."

"Us come too." Michael joined the conversation for the first time. "Missie say us stay with you."

Jeremy regarded the huge Negro intently for a moment. "All right, Michael," he said crisply. "Come along, both of you. If we can persuade Sir Arthur to call off his campaign against the Maroons, you'll be doing your people a greater service than if you were up there at this minute with Arnold, shooting at soldiers."

The two Maroons were pleased, but Dirk frowned and was obviously ill at ease. "We got t' tell Esther Mary 'n' get her approval b'fore we——"

"I'm asking no one's permission, and that's final, Dirk! Michael, to keep our friend here happy, you go to Mistress Pennywell and tell her our plans. Then meet us in half an hour's time at Snell's Wharf on the back side of town. That's where I hid the dugout canoe I borrowed from the fisher-folk of Kingston Village. We'll use the boat to take us back across the bay, and we'll even return it to its owners. Do I make myself clear to all of you? Good! Let's be on our way then."

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN:

# June 2, 1692

A STEADY, driving rain that began shortly after midnight turned the Liguanea Plain into a sea of sticky mud, and when there was no appreciable letup of the storm by dawn the troops of the Royal Army of the Caribbean were ordered to eat cold rations for their breakfast. Despite the grumbling, the soldiers realized that the command was a sensible one, for it would have been impossible to find dry firewood, much less keep a flame alive under the stew kettles. And so the men huddled under the dripping, soggy sailcloth of their tents, wrapped their wet capes more securely around their shoulders, and cursed the weather, their officers, the tropics, and the Maroons.

So far their campaign had been an abject failure. Five times the brigade had advanced into the jungles, and five times it had been forced to retreat ignominiously and at double tempo to the open spaces of the plain. The battalions that bore the reputation of being the best in the New World, the companies whose very names excited the envy of the French and the fear of the Spaniards were taking a decisive drubbing from savages and fugitives who were ignorant of the art of warfare and who were consequently unimpressed by the glittering, reputations of the units. Close to one hundred members of the brigade were casualties, but the elusive enemy, in so far as anyone knew, had suffered no losses.

There had been high hopes when the rainstorm had started that the governor general and his staff would abandon the expedition and order an immediate return to Port Royal, but no such directive had been issued, and the men were resigned to the inevitability of still another push into the dark recesses of the tropical forest. Strangely, morale was still fairly high, though none of the troops felt that the Maroons would be routed. It was difficult to work up a rage against a foe who was never seen, never heard, and even the most belligerent yearned not for blood but for a return to their doxies and the rum shops of Port Royal.

No one was out in the open but a few miserable sentries as Jeremy Stone, accompanied by Dirk Friendly and the two

~~Maroons~~ Maroons, Gabriel and Michael, approached the encampment on horseback. Michael had managed in some mysterious manner to find mounts for the party after they had crossed the Bay of Jamaica to the island mainland, and they had ridden up the plain at a fast clip in spite of the rain. All were sleepy after their long journey, but a sense of tension and excitement kept them alert, and Jeremy was grinning to himself as he waved a limp handkerchief from the tip of his Toledo sword.

He felt sure of success and had confided some of his thoughts to Dirk during the ride, but the big man had not shared his optimism and had been convinced, in fact, that Jeremy was signing both of their death warrants. His glistening face accurately mirrored his thoughts as he slowed his horse to a walk; his lips were compressed, his broad brow was furrowed, and his usually happy eyes showed nothing but a grim determination liberally larded with utter despair.

Two sentries lifted their muskets when the riders approached. Jeremy asked to be conducted to Sir Arthur Bartlett, and a corporal of the guard was immediately summoned. That worthy beamed in the friendliest possible manner despite the presence in the party of two Negroes, whom he assumed to be servants rather than Maroons, and led the way across the encampment. In the center of a circle of large tents stood a peculiarly built affair that boasted three layers of sailcloth over a lining of heavy silk. The corporal showed some hesitation, obviously not wanting to approach too close, so Jeremy dismounted, threw his reins to Dirk, and after thanking the guard started toward the flap, which was partly open.

After removing some quantities of mud from his clothes, face, and boots, he stood at the entrance and peered inside. It was dry there, probably the only spot in the entire encampment that was not dripping. Inside sat Sir Arthur Bartlett, reading a long sheet of parchment and puffing reflectively on a long-stemmed clay pipe. He was in full uniform, and on his shoulders were the golden, crown-encrusted epaulets of a lieutenant general of the realm. In front of him on a small wooden table were his sword and plumed helmet, and lying on a small field trunk were a brace of pistols.

Jeremy's heart beat violently, but his voice was calm as he called, "May I see you, sir?" The rain drumming on the canvas was so loud that he was forced to repeat the question.

"Yes? What is it?" Sir Arthur did not look up from the parchment.

Wishing he had been able to make himself more presentable, Jeremy advanced into the tent. "I imagine you're surprised to see me, Sir Arthur," he began tentatively.

The governor general looked up casually, then leaped to his

feet, breaking the clay pipe. "You! Why—why, damn your impertinence!" His voice rose to a shout. "Guards! Arrest this man!"

No one approached, and Jeremy wasted no time. "Sir Arthur," he said urgently, "I know you have no reason to trust me, but I have come here of my own volition, knowing full well that you could have me executed."

"What do you want here?" It was evident that the guards had not heard Sir Arthur's shout, and his expression showed that he was sure the impostor's intent was to murder him. He looked around hastily for a weapon, and his glance fell on the long sword resting on the table. He ripped it hastily from its scabbard and glared at the intruder.

Jeremy had more or less anticipated such a reaction. However, he had not counted on finding the governor general alone, and he pressed his advantage. Despite the uncomfortable presence of Sir Arthur's naked sword only a few inches from his face, he neither retreated nor reached for his own blade. "I am in possession of information that is vital to the safety of this colony, Your Excellency. I have come to you with this information, for I feel it is my duty as a loyal subject of the Crown."

Cynical incredulity showed in Sir Arthur's eyes, and he did not lower his weapon. "You—a loyal subject? I warn you, young man, I shall not treat you as a gentleman. If you make the slightest attempt to draw your sword, I shall run you through. Ho, there! Guards!"

It took a supreme effort to maintain an outer semblance of calm. "I have no intention of harming you, Sir Arthur. If that had been my purpose in coming here, I could have accomplished it very easily by now, for friends of mine are waiting for me right outside this tent, and between us we would have no trouble in subduing you, I am sure. However, that is beside the point. As to my loyalty, I cannot blame you for doubting me. I can only assure you that my masquerade as your nephew was a folly prompted by overambition and born of a desperation caused by the life I was leading. But this is of no consequence at the present moment, either. I want to report——"

The sword blade flickered ominously. "You seriously expect me to believe that patriotism is the sole motive that brings you here, young man?"

"No, sir." Jeremy smiled, debated with himself the virtues of frankness, and decided to be completely honest. "I hope that you'll reward me with a pardon."

"I see," the governor general replied heavily. "And now you'll tell me that you've come to me as an emissary of the

**Maroons.** You'll offer me information as to their present troop dispositions and battle plans. And should I be fool enough to believe your rot, my brigade will be annihilated. Thank you, Master Charlatan, but I will not——"

"I'm sorry to contradict you, Your Excellency," Jeremy cut in loudly, "but I am not an ambassador from the Maroons." He spoke hurriedly, knowing that it would be only a matter of time before the absent guards returned. "It is true that I found sanctuary with them and that they nursed me back to health. But I am most emphatically not their representative. They have no idea that I am here. In fact, they probably think I am in Port Royal. I *was* in the town—as recently as yesterday—and I have come to you with full speed. There is a vast conspiracy afoot in your capital, sir. A group of ruthless and wealthy people have bribed the crews of the *boucanier* ships to join them in seizing the government. I myself was offered a high position in their cause."

Sir Arthur, in spite of himself, was impressed. "Who are the leaders of this conspiracy?" he asked.

Jeremy took a deep breath. "The Duchess Caroline of Glasgow and her gentlemen."

The governor general's face lost its color, and after a moment of shock his eyes showed a deep anger. "You damned renegade!" he bellowed. "Do you dare to suggest that Caroline Stuart—a cousin of Her Majesty—is trying to overthrow the rule of William and Mary in this colony?"

"Yes, Your Excellency. Not only here, but in North America as well. It is their intent to set up a new kingdom of the West, with Her Grace of Glasgow as Queen."

"I've never heard such rubbish in my life! I don't know what your game is, young man, but you'll not get away with it, by God! I'll have you——"

"I don't expect you to accept my story without verification, Sir Arthur." Jeremy spoke quietly now, but with considerable force. He unbuckled his sword and laid it on the table. "I surrender this to you as a token. I hope you will return it to me when you discover that there are *boucanier* riots erupting all over Port Royal and that Caroline has by now caused Their Majesties' flag to be struck at King's House and has raised her own in its place."

"Preposterous!" Sir Arthur spluttered. "Lady Bartlett is at King's House."

"In that event, Your Excellency, she is no doubt a hostage, just as I am yours." Without pausing he lifted his voice. "Dirk! Come in here and bring the others with you!"

Dirk Friendly and the two Maroons entered the tent, wet and bedraggled and showing no sign of awe for the governor

general. At Jeremy's bidding each in turn told his version of the conversation at the Golden Bucket, and Sir Arthur, his anger cooling, was increasingly interested. Finally, after the reluctant Gabriel had haltingly and with obvious sincerity struggled through his account of the meeting, Sir Arthur rubbed his knuckles across his chin reflectively.

"It is possible," he conceded, "that you are telling the truth, all of you. Now that I think of it, Her Grace of Glasgow is in large part responsible for this campaign against the Maroons."

Gabriel and Michael both stiffened, their eyes flashing, but subsided at a warning look from Jeremy. "In what way is she responsible, sir?"

"She talked me into it," the governor general declared ruefully. "And because of you. She persuaded me that the Maroons were flouting my authority by harboring *you* in their midst, and she offered substantial proof that you were with them in the hills. If what you now tell me is actually so, then she merely used a neat and perfidious device to remove me and my troops from town." He sighed reflectively. "That woman has unique persuasive powers, there's no doubt of it."

"Indeed there isn't, sir," the young gunsmith agreed, daring to hope that Sir Arthur's milder manner indicated that he believed what he had been told.

"Well, we shall see, we shall see. I'll dispatch a messenger into Port Royal at once, and we'll know by tonight—tomorrow morning at the latest—whether your story is true. In the meantime, you will be my guests, all of you. You will not be ill-treated, but I warn you, make no attempt to leave this encampment. I will not pass judgment on you until I am sure where I stand, and to be frank, I do not know at this moment whether you are trying to fool me again or whether Their Majesties stand forever in your debt."

It was a rare day when the sun failed to shine over Jamaica, and by dawn the rain had set a new and dismal record, having fallen for more than twenty-four consecutive hours without a break. Now, shortly after breakfast, the downpour gave way to a steady drizzle, but the sky over the Blue Mountains remained forbidding and a particularly heavy concentration of clouds was gathering over Spanish Town to the southwest. As a sea breeze was blowing from that direction, it was probable that the Liguanea Plain would receive another heavy drenching.

Troop morale was finally beginning to crumble under the influence of the weather, and even a few of the veteran sergeant majors expressed the loud wish, in the hearing of

commissioned officers, that the battalions would return to Port Royal and comfortable barracks. The grumbling was loudest, of course, in the ranks of the two companies that had only recently arrived from England.

However, the Maroons remained quiet in their hidden hill positions, and although the brigade was badly exposed and vulnerable to an attack, none was forthcoming. Through deliberate inaction the enemy was emphasizing the principle that he merely wanted to be allowed to live in peace in his wilderness, that he would not fight unless attacked, and that he was harmless when unmolested.

The rain pelted lightly but steadily on a small tent located behind the sentry compound, the temporary quarters of Jeremy Stone and Dirk Friendly. A hole in the canvas on one side of the little pyramid forced the two gunsmiths to huddle in the farthest corner, and the sound of the drops on the soaked cloth made a dismal background as they tried to make themselves comfortable on two low, upturned crates, the only furniture the place afforded other than a pair of soggy mattresses. But Jeremy was in high spirits, and every few minutes he rose, walked to the tent flap, and peered out toward the sentry lines, beyond the leaky canvas structure where Gabriel and Michael were housed, for Sir Arthur's returning messenger would probably come past this point on his return from Port Royal.

Dirk did not share his friend's optimism, however, and as time wore on he became increasingly morose. "If'n I was t' have the chance again," he said, enlarging on a theme he had pursued relentlessly ever since he had awakened, "I wouldn't follow ye down the street, Jerry. I wouldn't follow ye t' somebuddy's house across the road or t' the jakes or nothin'. Some folks, they got themselves a real talent for makin' money or sailin' ships or attractin' wenches. But Jerry Stone, mind ye, has a talent for a-gettin' hisself into the worst kind o' trouble a man c'n dream up. For the past half year I been in danger o' gettin' my head cut off'n my body, 'n' I don't rightly like it. I'm a peaceable man 'n' I ain't a-aimin' t' be on the bad side o' nobuddy. O' course I'm just a-talkin' right through the hat that ain't even on m' head, b'cause I'm in a real heap o' trouble, 'n' this is one time I ain't a-goin' t' get out'n it."

Jeremy tried hard not to laugh at the other's gloomy predictions of what was ahead. "It isn't so bad, Dirk," he said, concealing his cheerfulness. "Until Sir Arthur's messenger arrives we aren't too uncomfortable, in spite of the rain. They gave us a fine breakfast at the officers' mess, and I haven't heard anyone order us before a squad of marksmen."

"There's only one reason why they ain't, Jerry, m' lad, 'n'

that's b'cause this here weather is so wet all their powder is damp. If we'd have gone t' Esther Mary like we should have did, she'd have talked us out o' comin' up here. I tell ye, that there girl has more pure smartness in her little finger than ye 'n' me have in both our heads put t'gether!"

Before Jeremy could reply, the flap opened and a young ensign wearing the triple shoulder loop of an aide-de-camp stuck his head inside and saluted smartly. Rivers of water ran down the youthful officer's helmet and neck into his soaked collar, but he nevertheless managed to look fairly smart. "Master Stone," he said crisply, "His Excellency's compliments, and could you gentlemen join him at the pavilion?"

"Certainly, mister. At once!" Jeremy jumped to his feet. "Has the messenger returned from Port Royal——"

"I really can't answer any questions, sir. It isn't my place," the ensign replied primly, then grinned.

"Thanks very much," the young gunsmith said heartily, his eyes twinkling. "Naturally I appreciate the delicacy of your position. . . . What about the two Negroes who rode up here with us?"

"I have no orders concerning them, Master Stone. But I've brought horses with me for your comfort, gentlemen, so you'll suffer inconvenience from the weather for only a few minutes."

Following him out into the rain, Jeremy nudged Dirk and whispered, "What about those predictions of yours now? When a general's aide-de-camp apologizes for the weather, there's nothing to worry about, Dirk, not a thing in the world."

"I ain't a-goin t' b'lieve ye until I hear Sir Arthur apologizin'—personal-like," the big man replied stubbornly, in no wise mollified.

Four sentries stood on duty before Sir Arthur Bartlett's quarters, stolidly ignoring the heavy drizzle as they stared straight ahead, their muskets held stiff-armed before them. Jeremy pushed aside the thick, corded flap and entered, with Dirk behind him. The governor general was seated behind his small table, and lounging around the pavilion were several high-ranking officers, all immaculately dressed. The young gunsmith was acutely conscious of his torn, stained clothing, but Sir Arthur smiled a broad welcome.

"Master Stone," he said heartily, "on behalf of King William and Queen Mary, I thank you for your service to the Crown. And in my own name, before my staff, I want to express my own appreciation by granting you a full and unconditional pardon for your past—let us call them—indiscretions. Here are your weapons, which I freely return to you as a sign of my trust."

"Thank you, sir." Jeremy took his sword and pistol and bowed first to Sir Arthur, then to the other officers. "I take it, sir, that the messenger's story was somewhat similar to my own?"

"Virtually identical. I sent an experienced cavalry officer into the town, and he suffered several minor wounds at the hands of the rascals who have taken over Port Royal. But he escaped from them and returned to me. You will be relieved to hear, as I was, that a spirited defense is being conducted at King's House, so your prediction that Their Majesties' flag would be torn from its standard there has not come true. I intend to see that it does not and have already given orders for a forced march to the capital. We will leave this encampment in an hour, and I will feel honored if you will ride with me and my staff." He glanced past Jeremy and seemed to become conscious of Dirk for the first time. "A suitable place will be found for you too," he added hurriedly, embarrassed by his seeming lack of courtesy.

Jeremy bowed his acceptance of the honor being bestowed on him, but despite his restoration to official grace his mind was racing ahead to other things. "What of this expedition against the Maroons, Your Excellency?"

The officers laughed wryly, and one of them, a colonel with a thin aristocratic face, sat upright. "We've found the very excuse we need to call off this damned campaign," he said in the new, slow drawl that had recently become so fashionable at St. James's Palace. "The Maroons are as unobliging as they are inhospitable, and we're delighted to have found a valid reason to break off our engagement with them."

Sir Arthur frowned at his subordinate for saying too much, then turned back to Jeremy. "I have decided to issue a proclamation granting a blanket pardon to the people who call themselves Maroons," he said blandly. "Perhaps you can be of further assistance to me, Master Stone, and can tell me how to send an officer to them with word of my generosity. I don't know how to establish a contact with them and I don't want an officer murdered."

"I think I can arrange the matter for you, Your Excellency." The young gunsmith was suddenly lighthearted; he was certainly responsible in part for this termination of the hill campaign and was thus canceling the debt he owed the Maroons for saving his life. "The two Negroes who accompanied me here are prominent in the Maroon hierarchy, and I am sure they will be glad to take word to their leader."

"Maroons? In our camp?" The colonel leaped to his feet, his drawl forgotten. "Hang the filthy——"

The governor general glared coldly at his staff member.

"There will be no hangings," he said severely. "The pardon is already in effect, Colonel Howard. We can allow nothing to interfere with the crushing of the rebellion that has broken out in the town. Gentlemen, I want all of you to remember that our sole concern henceforth is to win a victory over the insurrectionists. We can not and will not allow Their Majesties' flag to be despoiled!"

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN:

# June 4, 1692

CHAOS reigned in Port Royal, and the sharp crack of musket fire sounded from every quarter of the town. In many sections of the community personal grudges were being settled by the crudest possible means, for the law had been overthrown and there was no authority to uphold its principles or its administration. Respectable householders bolted their doors and fastened their shutters, and the men of each family stood guard, often with ancient fowling pieces and rusty pistols. Homes without adequate protection had been looted and in some cases completely sacked, for small bands of Negroes, free men, and runaway slaves alike roamed the streets and robbed anyone who looked prosperous.

Business had come to a complete standstill, and shop fronts were covered with heavy wrought-iron grilles. The taverns and inns had all closed and strong guards had been established over liquor supplies, but the rioters had unearthed considerable quantities of rum from unknown sources and many of the marauders who were terrorizing the citizenry were drunk. Private vendettas flared up into the open at the bawdyhouses, and more than one overpainted harlot was stabbed and killed by a sister trollop.

Plantation masters remained at their estates and devoted their full energies to preventing an open rebellion of their slaves. Word spread that the owner of a vast tract of sugar cane had been murdered in his manor near Spanish Town, and later rumors indicated that his wife and daughters had been raped, then locked inside the house, which had finally been set afire. Such reports increased the nervousness of the more substantial residents, and those who secretly owned shares in the *boucanier* ships immediately sent appeals to the

captains of the vessels for aid. To their chagrin they learned that the masters as well as their crews had openly declared for the Duchess of Glasgow and had taken up arms in her behalf.

The military situation, which had been confused, was at last becoming painfully clear. The artillerymen of the royal brigade, who had not accompanied the remainder of the troops on the punitive expedition against the Maroons, had been taken by surprise when the initial assault had been launched against them and had suffered badly. No more than two hundred in number at the outset, they had been further crippled by an unwise decision on the part of their commanding officer, Major the Honorable Burnett-Tilden, who had spread his men over too great an area. The headquarters platoon, which had taken up residence in the Citadel, had been annihilated; among the dead were the major himself and Ensign Sir Morton Ellery, youngest son of the Duke of Portland.

Approximately one third of the artillerymen had not been on duty when Caroline and her military advisers had launched their first attack, and some had been either captured or struck down in the rum shops and houses of prostitution. However, the majority of those on leave had managed to make their way to King's House, where they had joined the company that had been detailed to serve as a temporary honor guard. The battered remnants of the other platoons had also fought through the ranks of howling *boucaniers* to King's House, and here the only organized resistance to Caroline still flickered.

There were perhaps ninety men of the original complement still able to fire a musket, and they opposed a horde that outnumbered them by at least three or four to one. Nevertheless, the strict discipline and rigorous training of the Royal Army had its effect, and the soldiers more than held their own. Pushed back by sheer weight of numbers, they retreated slowly across the extensive lawns of the palace and finally dug in for a last stand inside the walls of King's House itself. Costly furniture was piled high at doors and windows, and the women who remained, led by Lady Bartlett, cooked for the soldiers, cared for the wounded and loaded muskets.

This was the situation as the weary troop of calvary led the brigade into the outskirts of Port Royal after a long march. Humiliated at having been forced to acknowledge at least technical defeat by the Maroons, bone-tired after their journey, and showing in their faces and sagging shoulders what tropical heat and rain had done to them, they little resembled the smartly uniformed automatons who had swaggered off to the

hills only a few days before. Even the trumpets and snare drums were silent now, for the music-makers had been given muskets and taken into the ranks of fighting men to replace those who had fallen ill with dysentery or the Yellow Death.

Scouts who had been sent ahead apprised Sir Arthur Bartlett of the precarious position of the defenders of King's House, and the governor general ordered two battalions to make a concerted rush on the *boucaniers* who had the palace under siege. The troops revived somewhat as they charged through the narrow streets, and a ragged cheer went up when they saw that the pennant of William and Mary still flew from the roof. But the sound died in their throats when a score of cannon boomed from the direction of the King's House lawn and heavy iron balls came crashing down on the flimsy houses fringing the plaza. The troops halted, then retreated, and their officers hurried to Sir Arthur and his staff for consultation and instruction.

There was consternation in the high command, for no one had realized that the rebels had captured the artillery's guns. And the cannon were being manned by experts who had enjoyed long practice with naval ordnance. Thus, although the manpower of Caroline's cohorts was dwarfed by that of the brigade, the possession of the big guns tipped the scales heavily in favor of the insurrectionists, and for the first time there was serious doubt as to the eventual outcome.

The *boucanier* attack against the palace continued to be pressed with considerable fervor, and the feebleness of the return fire from within was an indication to the experienced ear that unless relief was forthcoming quickly King's House would soon fall. A second salvo of artillery fire sent the entire brigade scurrying for cover, but Sir Arthur continued to sit his horse, and his staff remained clustered around him. Jeremy Stone, an interested bystander, watched from a short distance. The governor general's stern features and hard eyes discouraged subordinates from expressing their sympathies for the unenviable presence of his lady in the besieged palace, and he himself made no mention of the fact.

Scouts brought in word that the Citadel was occupied by a strong force under the command of Sir Ian MacGregor and that the Duchess herself was ensconced in the virtually impregnable stone structure, but no officer allowed his mind to linger on the possibilities of first striking the *boucaniers* there. King's House would be difficult enough to capture; the Citadel might hold out indefinitely against a force equipped with as little long-range fire power as that which the enfeebled brigade could muster. It was obvious that the initial move would have to be made against the hard-bitten desperadoes

who surrounded the palace that was the seat and symbol of Crown power in the Western world, but not one of the staff dared to express his views until Sir Arthur asked for them.

Jeremy Stone felt under no obligation to keep silent, however. As a civilian he was free to speak his mind, and as one who was currently in favor with the governor general he had little to lose. And so while the officers maintained a respectful distance between themselves and the man who acted as William and Mary's viceroy Jeremy edged his mount closer to Sir Arthur.

"Your Excellency," he said, "I hope you won't think me forward for interrupting your thoughts, but I have something of an idea."

"You, Master Stone?" The governor general spoke absently.

"Yes, sir. I'm only an amateur student of war, but my father had considerable experience in the field and I learned much from him. And I'm more or less acquainted with artillery——"

"Unfortunately we have none," the older man replied dryly, never removing his eyes from the skirmishing figures in the distance. "I thank you for your good intentions, Master Stone, but I fear there is only one approach open to me. My brigade is a disciplined, cohesive unit, while the *boucaniers* are—shall we say?—specialists in individual combat. Although they are not lacking in personal valor, they have had little experience against trained troops. You'll pardon this little lecture in tactics, but perhaps you can understand now why the enemy will be most vulnerable if he is attacked by a unified force which strikes as one body."

"Won't the captured artillery create heavy casualties in the ranks of the brigade, Sir Arthur?"

"Yes, unfortunately." The governor general turned and beckoned to a lieutenant colonel, to whom he gave specific orders. The elements of the brigade were to be drawn up in battle order in five different streets approaching the palace; the cavalry was to be pulled back and held in reserve.

Jeremy, rebuffed, moved to the side of the road and kept out of the way while the maneuver was accomplished. He had not been given an opportunity to explain his thoughts but would try again at the right moment. His fingers touched the hilt of his sword, and he smiled quietly to himself. He had offered both the blade and pistol to Michael when the Maroon had been about to depart into the hills to tell his people of the pardon. But Michael had insisted that he keep the weapons, and Gabriel had agreed enthusiastically. The commander and Arnold, they had said, would want him to keep the Toledo blade and the slender pistol as an expression of their gratitude. Jeremy's prompt action in hastening to tell the governor

general of Jamaica about the conspiracy in Port Royal had doubtless saved many Maroon lives. And so the weapons were now his, the first he had actually owned since his arrest as an impostor.

A feeling of impotence stole over the young gunsmith, and he fingered the sword hilt nervously. King's House was the gateway to Port Royal, and Janine Groliere was in the town. He was consumed with worry over her, and only if the brigades could capture the palace would there be a chance to reach her. Anything might be happening to her, and it was vital, urgent that he be given the opportunity to fight his way to her side.

The sun broke through a layer of clouds, and the heat became more intense. In a few minutes now the command would be given for the brigade to begin its attack, and Jeremy roused himself. The chance to speak to Sir Arthur again had not come his way, so he would create his own opportunity. The governor general sat his horse fifty feet down the road; alone and pre-occupied, he was awaiting word that the battalions were in position. Taking a tight grip on the reins of his horse, Jeremy rode straight to him and pulled up short.

"Your Excellency," he said quickly, "as you're no doubt aware, the enemy range is short, and the heated shot they're aiming at us is merely setting fire to those flimsy houses on the near edge of the plaza."

"That is obvious, Master Stone," Sir Arthur snapped. "The fires will soon die out, and I shall then begin my attack. Be good enough to withdraw, sir."

The young gunsmith ignored the command. "I propose, Sir Arthur, that you wait until the flames are beginning to die, just before the buildings are gutted. Begin the attack then. If the men move fast enough, they won't be burned by the dying fires and the flames will act as a screen, as a protection for the troops. The enemy won't see them until they're within infantry range, and they can surely handle themselves satisfactorily against nothing stronger than musket fire. The enemy artillery can't be used at that short a range, for they might hit their own men."

The governor general's attention was captured now, and he frowned in concentration. "It might be possible," he conceded, "but on the other hand I'd be risking the burning alive of my own troops."

"The stratagem isn't original with me, Your Excellency," was the rapid rejoinder. "It was used about thirty years ago when the army of Savoy attacked Venice."

Sir Arthur listened, nodded, and fell silent. For several long seconds he did not move; his was the authority at stake, his

the trust of William and Mary to protect this distant corner of their empire, his the responsibility to live up to the obligations of high office. But at last he made up his mind. "Thank you, Master Stone," he said, and his voice was firm. "I shall accept your suggestion. It would appear that I am increasingly in your debt."

He turned to give the new tactical plan to his subordinate commanders, and Jeremy retired to the background. Although he longed to join actively in the fight against the wildly gesticulating, capering *boucaniers* on the King's House lawn, two of the colonels had already explained to him that strict regulations forbade a civilian from taking part in a military campaign. So for the moment he would have to content himself with the role of a mere onlooker.

The governor general watched the fires in the burning houses carefully, and at last the moment came when he decided that a man might dash through the screen of fire and smoke without injury. He gave the signal to advance, a single trumpet call sounded sharp and clear, and the battalions attacked.

When the *boucaniers*, some two to three hundred yards distant on the King's House lawn, saw the soldiers appearing through the flames, they promptly redoubled the rate of artillery fire. As a result approximately half the brigade, those units which were in rear positions, were pinned down. The leading companies managed to break through, however, and were too close to the enemy for the artillery fire to touch them. Veterans all, the infantrymen spread out, threw themselves to the ground just outside the ornamental fence that surrounded King's House and its spacious lawns, and opened a fierce musketry duel with the *boucaniers*.

Both groups were in exposed positions, and casualties were high inside the gates as well as out. The gallant little band besieged in King's House took on new courage, and the rate of musket fire from the windows increased. Thus the *boucaniers* were being hit simultaneously from the front and rear, and there were indications that they might be wavering. The first was a slackening in the artillery barrage, which lifted sufficiently for the remainder of the brigade's battalions to surge forward and take up positions in the plaza just outside the palace gates.

All at once the big guns fell completely silent, and Sir Arthur moved forward with the members of his staff, Jeremy among them. It was believed by several of the senior officers that the troops inside King's House were deliberately picking off those of the *boucaniers* who were manning the cannon; in any case and whatever the cause, the battle was being fought on more even terms now.

At this stage of the fight the governor general decided to employ his cavalry. A dozen volunteer infantrymen leaped to their feet and dashed to the broad gates. Although all but two of these loyal soldiers were killed, the portals were opened and the horsemen thundered through them, shooting as they rode. This was enough to complete the demoralization of the *boucaniers*, who took to their heels. Their rear guard could not be stampeded, however, and coolly maintained an insistent fire that prevented the cavalry from breaking through as the entire band of rebels retreated through the narrow streets of the more heavily populated sections of Port Royal.

The cavalymen and their mounts alike were too weary to take up organized pursuit, so the bulk of the *boucanier* force escaped to join the Duchess Caroline and the remainder of her supporters in the Citadel. Rebel outposts were set up on streets leading to the fort and were manned by sharpshooters. And as the Duchess had complete control of the harbor and all approaches to the town from the sea, the war was far from finished.

While Sir Arthur and Lady Bartlett enjoyed a brief reunion, strenuous efforts were made to remove the evidence of battle from the precincts of the palace. The wounded were taken to the barracks, where the surgeons and their assistants went to work at once. The dead were removed for burial, and the bodies of *boucaniers* were thrown into a common grave. Those of the brigade who were not assigned to other duties proved themselves to be experienced soldiers: they ate heartily and promptly took to their beds.

It was during the tidying of the King's House lawns that a sublieutenant made the discovery that so horrified the high command. The *boucaniers*, working efficiently and methodically, had spiked every piece of artillery on the palace grounds. Thus the problem of dislodging the pirates from the Citadel was increased, and the colonels despaired. The heavy stone walls had been built to withstand assault from every side, from the land as well as from the sea, and no responsible officer had any false illusions of potential victory now. It would require more than a military feat to oust Caroline and her men from the great fortress without artillery, for not one cannon could be operated.

Sir Arthur immediately cut short his reunion with his wife to study the situation. Captain Henry Thorne, the ranking artillery officer, walked at the governor general's side, and as they saw the evidence of the *boucaniers'* handiwork their depression grew.

The governor general went into conference with his military staff and with those of his civilian advisers who had survived

the initial assault of the rebels on the town. This latter group was considerably shrunken; there had been eight, but only the three who had fortunately been in King's House itself at the time Caroline and her cohorts had launched their attack still survived.

Time was all-important, for Sir Arthur could visualize a call being sent out from the fortress to the *boucanier* brotherhood scattered throughout the Caribbean. Jamacia was the richest plum in the tropics, and it was a certainty that vessels would sail from Hispaniola and Dominica to share the plunder and sack, kill, and loot at will. It was not a pretty picture, but none of the gentlemen could suggest an effective means of preventing the rape of the island. It would not even be possible to send for aid from Charles Towne on the North American mainland, for the huge guns of the Citadel could sink any ship that tried to slip out to sea and could prevent the landing of unfriendly troops.

It was at this juncture that a badly injured soldier was brought into the conference room. One of those who had remained in Port Royal when the brigade had gone off to the hills, he had been taken prisoner at the Citadel, tortured, and left for dead. Despite his painful wounds he had managed to escape, and with the help of friendly townspeople who had smuggled him past bands of roving *boucanier* patrols he had been brought to King's House. Now, with Sir Arthur and the other officials gathered around him, he gasped out his story.

The enemy, he said, was planning to launch a concentrated attack at eight o'clock the following morning. The *boucaniers* had reasoned that, although outnumbered, their forces were fresh while the men of the brigade were tired after their long march from the foothills of the Blue Mountains. Further, the Citadel would provide the rebels with a secure operational base from which they could make forays and to which they could retire if the battle should go against them. The brigade, on the other hand, would be forced to fight in the open.

The injured man was carried out, and Sir Arthur tried to curb the growing panic of his advisers. Methods and tactics were discussed fruitlessly and at great length, and at last tempers became frayed. Any interruption was therefore welcome to the majority of the council, who looked up in relief as Captain Thorne, the artillery officer, came into the chamber. Somewhat ill at ease in the presence of so many prominent and influential men, he advanced to Sir Arthur, and his face was red with embarrassment as he saluted.

"A thousand pardons for this intrusion, Your Excellency," he said, "but it appears that a way has been found to beat the insurrectionists."

The governor general raised an eyebrow. "You can do what this distinguished group cannot?"

"No, sir. Not I." He turned toward the open door behind him. "Will you come in, gentlemen?" he called.

Jeremy Stone and Dirk Friendly entered quickly, and their dirty, disreputable clothes contrasted sharply with the fine suits and freshly starched linen of the council. Sir Arthur looked up in amazement, and for an instant his eyes twinkled. "Well, Master Stone!" he said. "You seem to have developed an uncanny habit of appearing at a time when we need help the most. Don't tell me you have a scheme for blasting those damned rebels out of the Citadel without artillery!"

"No, sir. With artillery." Jeremy grinned.

"Unfortunately we lack the facilities and time to send our cannon to England for repairs."

"That may not be necessary, Your Excellency." Jeremy seemed very positive, very sure of himself. "Have I your permission to proceed?"

"You certainly have!" Sir Arthur was on his feet, and the members of the council were sitting up in their thickly padded chairs.

Dirk, unabashed at appearing before such a select group, raised his voice for the first time. "Up where we come from," he said mildly, "folks learn t' be just naturally nosy. So me 'n' Jerry here, we got a-talkin' t' Cap'n Thorne, and b'fore ye could spit cross-wind, he was a-takin' us around 'n' a-showin' us all them guns that the *boucaniers* went 'n' spoilt for ye."

"It so happens, Your Excellency," Jeremy cut in, "that my friend and I are gunsmiths by training and vocation. We have examined the weapons that the enemy attempted to destroy. However, in our opinion they had too little time to accomplish their purpose, and we believe we can repair the damage."

"Master Stone has outlined his plan to me, sir," Captain Thorne put in, "and it seems very logical. In fact, I think it might work."

"Can you place sufficient guns in operation by eight o'clock tomorrow morning to repulse a rebel attack, Master Stone?" The governor general's face looked tired and lined.

Dirk whistled. "Eight o'clock in the mornin'. That sure ain't a-givin' us much time."

Jeremy silenced the giant with a glance. "We'll do our best, Your Excellency."

"I'm sure you will."

"However, with such a time limit I shall need far more help than I had anticipated. In fact, I'll require your very active co-operation."

"You have it, young man!" To the astonishment of the council members, Sir Arthur strode over to the bedraggled young gunsmith and clapped him fondly on the shoulder.

"You'll give me one hundred and fifty, perhaps two hundred men, all of them prepared to work through the remainder of the day and the night, Your Excellency?"

Clearly Sir Arthur had not anticipated a request of such magnitude and for an instant he seemed staggered. "I think I can oblige you, though our force of effectives for tomorrow will be cut considerably. Men who labor all night do not make alert soldiers in the morning." He deliberated briefly, then added, "As I know a little something about artillery, perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me how you intend to employ my troops."

"Certainly, sir. If my memory serves me correctly, there are a large number of demi-cannon and culverins located in the Citadel. I inspected them at a time when I—ah—enjoyed your confidence as well as that of Her Grace of Glasgow. Those guns need not concern us in any way. They are emplaced in the stones of the fort, facing out to sea, and they therefore cannot be turned to face inland." He looked past the governor general at the inquiring faces of the council members. "A demi-cannon weighs more than four thousand pounds, gentlemen, and fires a thirty-two-pound ball. A culverin weighs approximately five thousand pounds and shoots an eighteen-pound ball. Both of these guns are about twelve feet long. And we need not fear that the Duchess can exert her charms to the extent that the muzzles of these weapons can be pointed in our direction."

Dirk Friendly jammed his hands into the pockets of his ragged trousers, and his bass voice filled the room. "Them sakers 'n' basilisks ye got right in yer own yard 'n' at the garrison, them is guns we c'n use for *sure*."

"That's right," Jeremy added confidently. "There are twenty sakers only partly damaged. With the right help I can have a number of them in operation again, perhaps by tomorrow morning." His voice grew in volume and authority. "A saker, gentlemen, is a comparatively small yet powerful gun. It weighs about fifteen hundred pounds, and it fires a six-pound ball with great force. We'll also do what we can with one or two of the basilisks on the parade ground, for I'm sure you'd find them useful in the event that it should be necessary for you to destroy a whole section of the Citadel with cannon fire. But I make you no promises with regard to the basilisks, Sir Arthur. They are ponderous guns, and I am handicapped by a lack of proper equipment as well as by time. However, I will do my

best and I hope to have some success before the enemy attacks."

By midnight the lawns of King's House looked as though a particularly devastating tropical hurricane had struck them. Teams of soldiers had dug a series of deep holes five feet long and almost as wide, and in these burned fires that were continually being fed by troopers. Other groups of perspiring men of the brigade labored with axes, knives, and even cutlasses to reduce hastily cut dead trees to kindling.

There were perhaps a dozen pits, and across each one was laid the barrel of a saker; as the cannon were six feet long, they extended beyond the lips of the holes and thus balanced themselves. At a point farthest from the palace, at the edge of the parade ground, there was a larger hole, almost twelve feet long, and across it was laid the incredibly heavy and thick barrel of a ponderous basilisk, a siege gun capable of hurling a twelve-pound shot.

Slowly the wrought iron of the gun barrels was being heated, and occasionally a soldier, anxious to hurry the process, would throw too many shavings on the fire in one of the pits. Then the flames would leap high, the outside of the gun barrel would become streaked with smoke, and in a few moments either Jeremy Stone or Dirk Friendly would appear and give the offender a tongue-lashing. The officer in charge of each pit, either a lieutenant or an ensign, would be told that an even fire was necessary, and the harried gunsmith would hurry off to the next crisis.

The wives of several senior officers accompanied Lady Bartlett on a tour of the premises, but the gentlewomen soon withdrew to the more comfortable though musket-scarred precincts of the palace, and for a valid reason. The men, tired to the point of exhaustion and disgruntled at being forced to labor like field slaves, grumbled and swore incessantly. For a time Sir Arthur strolled around the lawns, peering at the work and trying not to interfere. Unfortunately his very presence at a pit caused the crew at work there to jump to rigid attention, and after a time Jeremy suggested that the repairs might progress more smoothly and rapidly if the governor general would absent himself from the scene. This he did, rather grumpily.

Meanwhile, as the two gunsmiths went their separate ways, supervising the heating of the smooth-bored gun barrels and trying vainly to be everywhere at once, the members of the officers' corps who had nothing better to do stood together at the edge of the lawn and commented cynically on the scene of bedlam. They made no attempt to conceal their pessimistic

view that the operation was doomed and that men who would otherwise have been fit for combat would be useless in the morning. The one officer who seemed to believe in the gunsmiths was Captain Henry Thorne. Now, his uniform smoke-grimed and his face blackened, he hastily swallowed the last bite of a slab of cold roast beef and hurried to join Jeremy, who was standing before one of the saker barrels, holding a mug of liquid in his hand.

As the officer came up beside him, the young gunsmith dipped his fingers into the mug, carefully sprinkled a few drops onto the gun, then peered intently as the liquid sizzled and dried. "What's this, Stone?" the captain asked jocularly. "Wasting good rum?"

"No, Captain." Jeremy grinned. "It's only water, and the best test I know. When you've cast as many barrels as I have, you learn to judge the heat of the iron by the length of time it takes for a drop to dry on the metal." Again he let a little water fall onto the iron, then dropped to one knee and studied it carefully in the light of the fire's glare.

At last he arose, nodding in satisfaction. Captain Thorne swallowed some smoke, coughed, and backed away from the pit. A question loomed large in the officer's mind, but he hesitated before blurting it out. "What's your opinion, Stone? Can you do the trick and give me some guns to shoot by morning?"

"I think so. What I'm doing is pretty crude, but if I can make one out of three guns operable without ruining the bore, I'll be satisfied. You see, there's not much danger that these puny fires will actually melt the barrels, Captain. The iron is too tough for that. But they might just soften enough to let me pull out the metal strips that have been jammed into them, without my gouging into the bore. Oh, there may be a nick here and there—you see, a primer is made of harder metal than the cannon itself. But I don't believe that will really spoil your weapons."

"You think you can give me four sakers, perhaps?"

"Perhaps. Dirk is going to work on the basilisk, and I don't want to predict how he'll make out. A big gun like that is death to handle, but Dirk has had a considerable experience with even bigger. I've seen him turn out a seven-thousand-pound full cannon for harbor defense up in New York that couldn't be equaled—much less bettered—not anywhere."

The captain's eyes glowed. "Four sakers and the basilisk, that's all I ask of you. Give me five guns and I'll bring the rebels to heel myself, with my own batteries. The infantry can sit in their garrison on their arses, or if they're in a mood, they can watch the fireworks. They . . ." His voice dwindled away,

for he suddenly realized that Jeremy was no longer beside him. Something had happened at one of the pits, and a score of men were milling around it. The young gunsmith was sprinting to the scene of the commotion.

It was near dawn when Jeremy finally decided that the guns were sufficiently heated for an effort to be made to withdraw the bent metal primers from them. As the iron was too hot to be touched, he had devised long strips of *lignum vitae*, a particularly hard local wood, which had been soaked in water all night; the natural toughness of the wood, combined with the dampness, would, he hoped, prevent these poles from catching fire.

Each primer was approximately seven feet long, and at the end was a sheet of iron approximately four inches high and almost as wide. The *boucaniers* had jammed one of these into every small-mouthed saker, then had bent double the metal pole to which the plate was attached, thus preventing the withdrawal of the whole priming mechanism from the gun. It was Jeremy's intention to insert the *lignum vitae* pole between the lip of the gun mouth and the *u* where the iron pole was bent. Two men would kneel on either end of the short pole, as close to the hot saker barrel as they could come without burning themselves, and would gently pry the primer out.

Sir Arthur, the members of his staff, and even a few of the ladies came trooping out to the lawn. All appeared haggard, but that did not prevent the civilians from chatting with their feminine companions in loud and penetrating voices. Jeremy, who was making a final water-drop test, glanced up in irritation and peremptorily ordered everyone not directly concerned with the operation to leave the immediate area. The governor general, smiling faintly, set the example and withdrew a discreet distance. The members of his suite followed at once.

Jeremy had decided to take the position closest to the saker on one side, and Captain Thorne had volunteered for the inside place on the other. Two sergeants, chosen for their brawn as well as their ability to follow orders quickly, lined up behind them, and all was in readiness. Jeremy peered across the gun at the captain, and both squinted because of the extreme brightness of the fire.

"When I push this wood stick through, Captain," the young gunsmith directed, "let it slide for a second. Then you and the sergeant take hold—and hang on tight. My sergeant and I will tug first, then you do the same. We'll try to establish some sort of rhythm if we can, slow at first and faster, much faster, a bit later. I'll set the tempo. And remember, pull the stick to you, not up and down." A cloud of smoke made his eyes smart, but he paid no attention to the fumes. "Keep the

stick level, pull straight to your right, and most important of all—don't jerk it. If you do, the bore could be ruined. Am I clear?"

"You are." Thorne's face looked ghostly in the firelight.

"All right. We'll try it. Hand me a *lignum vitae* rod, someone."

He received the stick, which had just been lifted from a wooden tub of water, and slipped it into the narrow opening between the gun mouth and the twisted primer. Captain Thorne took hold of the other end, and Jeremy assumed that the other's sergeant had also laid his hands on it. He could feel rather than see that the man behind him had gripped it.

"Now!" he breathed, and slowly pushed to the right with all his force, praying that the wood would not crack or break. It held, though he could not feel the primer budge. "Yours!" he called, relaxing slightly as Captain Thorne and his assistant exerted pressure on the rod. "Yours! Ours! Yours! Ours!"

For five minutes the strange tug of war continued, then suddenly the primer moved a fraction of an inch. Jeremy, coughing and blinded by streams of perspiration that ran down his forehead into his eyes, immediately increased the pace. "Yours! Ours!"

It seemed as though an eternity passed; actually it was no more than two minutes when the primer, still attached to its metal plate, came free and sent the four men sprawling on the ground.

There was no time for Jeremy to enjoy his triumph, and he scrambled to his feet. "Put out the fire in this pit!" he roared.

Men who had been held in readiness for this task immediately lifted large wooden tubs of water and doused the flames. At Jeremy's direction they then poured still more water onto the wrought-iron gun barrel. A cheer went up from the on-lookers, but Jeremy shook his head angrily; he still had to determine whether the saker had been injured beyond possible immediate repair. With Captain Thorne crowding close to him, he again dropped to his knees and inserted the lighted end of a long French taper into the mouth of the gun. Slowly, methodically, he examined the bore. There were a few small scrapes where the metal plate had been jammed and a scratch on the interior surface where the metal square had pulled loose, but that was all.

Withdrawing the candle and extinguishing it, he grinned at the artillery officer. "There's nothing wrong with this saker now that a few rounds of shot won't cure, Captain," he said. "But if I were you I wouldn't try any heated iron in it for the next hour." Solemnly they shook hands, and Jeremy gave explicit instructions to the crew: they were to continue to

bathe the barrel in cold water and were to stop only when the iron was cool enough to be touched with a bare hand.

Then, without a pause for rest, he and his three helpers moved on to the next pit and began the operation all over again. For one and a half hours they labored, and at the end of that time there were five sakers ready for use. Three others had been damaged beyond any hope of repair and required complete recasting. The remainder might eventually respond to the treatment that Jeremy had prescribed, but he was wasting no more effort on them now. There were enough sakers to permit the brigade to utilize artillery in repulsing the rebels' forthcoming attack, and he was satisfied.

Meantime Dirk Friendly had accomplished a near miracle with the ponderous basilisk. A careful blending of force and skill had restored the big gun to an almost perfect condition, and Dirk insisted it was capable of blowing gaping holes in the masonry of the fortress. The basilisk, accurately fired, had been known to sink a heavy frigate unaided, and no sooner did the word spread that one of these monsters had been repaired than every artilleryman clamored for the opportunity to serve on her crew. It would be some hours before the barrel of the basilisk cooled sufficiently for it to be put into operation, but there was every possibility now that some of the sakers would be in working order in time to stop the *boucanier* attack.

It was after seven o'clock when Jeremy and Dirk sat down at the edge of one of the gun pits for a few minutes of rest, and they let their legs dangle into the pit as they breakfasted on slabs of cold beef and bread, washed down with pitchers of ale. Both were tired, but more than fatigue clouded their eyes, and they ate in silence for some time. The giant chewed reflectively on a chunk of meat, yawned, and looked across the ruined lawn toward the town.

"Jerry, m' lad," he said at last, "it'll be a wonder for sure if one o' them there sakers don't explode when we test it."

Jeremy wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "I doubt if there'll be any explosions, Dirk. I've gone over every one of the guns, and they all look sound to me. All the same, I hope Captain Thorne's batterymen know their business."

"Me too." Dirk swallowed a large quantity of ale, then thumped his pitcher on the ground. The topic that was foremost in his mind was coming to the surface. "S'pose the sakers are all right 'n' we stop the attack. After that, d' ye reckon we could sneak past the *boucanier* outposts? We might march right up t' 'em, bold as ye please, 'n' tell 'em we was a-wantin' t' see her high 'n' mightiness, the Duchess. Then they might take ye t' her. Ye could make up somethin' or other in

that there fancy talk ye use. Ye could keep 'em busy, ye see, 'n' that'd give me time t' be a-doin' other things."

Carefully finishing a loaf of bread, Jeremy glanced at him obliquely. "What other things?"

"Mostly Esther Mary 'n' Janine—'n' I'm scairt. I don't scare easy, but I'm scairt. After the way we ran out o' that Duchess o' Glasgow's rooms, she sure don't like us much. 'N' if'n she finds out it was us fixed up these cannon, she's like t' be in a right smart tizzy over us. So she might try t' take out her spleen on Esther Mary 'n' Janine. If'n I ever seen a wench just a-brimmin' over with nastiness, it's her high 'n' mightiness. She's mean right through, 'n' the only one that's meaner is that Scots shadow o' her'n."

Dirk's words merely underlined Jeremy's own concern, and his jaw jutted forward. Through the long hours of the night he had never ceased to be tormented by thoughts of what might be happening to Janine Groliere. The harder he worked, the wilder his imagination had become, and only the constant exercise of will power had prevented him from dropping everything and racing into the town to seek her, sword in hand.

Such a course of action would be foolhardy, however, and he knew it. Now, of all times, he needed to discipline himself. There was no other way he could help Janine. And he knew how easily he could influence Dirk, so he would have to be careful in his choice of words to his friend, who was awaiting his reply.

Jeremy stood up and started to brush the crumbs from his trousers but gave up when he saw how filthy and tattered they were. "I'll be honest with you too, Dirk. I'm as worried over Janine and Esther Mary as you are, but if we try to sneak through the enemy lines to them we're likely to do them no good and ourselves a great deal of harm. There are only two of us—and a lot of *boucaniers*. My one hope is that they're safe in Reverend Pennywell's house and that they'll continue to be safe until the brigade frees the town."

"Trouble with ye, ye're still too much o' a gentleman for yer own good. Ye don't rightly think them scum will respect a minister's house, d'ye? Sizzlin' Jehos'phat! Them *boucaniers* has been known t' cut the heart right out o' men o' the cloth, Jerry! B'lieve me, if'n the Duchess says they're t' go fetch Esther Mary 'n' Janine, ye don't think they'll——"

"Yes, I do. At least that's what I'm counting on. You've forgotten that Reverend Pennywell has many friends, Dirk. He knows practically every *boucanier* who has ever visited this island, and they all respect him. What's more, they like Esther Mary. I don't know why she's allowed to wear that *boucanier*

belt of hers, but that might be an indication that they won't molest either of the girls."

Dirk looked straight ahead. "It so happens I know about that there belt. So ye might be right. Anyways, it won't do us good t' stay here 'n' worry. Let's see if them sakers is cool enough t' test yet."

They found that two of the small cannon, though still warm, could now be fired, and a chosen crew working under the close supervision of the gunsmiths loaded the weapons. Only half an hour remained before the rebel attack was expected to begin, and there was no time to lose. Because of the possibility that one or the other of the cannon might explode, all except those participating in the test were kept at a distance of one hundred feet. At last the crucial moment arrived, and a hush settled over the observers. A lighted straw was applied to one saker, and after a split second's pause there was a sharp, gratifying roar.

The onlookers cheered, then the second gun was fired with equal success. Captain Thorne beamed with pleasure but did not pause to offer his congratulations to the gunsmiths. He immediately ordered full crews to man both sakers, and within a few moments heavy iron balls were being catapulted through the air in the direction of the Citadel. Trained artillerymen standing in makeshift towers which had been erected in the tops of the tallest trees ordered changes in elevation and range and at last announced that the missiles were striking the target.

The time of the planned rebel attack came and went without incident. The artillery had ruined the insurrectionists' timetable, and the initiative passed over to the Crown troops.

Two more repaired sakers were being dragged into position for tests when Sir Arthur Bartlett strode onto the lawn. Unaccompanied, he wore a fresh uniform, but there were deep smudges of black under his eyes. He walked straight to Jeremy and Dirk and shook hands with them warmly. "You young men have saved this colony," he said in a voice husky from lack of sleep, "and there is nothing I can or will withhold from you. What can I do for you?"

Dirk was the first to answer. "We got to test the rest o' these here guns, Guv'nor. After that I'd sure appreciate a soft feather mattress for an hour or two."

"You are both my guests here at King's House," Sir Arthur responded at once, then turned to Jeremy, his tired eyes bright. "And you, Master Stone. Can an eternally grateful Crown viceroy offer you anything more than a soft pallet?"

Grinning appreciatively, Jeremy replied in a quiet voice, "Let me ask you a question in return, Your Excellency. It would seem as though the rebel drive has been stopped before

it could start. Now, assuming that we can put several more sakers into commission—perhaps the basilisk, too—when will you attack the rebels?”

Although the governor general had no desire to reveal his most important military secrets, he could not conceal them from men who had contributed so much. “I hope the artillery will soften the enemy sufficiently so the infantry assault can commence by high noon tomorrow.”

“I see. Then—will you permit me to take part in that attack?”

Sir Arthur straightened, his tired eyes flashing with both pleasure and pride. “Nothing gives me greater joy than to offer you the rank of senior lieutenant in Their Majesties’ brigade, Master Stone. And after the battle, when you have comported yourself as I have no doubt you shall, it will be my further privilege to grant you a permanent commission as a captain. England has few subjects whose worth equals yours, sir, and I want the whole realm to know and recognize your value!”

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN :

# June 6, 1692

FOR twenty-six hours the guns repaired by Jeremy Stone and Dirk Friendly pounded the rebel-held Citadel, and observers stationed in hastily constructed observation platforms atop towering gwango trees reported that the fortress was absorbing considerable punishment. Several gaping holes had appeared in the masonry after the batterymen of Captain Thorne first found their range, and these breaks were skillfully widened as round after round of heated iron shot was hurled at the insurrectionists. There was little that Caroline and her trapped cohorts could do at the moment but dig in and suffer the abuse being inflicted on them. Eventually the artillery barrage would be lifted, and there remained a chance that enough of the heavy walls and bulwarked turrets of the Citadel would still be standing to permit the defenders to repel the Crown brigade’s infantry charge.

There was no other hope for the *boucaniers*, however, and both sides knew it. No reinforcements had sailed into the harbor to join the ranks of the rebels, and Sir Ian MacGregor, the Duchess’s field general, did not now dare to order his

forces to sally forth from the Citadel and attack. The outlook for the would-be creators of a new empire in the West was at best dim, but it was too late to call off the enterprise, and every man on both sides realized all too well that a bloody hand-to-hand battle was in prospect.

It was conceivable that the *boucaniers*, if decisively beaten, might escape via their ships which rode at anchor in the Port Royal roads, and the governor general and his staff believed that the big, immovable cannon facing out toward the Caribbean from the Citadel had already been spiked. The conferees at King's House knew that the one warship permanently stationed in Jamaica, the *Duke of York*, was intact in the harbor, but it was likely that the *boucaniers* had murdered her commanding officer and crew, and in any case, there was little that a small vessel could do against the towering, heavily armed ships of the pirates.

The infantry battalions were ordered to fight through to the sea wall of the fortress as rapidly as possible, to cut off all avenues of escape, and to kill or capture as many of the enemy as possible. Sir Arthur Bartlett issued specific instructions that the Duchess of Glasgow and members of her personal entourage were to be taken alive, and detailed descriptions of Caroline herself, of Sir Ian and Lord Murray were read to the troops.

Refreshed after a long night's sleep and plentiful servings of hot food, the infantry was ready for anything. The rebels held a strong outpost line in the town's most solidly constructed buildings on the High Street, and these bastions had not been reduced by artillery because of the damage that heavy gunfire would cause among the inhabitants of Port Royal. The cavalry was to charge these rebel positions and wipe them out, following which the infantry was to march quickly through Port Royal and assault the battered ramparts of the fortress.

The men stood in solid ranks on the churned lawn of King's House, with the cavalry troopers in formation ahead of them. Now that the hour to strike had come, there was a tense silence. Even these hardened veterans knew that the task ahead of them was as dangerous as it was difficult and that many would die before the ensign of William and Mary again fluttered over the ruins of the Citadel. Muskets and bayonets had been inspected, ammunition and powder had been passed out, and the commanders of platoons had explained in infinite detail the tactics, the order of battle, and the timetable. All was in readiness.

Jeremy Stone had been given his commission, and he stood now near the head of the first battalion of infantry, resplendent in a uniform borrowed from Captain Thorne, the artillery-

man. The trappings on the gaudy scarlet tunic gleamed in the Jamaican sunlight, and the heavy, burnished brass hat caused rivers of sweat to run down his face and into his collar, but he was excited and happy. Every few seconds his right hand touched the hilt of his Toledo blade, and he waited impatiently for the trumpet call that would silence the artillery and send the rest of the brigade into action. He glanced at the horsemen drawn up in straight rows directly ahead of him and felt a twinge of envy. He had pleaded with the governor general to allow him to join the mounted troops, but the horsemen had been trained as a unit, and the perfection of their operation would be marred by the presence in their ranks of someone unfamiliar with the intricacies of their maneuvers. Had he ridden with the cavalry, he would have had the opportunity to stop briefly at the Pennywell home to see whether Janine Groliere was alive and unharmed; now the battle would of necessity come first, and personal matters would have to wait.

Lounging nearby was Dirk Friendly, who had objected to donning a sergeant's uniform but had finally succumbed when it had been patiently explained to him that if he wore civilian attire he would undoubtedly be mistaken for a *boucanier* and would assuredly become a target for a brigade man's musket. Wearing a scarlet tunic several sizes too small, he leaned against the King's House fence, chewing a blade of grass as he stroked the barrel of a long frontiersman's rifle. The source of that rifle was something of a mystery; Dirk had complained that he felt at home with no other weapon, had then disappeared for two hours, and had come back to the barracks with the rifle carefully tucked under his arm. Over his left shoulder was slung a powder horn, and from his belt dangled three pouches of bullets which he had carefully made for himself through the long hours of the hot June morning. His usually mild blue eyes burned with an intense fever, and his seemingly relaxed position did not fool Jeremy, who grinned at him.

Conversation was impossible above the booming of the artillery, and Jeremy shifted impatiently from one foot to the other, stamping his feet in his highly polished army boots and secretly wishing he were wearing more comfortable footwear. Nearby stood Lieutenant Andrew Wolford, commander of the first platoon of the First Battalion, who had resented Jeremy when he had been informed that the young gunsmith was to be attached to his unit but had calmed down somewhat when he had subsequently learned that his own authority was in no way lessened.

Lieutenant Wolford's gaze lingered on Jeremy, and the reason was obvious. It was customary for officers to carry no weapons other than their swords, and the lieutenant con-

sidered it both unorthodox and ungentlemanly for the new arrival to wear a dueling pistol in his belt and a *boucanier* long-dagger in a sheath strapped to his right side. Jeremy knew what the other was thinking and smiled blandly. The coming fight was more than a routine military operation to him, and he was completely indifferent to Lieutenant WOLFORD's opinions.

Suddenly the long-awaited call of a half score of trumpets floated above the booming of the cannon, and an instant later the big guns became still. The silence was strange, but the pause was brief; the officers shouted commands and the brigade was on the move. The horsemen rapidly outdistanced the foot soldiers, and soon disappeared in the maze of streets leading toward the center of Port Royal.

Within a few minutes the dry bark of muskets filled the air. Jeremy, marching a half pace behind Lieutenant WOLFORD at the head of the platoon, raised his eyebrows and whispered to Dirk, who trudged stolidly beside him. "The rebels in the High Street are giving as good as they're getting."

The giant answered out of the side of his mouth carefully, mindful of the prohibition against talking in the ranks. "I reckon there'll be enough of 'em left for ye 'n' me t' take a few cracks at 'em," he muttered.

However, by the time the First Battalion arrived at the High Street, the nests of *boucanier* outposts had been demolished, and the cavalry was in complete command of the situation. Several riders were already on their way to the rear with a group of bloody and disconsolate prisoners, who marched sullenly, their hands high above their heads and their faces reflecting the sure knowledge that they would be hanged. The bulk of the cavalry waited impatiently, and as soon as the infantry made its appearance, discipline was momentarily relaxed while the men exchanged coarse but good-natured insults. Shuttered houses and boarded shops which had been seemingly deserted came to life, and the citizens of Port Royal appeared in the windows and doorways of their homes to cheer the troops.

As soon as the infantry re-formed in the High Street, the mounted escort wheeled smartly and started at a trot in the direction of the Citadel. Although Sir Ian MacGregor had set up outposts in depth, his undisciplined *boucaniers*, who had no desire to be caught in small, isolated groups, refused to hold their advanced positions and fell back to join the main body in the fortress.

Platoon leaders bawled commands, and the men jogged forward at double time, their muskets at the ready, bayonets glinting. As they approached the wharf area, the results of the

heavy bombardment became evident; here and there a shot had fallen short and had crashed through the roof of a flimsy house. At last the Citadel itself came into view, and the once proud building was in places no more than a high pile of rubble. Other sections were more or less intact, including three high turrets. A blast of musket and rifle fire greeted the brigade.

A barrier of stones and tree logs had been placed across the main entrance to the fort, blocking the path of the cavalry, and accurate fire from the Citadel's turrets forced the riders to turn aside. The brigade's high command had foreseen such a development, however. While the defenders inside the Citadel continued to fire at the cavalry, who moved carefully just out of musket range, the infantry moved in at a dead run.

The startled *boucaniers* were forced to reload their weapons, and by that time various squads had gained a foothold on the rubble and were scrambling over the jumbled piles of heavy, broken stones. Lieutenant Wolford led his unit toward a gaping hole in the wall of the fort. Jeremy was directly behind him, and the young gunsmith discovered, somewhat to his surprise, that he had his sword in his hand and that he was shouting at the top of his voice as he slid and stumbled over the debris. There were shots from the men behind him, and the rebels in the windows and sally ports above were beginning to respond. Bullets whined overhead and to the left, but Jeremy no longer cared.

His sense of fear, his nervous anticipation gave way to a strange, almost savage exuberance. This was the first battle in which he had ever engaged, and if luck went against him it would be his last, but he did not care. Cursing, laughing, not really knowing what he was saying or why he was saying it, he dashed on, overwhelmed by the primitive urge to conquer. He passed through the gap in the wall, and most of the platoon tumbled through after him.

Breathless, they followed Lieutenant Wolford to an outside winding staircase that led to a tower directly overhead, and ran up the stairs at top speed. The platoon presented a difficult target for the rebels, as the *boucaniers* were forced to lean far out of the turret in order to aim and thus made perfect targets. Meantime the Second Battalion had arrived on the scene, and so many soldiers were now making a concerted rush on the Citadel that the rattled insurgents did not know where to shoot first.

The confusion saved lives on both sides, for the Second Battalion was ordered to hold its fire, the senior officers having quickly sensed that a volley would kill more brothers-in-arms than it would the enemy. Meantime the cavalry had broken up

into two units and ridden to either side of the Citadel, where the troopers dismounted and took up positions along the waterfront. Theirs was to be the task of preventing the escape of the *boucaniers* by small boat to the ships anchored in the Caribbean, and they set to work immediately, unslinging their muskets as they fanned out. Several of the more daring cavalymen crawled along the wall with the intent of cutting the ropes that held the boats, and as the enemy was fully occupied with the onrushing infantry, the maneuver went unnoticed.

Lieutenant Wolford reached the top of the stairs and plunged under a low arch into the Citadel. Jeremy, slightly breathless from the frenzied climb but still shouting, was directly behind him. The dueling pistol that had been in the young gunsmith's belt was in his hand now, and his sword flashed in a wide arc as he leaped into a large tower room. There were perhaps thirty *boucaniers* at the windows, and they turned savagely on the invaders who thrust in on them. No more than twenty of the platoon had succeeded in reaching the top, but theirs was the advantage of swift advance, and they rushed the enemy before a unified defense could be organized. What was more, the soldiers had Dirk Friendly in their midst, and the big American had become a roaring demon, or so he seemed to the dazed crew of cutthroats. Holding the muzzle of his long rifle in both hands, he wielded the heavy oak butt like a club as he advanced, and his deep bellow echoed and re-echoed against the stone walls of the chamber.

The giant hurled himself at a group of three men and immediately was engaged in a violent brawl with them. A few musket and pistol shots sounded, but it was almost impossible to fire at such close quarters without endangering the life of a friend, and a series of fierce individual hand-to-hand combats quickly developed. Jeremy found himself looking into the muzzle of a clumsy horse pistol held by a red-faced, bearded brute with small, inflamed eyes. Before the *boucanier* could fire, the young gunsmith's sword flicked out delicately, and a stream of blood spurted from the man's throat. He tried to cry out but gagged, then slipped in his own blood and fell senseless to the stone floor.

Someone called for help, and Jeremy wheeled around to see Lieutenant Wolford hemmed in by two rebels who were hammering at him with their muskets. He was trying to defend himself with his sword, but his opponents were obviously old hands at this type of fighting, for they evaded his thrusts as they closed in on him. Before Jeremy could come to his assistance one of them landed a vicious blow on the side of his head, and the lieutenant crumpled.

It was impossible to miss a shot at this short a distance, and Jeremy fired point-blank at the nearer of the *boucaniers*, who died instantly. The other man whirled quickly to meet the challenge, but Jeremy, still moving, ran him through before he could raise his musket.

The battle for possession of the tower chamber ended as abruptly as it had begun. The fierce drive of the platoon had been victorious, though at a heavy cost: at least six men of the unit were lying dead on the floor, and two others were wounded, one of them seriously. No more than ten of the thirty *boucaniers* had survived the attack, however, and although they now stood with their hands high above their heads, they nervously eyed Dirk Friendly, who growled something unintelligible as he moved slowly toward them, his rifle still gripped in his hands.

"No, Dirk!" Jeremy called sharply. "Those men are now prisoners!"

At the sound of his voice the big American stopped, turned, and grinned foolishly, then rested his rifle butt on the floor and for the first time looked around and took in the scene. Jeremy turned to the platoon's junior officer, a pink-cheeked young ensign whose name he had forgotten. "You there, mister! Arrange for an escort for these prisoners, and see that they are sent below. And dispatch a messenger to the brigade major. Be good enough to give him my compliments and tell him that this tower is now securely in our hands."

The youth hastened to obey, and for an instant Jeremy thrilled to the recognition that he was now the commanding officer of the platoon. This awakened him to his responsibilities to Lieutenant Wolford, and he hurried to the officer's side and knelt down. The lieutenant was breathing evenly though he was unconscious, and after examining him Jeremy felt that he would survive the blow.

It suddenly seemed abominably hot in the tower chamber, and the young gunsmith opened the collar of his tunic and moved to the window. Perhaps it was the heat that affected him, perhaps the sight of so many dead. He knew only that he felt weary beyond measure and more than a little queasy in the pit of his stomach. He stared out of the window at the cloudless blue sky, then down at the troops milling around outside the Citadel. The sounds of firing from the battlements and turrets seemed to have eased, and he wondered dully if the whole battle was ending.

Dirk approached him and touched his arm. "Jerry," the big man said softly, "there's more sojers a-comin' in. They say the fightin' is near over, exceptin' that Sir Ian MacGregor is still

a-holdin' out somewheres. Seein' ye're the head o' this here platoon now, what d'ye want us'ns t' do?"

Glancing up, Jeremy saw the troops of the Second Battalion filing under the arch, stepping carefully as they gazed with morbid curiosity into the faces of the dead. Command carried with it a responsibility, and Jeremy straightened. Buttoning his collar, he murmured, "Thanks, Dirk," and hurried to an inner door, which was shut. Raising the bolt, he peered down a dark corridor that apparently led to another tower. From somewhere in the gloom there came the muffled sounds of musket shots, the sharper retorts of pistols, and the young gunsmith shook himself. Although his men had seen combat and those of the other battalion had not, he was reluctant to let the initiative pass to others. If Sir Ian MacGregor was engaging in a last stand, Jeremy wanted the privilege of capturing him.

"First Platoon, First Battalion," he called, surprised by the hoarseness of his own voice, "follow me!"

He plunged into the dark corridor, and the remaining men of the platoon rallied behind him, Dirk in the lead. Ahead there was a maze of passageways, but Jeremy let himself be guided by the sound of firing, which became increasingly loud as he darted first to the left, then left again, then to the right. The men behind him began to shout, and in the narrow, inky corridor the noise reverberated loudly.

The heavy cannonading of the morning and the previous afternoon had jarred loose some of the stones in the flooring, and Jeremy's boot toe struck smartly against a raised slab. A pain shot up his leg. He stumbled and fell to one knee, and the men of the platoon raced past him. Rising, he hobbled after them around a bend, but by the time his leg felt normal they were at least twenty feet ahead of him; although he could no longer see them, he could hear their thick-soled army shoes slapping against the stones.

Now, a few feet to his right, he noticed an inner staircase, and as he glanced toward it a tall figure muffled in a long cloak started down the steps. There was something so furtive, so reminiscent about the way the man moved that Jeremy paused. On quick reflection he realized that it was extraordinary for any man to be wearing a cloak on so hot a day, and without further ado he moved toward the stairs. "You there!" he called, certain that he would recognize the harsh voice of the Scots chamberlain to the Duchess of Glasgow.

There was no reply, but the light sound of the man's hurrying footsteps echoed up the well. Gripping his sword, Jeremy impulsively followed him. It was so dark that he had to feel his way, and occasionally he touched the wall for support. The

stones were damp to the touch, so he reasoned that the stairs must be close to the outer sea wall of the Citadel. When he reached the bottom of the steps, a black tunnel stretched out ahead of him, so low that he had to bend almost double as he ran blindly, his left hand stretched out protectively in front of him.

It seemed logical that this dank corridor was a little-used exit from the Citadel. The air was cool and damp but stale, and tiny scraping noises indicated the presence of rats. Jeremy had no idea where the tunnel was leading, but he had already come a considerable distance and he knew that the passage must end somewhere. It did, with unexpected suddenness. The young gunsmith rounded a sharp corner and saw daylight directly ahead.

He came out into the open, and standing ten feet away, waiting for him, was Sir Ian MacGregor. The Scotsman had discarded his cloak; his sword was in his right hand and a cocked pistol in his left. As he recognized Jeremy a hard light came into his eyes and he laughed harshly.

Jeremy looked about wildly. The north outer wall of the Citadel was one hundred and fifty or more feet behind him. The tunnel had opened onto a high-walled courtyard from what appeared to be an innocent one-story stone warehouse, which itself made up one wall. Only the sea side was open and unprotected, and the gentle waters of the Caribbean lapped against the cobbled flooring which extended to the shore line. The two men were completely alone, sealed off in an area that was perhaps twenty feet long and approximately half as wide.

Cursing himself for having failed to reload his own pistol, Jeremy knew that he was helpless. Worst of all, Sir Ian was enjoying the moment, and the knowledge further enraged the young gunsmith. It was bad enough that he was about to die; that his own stupid carelessness had contributed to his downfall made the situation doubly bitter.

"So we met again, impostor—for the last time." The Scotsman savored each word. "This is an unexpected pleasure. Our failure to achieve the brightest dream of this age is due as much to your perfidy as to any other cause." His hand was steady, and the pistol remained pointed at Jeremy. "It gives me even greater joy than you can imagine to see you wearing the uniform of William and Mary. I dare say that your choice of colors seemed a wise one to you when you made it. On the other hand, had you thrown in your lot with us you would have toasted a great victory with us on this very night. As it is, I fear you will dine instead in hell."

Jeremy tried to assume a dignified stance. "What has become of the Duchess?" he asked, dismayed that his voice sounded in his own ears like a hoarse croak.

Sir Ian shrugged indifferently. "Caroline and Tom Murray and I gambled for the highest stakes on earth," he said idly, as though the subject bored him. "I put my fortune into the enterprise and Tom risked the Murray estates. We've gambled—and we've lost. So have you, impostor. Ah well. Is there anything you'd like to say before I put an end to your miserable existence?"

"Yes, MacGregor, there is. You may go to blazes."

"No, my brazen charlatan. That is where I am consigning you. Now." The Scotsman, still smiling sardonically, squeezed the trigger of his pistol. There was a faint spark, but the weapon did not fire. Jeremy instantly lunged across the intervening distance, quickly transferring his blade to his left hand. Sir Ian hurriedly cocked the pistol again with his thumb and again pulled the trigger, but for the second time there was no explosion. He hurled the useless pistol wildly, and the young gunsmith ducked. It passed harmlessly over his head, struck the stone wall behind him, and bounced on the cobblestones.

"Perhaps we can conclude a little disagreement that was once interrupted on board the *Bonnie Maid*," Jeremy suggested, leaping forward and thrusting.

The baronet was ready for him, parried neatly, and in almost the same movement thrust wickedly at the younger man's face.

Jeremy danced out of reach, testing the cobbles with the soles of his boots. Dried salt spray gave the stones a gritty feel, so the footing seemed fairly secure. That would be a help, for in a duel that was unwitnessed he knew Sir Ian would resort to any trick. He knew, too, that in any prolonged match the baronet would be a sure winner, for his reach was slightly longer and his physical strength was greater.

So he planned carefully, trying to co-ordinate his over-all tactics in advance. Meanwhile he tried to keep out of the Scotsman's way and retreated slowly, his sword high. To his surprise Sir Ian moved in viciously for a kill, and Jeremy was delighted as he realized that his enemy wanted to end the affair in a hurry too. That made sense, for they might be discovered here at any time, and the rebel chamberlain to a traitorous duchess would be taken prisoner instantly by any Crown troops who found him.

Thus Sir Ian was playing Jeremy's own game, and steel rang against steel as their blades crossed and struck, touched again and slid apart. For an instant the eyes of the two men met, and the young gunsmith read deadly hatred and absolute

purpose in his opponent's glance. The afternoon heat was oppressive almost beyond endurance; the sun was shining brightly and the atmosphere was stifling, with no motion of air.

Both were perspiring heavily, and Jeremy longed for an opportunity to shed the tunic of his uniform. He had no chance to pause long enough to open a single button, however, as a rhythm of thrust and parry, slash and riposte was quickly established, and if either man faltered it would certainly be his finish. Sir Ian was combining brute force with skill, and Jeremy needed all of his knowledge and experience as a swordsman to keep the prying, insistent point of the Scotsman's blade from his heart, his throat, his face.

Neither could maintain the present pace for very long, and Jeremy decided to risk everything on a maneuver his father had taught him long ago. He slowly allowed himself to be pulled out of a proper guard position, or so it seemed. His sword moved farther and farther to the left, leaving his defense wide open. He could sense Sir Ian's growing confidence, and when the baronet struck, Jeremy was ready. He whipped his sword back into line, slipped inside the other's lunge, and drove straight and true at the Scotsman's heart.

Sir Ian's sword fell to the cobbles, and he stood for a moment swaying, astonishment and hatred showing on his face. Then he fell to the stones, dead.

At that instant there was a long, shuddering movement of the earth that knocked Jeremy backward. The ground heaved convulsively, then opened up in a wide, jagged gap, revealing a murky, black hole. It closed again a moment later in another violent surge, and Sir Ian's body was gone, swallowed up by the land itself.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN:

# June 6, 1692

WHEN doubt no longer existed as to the outcome of the battle for the Citadel and those *boucaniers* who had not been killed began to surrender in large numbers, Sir Arthur Bartlett left the mopping-up operation in the hands of subordinates and returned to King's House. With him went several of his aides, and it was the decision of the governor general to leave the scene of the fight that undoubtedly saved his life

when the earthquake struck Port Royal. A raw, gaping crack appeared in the face of the earth at the very spot where Sir Arthur had sat his horse, watching the progress of the battle, and the lieutenant colonel and two majors who had taken over this vantage point were swallowed up alive.

Sir Arthur did not know there had been a quake, for he sat in his study, beginning his preliminary report to the King and Queen, and his mind was so filled with his victory over the rebels that he did not see the pictures on his walls shake and the *objets d'art* on tables tremble. He paused now and again in his writing and wondered how soon the Duchess of Glasgow and her confederates would be hauled before him, for he would then be faced with the decision of whether to confine Her Grace to a room in King's House pending her return to England under guard or whether to throw her into prison. The Stuarts were no strangers to prisons, but none of them had even been held in so squalid and mean a hole as the Royal Penitentiary of Port Royal.

Of all the thousands of human beings on the tiny peninsular projection of the main body of Jamaica, the governor general was probably the only one who did not know of the catastrophe. Elsewhere there was terror, chaos, and death.

Jeremy Stone was numb, unable to believe the evidence of his own eyes. He had killed Sir Ian MacGregor in a fair duel, then the earth had opened and had eaten the dead man. Part of the wall behind the young gunsmith had fallen and resembled a miniature mountain of rubble. The forces of nature had done more destruction in a few seconds than artillery had accomplished in many hours. An instinct for self-preservation led Jeremy to climb up onto the rubble, and from there he made his way to the roof of the single-storied warehouse from which he had emerged into the daylight only a few minutes before. Some order was beginning to grow out of the confusion in his mind, and he was obsessed with the idea of finding Janine Groliere. At this instant nothing mattered to him but her safety, and he thought that from the roof he might be able to see the Pennywell house and to discover whether or not it still stood. As he peered over the jumbled mass of caved-in roofs and broken supports, tumbled walls and skeletons of what had been homes and shops, he could distinguish almost nothing. Familiar landmarks had disappeared, and in their place was a nightmare of ruin. He was still standing there, staring, straining, when the second quake struck. The warehouse swayed, but its supports were solid and it did not collapse. Jeremy was thrown to the roof by the tremor, and as he

groped to his hands and knees, he realized dazedly that he was still alive but was incapable of further coherent thought.

A small group sat at a table in the outside garden of the Golden Bucket. Three of the men were drinking rum and listening nervously to the sound of musket fire from the Citadel. *Boucaniers*, they had wisely chosen not to join their brethren in the rebellion, and their earnest hope was that the brigade would win; if their former comrades should be victorious, these shirkers could anticipate little mercy. The fourth member of the party was Jonas Pennywell, who drank nothing and said little as he sat quietly with a small leather-bound Bible clasped in his hands.

When the first tremor struck, a portion of the flimsy Golden Bucket crashed to the earth, and a falling beam struck one of the *boucaniers* across the head, killing him instantly. His two friends were panic-stricken; one jumped to his feet and ran from the ruins, screaming at the top of his lungs; the other retched and then crawled blindly across the garden on his hands and knees. Reverend Pennywell, who had been thrown to the ground, climbed to his feet, his Bible still clutched in his hand. He opened it to the Book of Psalms and began to read aloud in a voice that was quiet but clear and utterly devoid of fear.

*"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall be no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."*

There was nobody left to fight, and Dirk Friendly leaned disconsolately against the wall of the inner courtyard, glowering at the prisoners who filed slowly out of the Citadel to captivity and possible death. So many of the *boucaniers* had

surrendered that it seemed unlikely they would all be executed; the gibbets of Jamaica would not hold them all. But these men were strapping, healthy specimens, and there was plenty of battle left in them. Dirk wanted nothing more than to continue the combat, and he was angry at the rebels for giving up and spoiling what had promised to be an endless day of hand-to-hand encounters.

He had worked himself up to a rare pitch of righteous, pugnacious wrath, and it was unfair of the enemy to quit the field so soon. He looked enviously at a bearded giant dressed in tattered shirt and trousers and wearing a small gold ring in his right ear lobe. There was a man against whom an American could pit his strength and really enjoy the experience; the *boucanier's* shoulders were as broad as Dirk's, and the muscles of his arms budged under the remnants of his tight-fitting, filthy shirt. Dirk glared hopefully at the prisoner, who stared back at him with dull, apathetic eyes as he shuffled through the gate. The giant gunsmith sighed unhappily and scratched his head.

He glanced around for Jeremy and wondered for the fiftieth time what had happened to his friend. He was not worried, for he was convinced that Jeremy led a charmed life, and he had no doubt that his adventurous companion had managed to survive whatever mishap had prevented him from taking part in the final phase of the battle. If he would only hurry, Dirk thought, they might go searching together for a few *boucaniers* who had decided not to surrender.

Frowning, the big man leaned his full weight against the wall. At that moment the earth shook, the Citadel seemed to be lifted from the ground, and the men in the courtyard were scattered like grains of dust before a high wind. A portion of the weakened fortress collapsed with a deafening roar, and the high-pitched, agonized screams of the wounded mingled with the thunder of falling debris. Some parts of the once mighty Citadel still stood, but their very appearance of solidity suddenly seemed incongruous.

Dirk was lying in the middle of the yard, his legs pinned down by a heavy beam of mahogany which had lost the force of its fall before toppling him to the ground. Spitting out dirt, he sat up and looked around for help. The few men whom he could see were obviously in greater need of assistance than he himself required. He took hold of the end of the timber and pushed, but nothing happened. Grunting in exasperation, he put all of his strength into the effort. The thick plank moved a few inches, just enough for Dirk to draw his legs free.

Spitting again, he lifted himself to his feet and ruefully inspected a long rip in the fabric of his tunic, the best and

most expensive item of clothing he had ever owned. Shrugging, he wiped the palms of his hands on the sides of his breeches. Curiously, all the fight had gone out of him. . . .

There was an unobstructed view of the battle from the veranda of the Rainbow Inn, as the land on which the tavern was located jutted out some fifty feet into the water and nothing stood between it and the Citadel. While the distance was too great to make out the features of individual men, Esther Mary Pennywell watched in fascination as the red-coated troops of the brigade swarmed higher and still higher up the ramparts. Janine Groliere stood beside her, sickened by the spectacle of war.

"How can you be so sure that Jeremy is all right?"

"It's plain, that's how! So plain that even a lovesick fool could see it if she weren't frightened out of her wits!" Esther Mary replied without taking her eyes from the battle. "There are only two men on this island who could have repaired the cannon—Dirk and Jeremy. I don't pretend to know what happened to them when they rode up into hills with that mad scheme of appealing to Sir Arthur Bartlett. But the old man obviously listened to them. You know the tales we heard from the men who were sent by the Duchess yesterday morning to take us prisoner——"

"Those filthy *boucaniers*!" Janine shuddered at the memory.

For the first time Esther Mary tore her gaze from the battlements of the fortress, and her dark eyes were stormy. "Not all that filthy. They warned us—instead of dragging us to the Citadel, didn't they? That's because they were my friends—my brothers. I happen to know something about the *boucaniers*, and you can believe me, Sister Janine, when they put a cannon out of action, it takes a master hand to restore it. I say that Dirk has the physical strength to do the job, but he needed Jeremy to direct him. So they're safe. They're probably at King's House at this very minute, smoking a pipe or a *segaro* with the governor general and accepting his congratulations. So stop your incessant worrying!"

Illogically Janine shifted ground. "You seem to think considerable of Master Friendly," she said accusingly.

"I do indeed," was the bald reply. "I need a man with more brawn and less intelligence than I myself possess. I've found him."

She had no opportunity to say anything more, for at that moment the first tremor of the earthquake struck, and the better part of the rickety patchwork of buildings that made up the Rainbow promptly folded like a pack of playing cards

and collapsed. None of the debris struck the veranda, however, and both girls were unharmed, though badly shaken. With unspoken accord they moved away from the scene of destruction to the nearby open field, which seemed friendly and harmless. Weeds and grass were still upright, and a few faded June flowers peered up out of the parched June earth.

A few moments later the second quake occurred, and after it was over they struggled to their feet and began to run together in the general direction of the Pennywell house. Neither spoke, and there was no need for speech. Nor did they look at the incredible wreckage which the two tremors had left in their wake. This was a time when self-preservation was the foremost concern of every human being, and if the two girls remained close to each other, it was only because each drew a sense of security from the other.

They were no more than two short town squares from the little cottage when a sustained roar that grew louder by the second welled up behind them. Esther Mary turned her head without slackening her pace, and her eyes grew wide with horror. Stopping, she clutched Janine's arm and dragged the slighter girl to a halt. "Look!" she screamed hysterically. "Look!"

A solid wall of water seemed to be bearing down on them, and as Janine tried to take in the enormity of what was happening, she realized dimly that a tidal wave had been thrown up by the sea as a result of the two violent earthquakes. She reacted with speed and calm and immediately scrambled up the ruined pilings of a fallen house, pulling Esther Mary after her. This vantage point gave them the benefit of only four feet of added height, but it was the best available.

The gray-green water rolled nearer at an alarming rate, and Esther Mary stood precariously on a pile of timbers, crying wildly. "I can't swim!" she sobbed. "I can't swim!"

Janine, in possession of all her faculties, glanced at the other girl for an instant, then drew back her hand and slapped Esther Mary hard across the face. "Don't worry," she said coldly. "I can swim. And I give you my word that I won't save myself without saving you too."

The waters of the Caribbean swirled up around them and pressed deeper inland. The jumble of wooden supports shook as the sea crept over them and lapped at the feet of the two girls. Then, after a few minutes that seemed like years, the tidal wave began to recede, sucking livestock and personal property, dead bodies and an indescribable mass of debris with it.

Esther Mary Pennywell was breathing deeply and rapidly, but her eyes were calmer as she watched the Caribbean take

unto itself the pitiful remnants of man and his works which the holocaust had left in its wake. But now that the worst was over, Janine Groliere felt spent, utterly exhausted. She began to weep silently, and Esther Mary looked at her, then began to cry too.

They put their arms around each other's waists for comfort, and together they watched the tidal wave, ugly and evil and shimmering in the sunlight like a live thing as it returned to the sea. Though the girls were comparatively safe at the moment, neither quite realized it. They were conscious only of the hot tears that rolled down their cheeks, leaving a residue of salt. The Caribbean left its trail of salt marks, too, on the face of the land. . . .

Thomas, Lord Murray stood on the remains of what had been a long and solidly constructed wharf, staring out toward the placid sea. His eyes burned intensely, feverishly, and his young, cynical mouth was set in hard lines. He had wasted years of his life, thrown away a vast fortune on a venture that had ended in dismal failure, and there was no hope now that the new empire for which he had schemed would ever materialize. Frowning, he drew a large fob watch from a waistcoat pocket and glanced at it impatiently, unaware that this was the fourth time in as many minutes that he had repeated the gesture.

If Ian MacGregor did not appear soon, Lord Murray thought, he was certainly dead, killed by the earthquake. There was no doubt that he had made good his escape from the Citadel, for they had stood together at the head of the dark staircase leading down to the secret tunnel, and Ian had promised that he would wait two minutes, no longer, for Caroline. If she did not appear in that time, he had said, he would come on and join Lord Murray at the wharf.

Now Murray alone of the original triumvirate remained, and when the boat came for him, he would leave. Although he felt a twinge of regret at the thought that he would never see either Ian or Caroline again, his conscience did not bother him in the least. They had made their plans carefully, and the other two knew that the boat was due shortly and that it would rendezvous two miles out with the frigate that was to take them to the Isle de Cuba. If the Duchess and her chamberlain should miss the boat, it was too bad—for them.

Lord Murray did not intend to suffer because of the negligence of someone else. As a matter of fact, his own future would be far more comfortable alone, for he would have no need to share the funds so carefully deposited in the strongbox of a seemingly respectable merchant in Habana. That money would be all his now, and it would assure him a pleasant in-

come for many months to come. During that time he could chart his future, perhaps arrange to go over to the side of Louis, the French Sun King, when the next war broke out between him and the English. Louis always prized English recruits, particularly when they were noblemen.

It would be a blessed relief to get away from the tropics, Lord Murray told himself as he wiped his face with a square of Irish lace. The heat was bad enough, and this earthquake had been damned inconvenient. The boat was already a quarter of an hour late, though the fisherman who owned it had been given only enough of his fee to whet his appetite. No doubt the quake had delayed him, but Lord Murray was annoyed. He himself was never late for an appointment, never permitted anything to stand in his way, and he'd let the fisherman know what he thought of him, perhaps even cut the size of the purse he had promised the fellow.

A tiny patch of sail showed far out to the right across the glaring Caribbean, and Lord Murray allowed himself the luxury of a small, tight smile. It was his fisherman at last, and in a few minutes he would be on his way to safety and freedom. He would not be sorry to see the last of Jamaica.

As he looked out to sea, an incredible phenomenon took place before his eyes. In a second the calm surface of the sea was broken and a huge wall of ugly gray-green water rose high into the air, seemingly from the very floor of the Caribbean. Before Lord Murray could move, it bore down on him. At last he turned and tried to flee, but it was too late. As the tidal wave engulfed him, sucked him under, the light, cynical smile was at last gone from his lips.

Port Royal lay in ruins. The area close to the waterfront had been totally destroyed. Public buildings, homes, and shops were no more, and people—those who still lived—were fleeing up the long neck of the Palisadoes to the comparative safety of the island mainland. Away from the waterfront it was a trifle better, though only a trifle. The High Street was virtually deserted save for the dead and dying, but the tidal wave had not penetrated this far inland, and the road, what was left of it, was still dry.

A figure moved out into the sunlight from the shadows of a tumbled, abandoned two-story house and moved slowly up the length of what had once been the town's proudest avenue. There was a native turban wound around the woman's head, effectively hiding her long wheat-colored hair. Her gown was in rags, and a welt on her shapely thigh showed through a jagged tear in the fabric of her clothes. There was a broad

smudge on her face, and her hands were dirty, her nails grimy. She walked slowly, with an exaggerated stoop, and only if one happened to notice her alert, clear blue eyes would one know that this survivor of the quake was Caroline, Duchess of Glasgow.

She seemed to be looking for something as she made her way up the street, and every now and again she paused, peered at the ruins of a building, then continued calmly, as though the lack of whatever it was she was seeking did not matter to her. At last she came upon the remains of the House of the Caribbean, the most notorious brothel in Port Royal. She laughed lightly and stepped over the crushed timbers of what had once been a stout, heavily guarded door. The entire building had collapsed, and Caroline made her way carefully across the field of ruins, her eyes probing carefully. Here and there she saw the twisted, lifeless body of one of the inmates of the establishment, but the Duchess wasted neither time nor emotion on them as she continued her systematic hunt.

Finally she found what she had been seeking, and again she laughed, this time joyously. A large trunk had fallen from the second floor of the building, and in landing the top had burst open and the contents were scattered across the remnants of broken timbers and smashed furniture. The box had contained the wardrobe of one of the trollops who had made her home in the establishment, and Caroline was in need of new attire.

Her composure was gone now, and she pawed hastily through the mounds of expensive fabrics, her eyes critical and appraising. Some garments she discarded because they were unsuitable, others because their colors were wrong for her type of beauty, but when she came upon a gown of pale green silk, exquisitely embroidered with gold thread, she uttered a cry of triumph and held it up to her body. It was going to be an even better fit than she had dared hope, and her smile broadened.

With her foot she kicked open the shattered side of the trunk and beheld piles of shoes and, in a tumbled mass, layers of underclothing. Bending over, she explored her found treasure with delicately probing fingers, quietly congratulating herself. A lady needed to look her triumphant best in order to get along in the world, and she needed a keen mind to guide her; Caroline was sure that few other women would have thought of such a means of replenishing a wardrobe.

Her fingers came upon something hard, and she dug out a small metal box. She opened it carefully, then almost dropped it into the debris, so great was her delight. Inside was a supply

of cosmetics, unguents, and perfumes, and beneath the jars and pomades was a small leather purse. She knew even before she tugged it open that it contained a sum of money.

Neither the failure of her carefully plotted rebellion nor the unexpected blow of a catastrophic earthquake could conquer her. She knew it as she glanced at her reflection in a tiny mirror of burnished metal set into the lid of the cosmetics box. The blue eyes that met her gaze were wise and strong, sure and purposeful, joyously triumphant. . . .

## CHAPTER TWENTY:

# June—July 1692

**T**HE MOST wicked city in the Western world was no more. Five days after the earthquake, when the survivors had assessed the damage, there was no doubt in the mind of anyone that Port Royal's days of glory were over. More than three quarters of the buildings in the town had been destroyed, and not a tavern, not an inn, not a brothel still stood. Only King's House and the tiny church of Reverend Pennywell were intact; the old parish church had disappeared into the sea, as had numerous other structures located within a square or two of the waterfront.

Now a great exodus was taking place, and the living were fleeing with what remained of their household goods and possessions to the opposite side of the Bay of Jamaica. The fisherfolk of the tiny village of Kingston had offered the hospitality of their land, and plans were already being made for the building of a new town there. The governor general and Lady Bartlett announced their intention of moving the seat of government to Spanish Town, where they had an auxiliary palace, and the army was surveying sites for a new garrison nearby. Meantime King's House itself had been converted into a hospital for the injured and was the scene of the busiest activity in the shattered community.

The *boucaniers* who had been captured in battle were given their provisional release, on the condition that they repair the damage to the Citadel. Thus more than one hundred and fifty able-bodied men were working to rebuild the fortress they had helped destroy, and the recent rebellion was virtually forgotten in the press of emergency activities.

Twenty-four hours after the catastrophe a long line of men and women bearing fruits, vegetables, and meats had appeared at King's House, deposited the food silently on the lawns, and departed as quickly as they had come. Belatedly the governor general and his associates realized that the donors had been the Maroons, who had quietly and without drama laid aside their own grievances to aid fellow human beings in distress. And although Sir Arthur Bartlett was incredibly busy, he issued a proclamation making it unlawful for any resident of Jamaica—English, native, or foreign—to molest the Maroons.

Fortunately there had been no rain since the quake, and no further disturbance; the days had been hot and bright, the nights clear and balmy. So the refugees lived and slept in the open without undue discomfort, and when food supplies again dwindled, parties of official foragers crossed the bay and hunted intensively and systematically for bananas, breadfruit, and coconuts. They returned a few hours later, their fleet of small boats and dugout canoes piled high with fruits and root vegetables.

As the crisis abated, it was learned that Port Royal alone had been struck by the catastrophe; the rest of Jamaica had escaped unscathed, and the homes of a handful of respectable and prosperous citizens who lived on the outskirts of the town had not been touched. The plantations on the mainland of the island were intact, and the owners of these estates threw open their doors to all family groups.

The tarts and wastrels, shady merchants and scum who made up the greater portion of the population of the ill-starred "jewel of the Caribbean" were welcome nowhere; but, being a hardy lot, they moved to Kingston, set to work with a vengeance, and rapidly built new homes for themselves on ground they hastily staked out in the new settlement. Ships began to appear once more in the Port Royal roads, and when they saw no plague flag flying from the one tower of the Citadel that was still erect, they boldly dropped anchor.

It was a new arrival from one of these vessels who first noticed that the grave of Sir Henry Morgan had vanished. The few who took time to discuss the matter agreed that it had probably been swallowed up in one of the earth's convulsive openings and closings, and the disappearance of the tomb was regarded as an omen: under the greatest of the *boucaniers* Port Royal had seen her day of glory; it was unlikely that she would ever rise from her ruins to attain such glittering and evil prominence again.

The little house of Reverend Jonas Pennywell was still standing, and although it had been battered, it was in far better

shape than most of the dwellings in the community. The reverend worked incessantly through the first days of recovery, comforting the bereaved, holding funeral services for the dead, offering encouragement to the ailing. He was tireless, cheerful, and ever-buoyant, but whenever he encountered a healthy, able-bodied person his attitude suffered a sharp change. Then his eyes burned with a holy zeal and his voice, hoarse with fatigue, thundered anew.

His text was invariably the same on these occasions. Port Royal had received her just deserts, and as always he quoted an appropriate passage from the Bible: " 'Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.' Genesis, 19."

The minister was too busy, too preoccupied to think of himself, so it came as something of a surprise when his niece, Esther Mary, approached him with the news that a grateful citizenry was already engaged in the project of building him a new church and a new house in the mushrooming town of Kingston. There were further surprises in store for Reverend Pennywell; Esther Mary, unusually diffident, had asked him to marry her to Dirk Friendly. The minister, alarmed, thought his niece was planning to go off to North America, but she quickly assured him to the contrary. She had decided, she said, that she and her bridegroom would move to the Land of the Maroons. The present amity between the authorities and the hill people would end someday, perhaps when a new governor general came to Jamaica and arbitrarily made up his mind to subdue the strong-willed little "nation" that refused to recognize the royal warrant.

When that time came, Esther Mary declared, the Maroons would be ready for any new military ventures that might threaten their security. Dirk was an accomplished gunsmith, and his bride-to-be was already making complete plans for the casting of cannon under his direction in the Land of the Maroons. Several spiked, unrepaired guns had disappeared at the time the Maroons brought their voluntary gifts of food-stuffs to King's House, and a number of twisted and broken iron fences had also vanished. Esther Mary was not allowing the Maroons to be caught napping, and Dirk was faced with the prospect of a very difficult task. He did not seem displeased at the future that had been plotted for him, however.

The wedding was to take place immediately, and Janine Groeliere hurried out of the Pennywell house to pick some flowers before the ceremony. Although little remained of the once lush garden, she had murmured something to the effect

that it was unthinkable to have a wedding without at least a few flowers in a bowl. Watching her through the open window frame, Jeremy Stone was torn by a variety of conflicting emotions. Waves of heat seemed to dance above the girl's shining red hair, and he blinked at the vision, then passed a hand over his eyes. If he could rest for a little while, he told himself, he might be able to organize his thinking. But like everyone else who was uninjured, he had been working almost without pause in rescue and salvage operations, and he was unutterably weary.

He was sure that Janine knew he was looking at her, but she refused to glance in his direction. And he couldn't blame her. When he had first seen her after the tidal wave had come and gone, he had taken her into his arms and had kissed her hungrily. She had responded fervently and had clung to him, but they had said little to each other. There had been no need for words.

But that had been five days past, and since that time they had both been busy, too busy to settle any personal problems. At least that was what he had been telling himself, and the undeniable fact that Dirk and Esther Mary, who had been working just as hard, had found the opportunity to plan a joint future had pointed up his own indecision.

He stared hard at Janine, and even as he knew he wanted her, he felt the old fear that he could not ask her to share an uncertain future. She was bending over a bed of wild gardenias, carefully picking the few blossoms that remained on the bush, and as she straightened her eyes met Jeremy's. Suddenly his uncertainties, his sense of fatigue were gone.

Climbing rapidly through the window frame, he walked to her and put his hands on her shoulders. She was smiling, a trifle questioningly, tremulously, but Jeremy's eyes and face were grave. "Come into the house, Janine," he said gently. "We're going to ask Reverend Pennywell to make it a double wedding."

Janine drew back, and when she spoke she could not conceal a note of hurt from her voice. "You've waited a long time to propose to me, Jeremy."

"Too long," he conceded. "But I intend to spend the rest of my life making amends to you."

She was partly mollified, but the feminine perversity of her nature goaded her on. "You've given me every reason to believe that I'm your—your last choice."

Jeremy was so astonished he could not reply. Instead he reached for her, but the girl eluded his grasp.

"At one time you were interested in the Duchess of Glasgow," she declared firmly. "Don't deny it because I could

see that you were. We don't know what has become of her—but if she were here, perhaps you'd still——”

A low growl of denial escaped Jeremy's lips, and he started toward her. Janine moved backward across the garden, determined to say what was on her mind despite a feeling that perhaps she was going a trifle too far.

“Then,” she continued bravely, “you fell in love with Esther Mary. Oh yes, you did! I'm sure you did! And you're only deigning to look at me now because she and Dirk——”

“Rubbish!” Jeremy was faintly surprised by the fierceness of his own bellow. Leaping forward, he took hold of Janine's shoulders and began to shake her. “Hold still! How can I talk to you when you keep running away from me? And listen to what I have to say! It's true that I thought the Duchess was dazzling, but I was never in love with her! Never! It's also true that I thought Esther Mary was attractive. I still think she is! But you, you addlepated wench, you're the loveliest girl who has ever lived! I've known for some time that I've been in love with you, and I've probably loved you from the first moment I saw you—standing on the deck of your father's brig, looking as though you wanted to spit on me! What have you to say to that? Well? Answer me!”

“I—I can't,” Janine gasped. “You—you're shaking all the breath out of me.”

He released her abruptly, and they stood facing each other. They began to laugh together, then at the same instant the sounds died in both their throats and they moved surely, hungrily into each other's arms. They kissed, and as they did their worlds merged and became one. . . .

Within a quarter of an hour the brief ceremony was over, and as the four young people laughingly congratulated each other Reverend Pennywell jammed his hat on his head, placed his small Bible carefully in his pocket, and bustled out of the house. The sun was throwing a blinding beam through the archway where there had been a door, and the reverend almost collided with a burly, heavy-set man who hurtled up the path, his clothes disheveled and his eyes frenzied.

“What the hell is going on here?” the man shouted in a boom reminiscent of the quarter-deck.

Reverend Pennywell took off his hat, beamed, and extended his right hand. “Welcome, Captain Groliere!” he said heartily. “You're just in time! Here is your daughter—and your son-in-law.”

“Jan is alive?”

“She is.”

“And married, you say?” The captain stared stupidly.

“Yes, with God's blessing, to Master Stone, Jeremy Stone.”

"They're both well and inside the house. Come, Captain Groliere, there's no one they'd rather see."

Reverend Pennywell took his arm, but the *Bonnie Maid's* master shook him off and wiped a sleeve over his face. "Give me a minute, Reverend. Hard to take in so much so fast. Stopped for water at Grand Cayman Island the other day. Learned of the quake and rebellion from the skipper of a fishing sloop. Sailed like hell—pardon me, Reverend—and just dropped anchor in the roads thirty minutes ago. Asked everybody I saw about my Jan. An old Negress who'd been fed by her at a free soup kitchen somewhere or other directed me here. Give me a minute to get my bearings."

Again he wiped his face, and a variety of conflicting emotions showed in his eyes. Finally his breathing became more regular and, jamming his hat down on his forehead, he marched into the house, the reverend at his heels. Janine was the first to see her father and raced across the room to him. The others held back, but after allowing father and daughter a few minutes for a private reunion they came forward and joined in a flurry of greetings.

At last the captain focused his full attention on the new member of his family, and Janine instinctively moved closer to Jeremy, who met the older man's hard stare coolly, levelly, and smiled. Philippe Groliere studied him in silence for a moment; it was his business to know and judge men, and what he saw pleased him. Something had happened to this tanned, lean fellow in the months since they had last met. Jeremy was sure of himself now and at peace. The captain's glance shifted abruptly to Janine, and he softened. She was radiantly happy, and her eyes were shining as brightly as the strange, barbaric gold hoops she now wore in her ears.

Gruffly the old sailor extended a thick, hairy hand to his son-in-law. "Damned if you're what I had in mind for my little girl," he roared, "but damned if I don't think she set a good course!"

During the next few minutes Janine and Jeremy tried simultaneously to bring Captain Groliere up to date on all that had been happening in Jamaica. But they left out various details that seemed pertinent or important to Esther Mary and Dirk, who interrupted so constantly that the recital made no sense to the *Bonnie Maid's* master. And so he appealed to Reverend Pennywell, who was once again on the verge of departure, to give him a coherent account. The minister sighed, removed his broad-brimmed hat, and told a succinct, straightforward story. The two pairs of newlyweds had interests of their own and would have drifted off, but they stopped short at a question of the captain's.

“What has become of Her Grace of Glasgow?”

“I don’t know,” Reverend Pennywell said slowly. “She may have been killed, along with so many others. ‘Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.’ Galatians, 6. But let us refer to her no more as the Duchess Caroline of Glasgow. There is no such person and never has been.”

Janine and Esther Mary gasped, and Jeremy could only stare blankly at the minister.

Reverend Pennywell had the full attention of his audience, and he smiled deprecatingly. “I have long been a student of genealogy, as Esther Mary knows. ‘And that ye study to be——’”

“Please, Uncle!” Esther Mary was the only one who dared to interrupt. “None of your quotations now! Go on with what you started to say!”

The minister glanced at her in mild reproof: “‘We ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience.’ Second Thessalonians, 1,” he replied, unruffled. “I am as familiar as anyone at the Court of St. James with the various branches of the Stuart family. And I knew from the day that the so-called duchess landed here that there was no such person, that she was an impostor. And if you ask why I have kept this information to myself, let me remind you that I do the work of God. I labor in His vineyards and do not interfere in the affairs of man.”

There was a long silence, broken at last by Janine. “But—but if she wasn’t the Duchess Caroline—then who was she? Who is she?”

No one answered.

The partly reconstructed Citadel dock was crowded on the morning that the *Bonnie Maid* was to set sail for New York and England. So many ladies and gentlemen, so many uniformed officers milled about that an onlooker who did not gaze at the ruined town behind them might never have guessed that Port Royal was the stricken victim of a catastrophe. Several prominent persons were taking passage on the brig, among them Colonel the Honorable Charles Llewelyn-Smith, who was returning to London for reassignment, Major Sir Stafford Chesley, who had suffered several wounds in the recent fighting and was in need of a change of climate, and Master Henry Slade, a wealthy bachelor plantation owner who had lost his taste for tropical living after the earthquake.

These worthies and their friends chatted amiably, while the owners of small boats waited patiently for the final farewells to be concluded so they could row the departing passen-

gers to the *Bonnie Maid*. Captain Groliere was already aboard but had sent his gig to Port Royal to pick up his daughter and son-in-law, who had elected to remain ashore until sailing time. Jeremy and Janine stood now, hand in hand, oblivious of the hubbub around them as they watched Dirk and Esther Mary Friendly making their way through the crowd to their waiting horses.

Dirk turned briefly, waved, and plunged on. Jeremy lifted a hand in reply, then let it fall to his side. Janine looked up at him, and her fingers squeezed his. "We'll miss them," she said softly, "but they've chosen the life they want, darling, just as we're doing what we think is right for us."

"I offered Dirk half of my share in the new foundry," he replied heavily. "I explained to him that your father is putting up the funds——"

"As my dowry, out of your——our portion of the profits he's made in his sailing ventures during these past months."

Jeremy smiled down at his bride, certain that she was unaware of the nature of Captain Groliere's "sailing ventures" in the Spanish traffic lanes of the Caribbean. The day might come when he would be forced to explain to her; right now his thoughts were still centered on Dirk. "It stands to reason," he said stubbornly, "that a foundry in Boston will be profitable. New England is the richest and fastest-growing region in all of North America. Colonists need cannon, and a man who is willing to work hard is sure to be successful. Dirk was never afraid of hard work before!"

"And he isn't now, dear," Janine replied soothingly. "He and Esther Mary simply prefer—— Look, Jeremy!"

At the excitement in her tone he roused himself and saw the group on the dock parting to let an elderly couple through. Sir Arthur and Lady Bartlett came straight to Jeremy and Janine, and for a moment the crowd fell silent. The governor general was wearing his uniform, and Lady Bartlett, reflecting the austerity of these new times, was attired in a simple gown devoid of ornamentation. She held out her arms to Janine before the younger woman could curtsy, and Sir Arthur took the gunsmith's hand in a firm grip.

"I thought I'd give you one more chance to reconsider my offer, Master Stone," he said crisply. "It isn't everyone who has a chance to become a captain in the Royal Artillery and chief ordnance officer to a Crown viceroy. Have you realized that you could buy a plantation here as well?"

Hesitating for a brief second only, Jeremy looked the governor general in the eye. "I'm not insensitive to the honors you would show me, Your Excellency, but I'm not really a military man and I know nothing about the operation of a

plantation. Maybe I'm foolish to turn my back on being a gentleman, but I've got to do the one thing in this world that I know. If I work long enough and hard enough, I'll make out all right, I'm sure."

Sir Arthur stared long and hard at the young man who only a few months previous had risked so much in order to achieve a place for himself among the gentry. "There are times," he said with a suspicion of huskiness in his voice, "when I long for the sight of snow and the feel of a cold wind too." He paused and his hand gripped Jeremy's shoulder. "I wish," he added abruptly, "that you truly were my nephew, Master Stone."

On the third night out of Jamaica, the *Bonnie Maid* sailed serenely across a calm sea on her northerly course, her sails filled with a warm, insistent breeze. The officer of the watch yawned on the quarter-deck and was lazily relieved when Captain Groliere himself took over. The helmsman hummed softly to himself, despite the presence of the brig's master, and the bosun's mate on duty laughed aloud at some remembered jest. The brig was heading for New York and Boston, and after so many months in tropical seas the crew was happy at the prospect of visiting more brisk peoples in more invigorating climates.

Janine Groliere Stone was dressing for dinner in the cabin which had been hers on the trip south but which she now shared with her husband. Jeremy, a married man of sufficient accumulated experience to flee from the chamber while his wife applied lotions and creams to her face, stood leaning against the low deck rail, staring down at the greenish-black water as he waited for Janine to join him. A bright moon etched every corner of the ship in light, the sky was filled with stars, and Jeremy was relaxed as he had never been before.

New York was to be the first port of call, but he had no desire to see the town again. It was true that he had learned his trade there, but more recently he had learned principles of living that made him want to avoid the place where he had almost foundered. Briefly he wondered what had ever become of the girl in whom he had been interested the previous winter—what was her name?—Peggy. Someday, he thought, she might enjoy his good fortune and learn that wealth and social position were of no significance and that nothing mattered but the inner convictions that made one strong or weak, wise or foolish. The road he was charting for himself now would be hard but honorable, and his success and happiness would depend on his own mind, his own integrity, his own will to

work. It would depend on Janine, too, so he had no doubts about the future. Together they could face anything.

He heard feminine footsteps approaching, and for an instant he thought Janine was coming to join him. Then he caught the elusive scent of a well-remembered perfume, and he turned sharply. A handsome young woman was strolling aft, her walk slightly undulating. The moonlight showed every line of a sleek figure under a tight-fitting silk dress of pale green embroidered with gold thread. Her skin was very white and her hair looked like pale gold, but her lips were full and red and inviting. Mocking blue eyes studied him casually.

Involuntarily he made a leg as he stared at her. "Caroline!" he muttered under his breath, then spoke aloud before he could stop the words, "Your Grace!"

She laughed lightly. "Good evening, Master Stone," she said in her sweet, clear voice.

"What—what are you doing aboard the *Bonnie Maid*?" he asked thickly, stupidly. "I thought you were dead."

Vast amusement showed in her deep eyes. "As you can see, I've never been more alive, sir." Reaching out casually, she plucked a tiny speck of lint from his collar. "As for my presence on this brig, I am—like you—a passenger. I understand you were recently married, so you and your bride must come to my stateroom someday for a glass of sack. You'll have no trouble finding me, as I've engaged the same room I had on the journey south. In fact, I've engaged it as far as France."

"France?" Jeremy felt tongue-tied.

"Of course. I forget you know very little about me, Master Stone. No doubt you've heard of me, however." She drew herself up proudly. "I am Emma Baumholz."

He shook his head. "I'm sorry, Your Gra—— Mistress Baumholz."

"How stupid you colonials are! The Baumholz name has been renowned among strolling players in Prussia for generations. And I have the reputation of being the finest dancer and actress in all Europe."

He chuckled. "You're a great actress, and that's the truth," he conceded.

"Thank you, sir." She laughed merrily and patted his arm affectionately. "And you, Master Stone, were one of the most appreciative audiences to whom I ever played." Inclining her head slightly, she swept past him and moved gracefully toward the stern.

Jeremy watched her for a moment, then bolted for the quarter-deck. Captain Groliere watched him approach and smiled amiably. "So you've seen her, Jerry. I thought you or Jan would come bouncing up here soon as you laid eyes on her."

He laughed, coughed, then resumed, "Paid double passage to France. Paid me in gold, too. Showed up at four bells. A stow-away. Damned if I know how she came aboard. And damned if I care. Her money's good. Anything else you want to know?"

"I reckon I can figure out the rest," the young gunsmith declared slowly. "She looks like the Stuarts. Sir Ian MacGregor and Lord Murray probably saw her dancing somewhere, noted the resemblance, and hatched their conspiracy."

"Aye. Smart as sea lawyers, they were. And now she says she's going to try her luck dancing for King Louis and his court. She'll make out fine there," he added, grinning again. "She'll do fine anywhere. Look at her now."

He waved a big hand toward the aft deck below. Emma Baumholz, once the self-styled Duchess of Glasgow and pretender to a throne, was surrounded by an admiring knot of her former enemies. The colonel and the major who had led Crown troops against her rebellious *boucaniers* jostled each other and elbowed the wealthy, eligible planter. Emma-Caroline, devoid of scruples, totally lacking in conscience or morality, flirted impartially and outrageously with each in turn. Many men had died because of her, but she was neither disturbed nor penitent.

She smiled intimately at the colonel, touched the major provocatively on his cheek with her ornamental, frivolously feathered fan, and let her fingertips caress the planter's sleeve. The expressions of the men with her indicated that each thought she was centering her attention on him alone.

Jeremy threw back his head and laughed heartily. "You're right, dead right," he said to his father-in-law. "Nobody need worry about that one. She'll make out fine."

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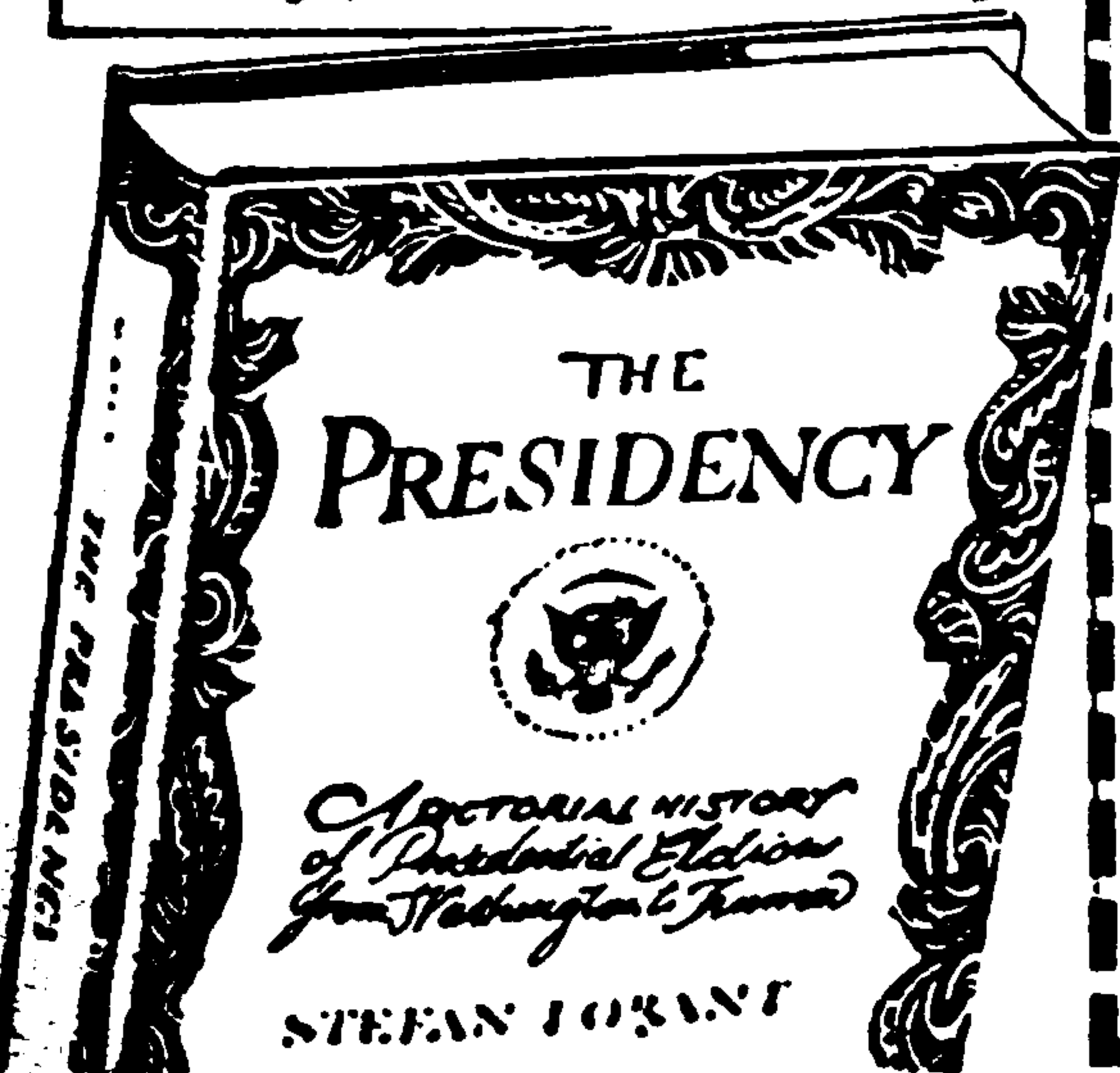
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