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Savage Cavalier

(Savage Gentleman)

NOEL B. GERSON

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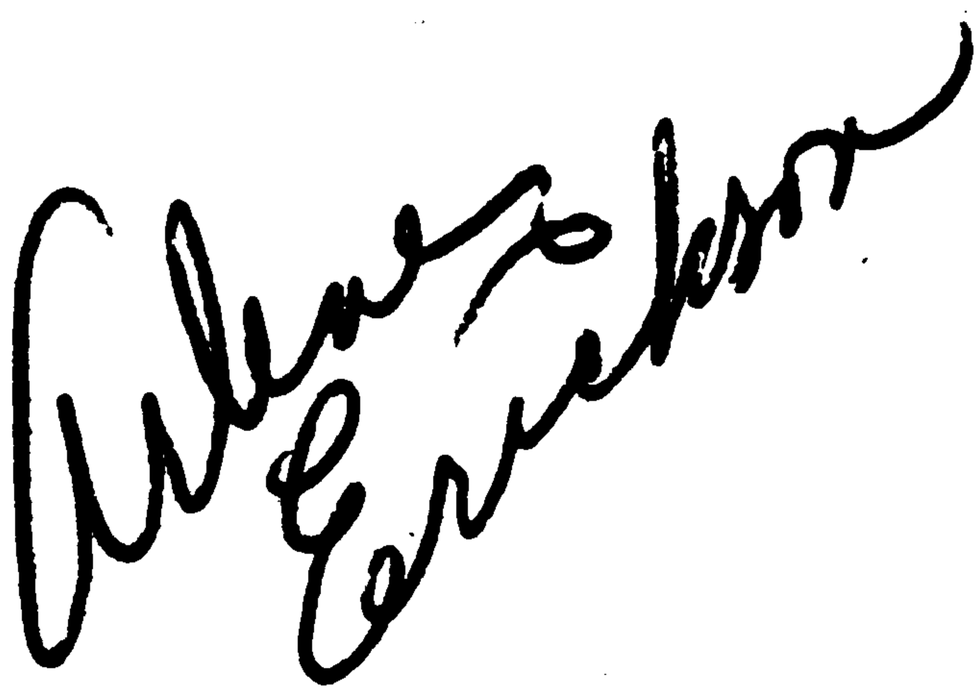

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"Noel B. Gerson drapes this authentic framework of history with a lusty and romantic tale . . . creates a genuine illusion of actual experience as we follow Col. Church in his daring march around the Bay of Fundy."

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Savage Cavalier

Original Title: SAVAGE GENTLEMAN

Noel B. Gerson

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TO MOTHER AND DAD

ORIGINAL TITLE:
SAVAGE GENTLEMAN

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Foreword

So TUMULTUOUS has been the growth of the United States that history has necessarily slighted some periods in her development. Illogically capricious, history has occasionally neglected some phase of our nation's expansion that was worthy of greater notice.

Thus it was that the last of the so-called "French and Indian Wars" which began in the middle of the eighteenth century, and in which such familiar figures as George Washington took part, captured the spotlight and threw its immediate predecessor, Queen Anne's War (1702–13), into the shadows.

Few struggles were more vital to American growth than this earlier war, but it is a "lost page" in our history, and the men who fought for their new land and their Queen have been forgotten, too, despite their extraordinary and significant deeds.

The march of Colonel Benjamin Church and his colonial army from Boston to Port Royal (now Annapolis Royal) on the Bay of Fundy was a remarkable feat of military craftsmanship. Had Church, a Massachusetts farmer-soldier, achieved his primary objective, the United States and Canada might well be one nation today. But Colonel Church was handicapped by provincial shortsightedness in high places, and by the bungling of his military superiors.

Nevertheless, his campaign marked the first time that men from New England, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia worked and fought and died in a common cause. Necessity in 1707 created the first bonds of unity which, three quarters of a century later, would forge a new nation.

In its own time, Colonel Church's decisive blow against the French citadel of Port Royal had a special significance: it broke the back of French-Indian resistance; the English colonists took the military initiative which resulted in the peace treaty of 1713 and ended formal warfare between the would-be masters of the New World for more than forty years. During these decades the English-speaking peoples of the Colonies and their compatriots from continental Europe were not slow to seize their advantage, and moved rapidly westward, thus consolidating their hold and contributing to the birth of the United States.

The sources used in the preparation of this novel are too nu-

merous to mention, but I want to acknowledge my appreciation of two books, without which I could have accomplished little. *Indian Wars*, published in Boston in 1716, was written by Thomas Church, eldest son of the illustrious Colonel, and gives a complete and factual account of his father's activities. I am convinced that his account of the duel with Paugus, the Indian chief, is the correct version of this controversial incident and have used it accordingly. *The History of the Wars in New England*, by Samuel Penhallow, published in Boston in 1726, was also invaluable.

While Colonel Church and several of his senior officers have been borrowed from history along with the French commander, Baron de St. Castine, the personal incidents in which they are involved are products of the author's imagination. The central figures in the story—the Wyatt family, the Hills, the Browns, and others—are all fictitious, and any resemblance they may bear to real persons is purely coincidental.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Ralph Gilbert Ross of New York University for his great help in the preparation and assimilation of background material for this book. I deeply appreciate the advice, ideas, and help of LeBaron R. Barker of Doubleday and Company. I am grateful, too, to Marion L. G. Cook and Henry Steeger for their assistance, and to Nancy Douglass Gerson for her patient and painstaking criticism as the story took shape.

The American Colonies at the beginning of the eighteenth century were as wild and savage as the men and women who lived in them were indifferent to personal hardships. This book is a salute to our forefathers who laid the cornerstone of a civilization and way of life which we cherish.

N.B.G.

New York City
March, 1950

Chapter One

EVEN THE quiet was menacing. Nathaniel Hill could remember when the stillness in the sawmill was soothing, but that era had ended almost three years ago. Now, in the winter of 1705–06, Her Majesty's Colonies were deep in the war against King Louis's French and their Indian allies, and nowhere along the frontier was there serenity.

"'They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more,'" he murmured. A deep sigh shook his long, bony frame, and he looked all of his fifty-nine years.

Nathaniel glanced about the sawmill and out across the white, frozen ground to the sturdy house beyond. All this was his, won in years of toil and constant danger. He had been one of the first settlers on the Mohawk; his had been the first sawmill this side of Fort Albany. And when the Iroquois had burned Schenectady to the ground fifteen years ago he had been one of the few who had refused to run away.

As a young man he had never minded danger. To be truthful with himself, he had often welcomed it. Fear was no tool with which to chop out a fortune in this wilderness, and Nathaniel Hill had built up a comfortable inheritance for Leah.

Leah. He frowned and glanced quickly at the cold, wintry sun. A grimace of annoyance crossed his face, and he hastily strode out of the sawmill and slammed the heavy door so hard that the leather-pegged hinges screeched in protest. By the singed beards of the demons, what was keeping the minx? The militia parade would be finished if they didn't leave for Schenectady at once.

The nearby river kept most of the house chilled through the winter months, and Nathaniel Hill usually enjoyed the cheerful warmth of the parlor. But the sight that greeted his eyes now made him uncomfortable. He'd lived among men for so long that the presence of an eighteen-year-old daughter in the house dis-

turbed him. Maybe Leah was right—it might have been better to leave her in Mistress Russell's Philadelphia Academy for Young Gentlewomen for another year. At least the parlor would have been free of feminine finery now.

Leah stood before the one good mirror, tying and untying bits of lace about her face. She was completely absorbed, and there was a look of intense concentration in her deep blue-green eyes. Nathaniel Hill noted in some surprise that Leah was wearing her new yellow gown—hardly the dress for a ride along snow-packed trails into Schenectady.

In spite of his annoyance over her tardiness Nathaniel grinned as Leah impatiently ripped away an offending veil and stamped her foot in a gesture she surely hadn't learned from her teachers at the academy.

"Matilda!" she called, and in spite of her anger her voice remained high and clear and musical. She was still unaware of her father's presence in the room.

In a moment a short, plump young woman with blond hair as straight as Leah's was wavy scurried into the room. This was Matilda Zimmerman, the indentured servant whose services Nathaniel had purchased when Leah came home from school. It was better, he had reasoned, to have a second female in a house filled with men.

"Yes, Mistress Leah?" Matilda bobbed a token curtsy.

"You may wear the veiling if you wish. I should have known better than to wash my hair this morning. It puffs out—and a veil makes it look worse. . . . Here, girl. I'll help you."

Towering over Matilda, Leah moved behind her, and with the aid of the mirror began to adjust the veil. Nathaniel Hill became annoyed. These vain young wenches would waste the whole day here.

"Take the mirror along on a pack horse, you self-admirin' hellcats," he shouted. "The wind ragin' up the valley will snarl up your hair no matter how much you fuss. So, if you're comin', come on!"

Startled, Matilda whirled about and sank to the floor in the full curtsy due to the master of the house. But Leah turned with deliberate slowness, a mocking smile forming on her full lips. "You don't understand, Papa——" she began.

But Nathaniel Hill was already through the door. It would be just like him to ride off without her, so Leah snatched up her cloak, beckoned to Matilda to follow, and hurried after him.

Nathaniel was already mounted on his horse as the two breath-

less girls hurried into the little courtyard before the house. Usually the sight of the handsome white building soothed him, but now he was grumbling to himself, muttering into the long woolen scarf wound in heavy folds about his neck.

"Jeff and Benjie have seen you at breakfast with your hair lookin' like the swamp weeds in August—and they don't mind," he said, spurring his horse to a canter. "Anyways, they'll be too busy marchin' with the militia to pay you two any heed."

Matilda's fair skin flamed a bright scarlet. She and Benjie Brown, the elder of Nathaniel's two male indentured servants, were much taken with each other. Nathaniel's anger eased somewhat as he noted Matilda's discomfort. He was doing all he could to encourage their romance and had even promised Benjie a gift of fifty acres of land at the end of his indenture if he married Matilda. Bonded servants were always more contented when they were happily married and settled down.

Leah pulled up her horse beside her father's. Her eyes had narrowed to thin slits, and her usually delicate nostrils flared. And when she spoke her voice was colder and harder than the thick ice on which the horsse occasionally slipped.

"It is a matter of supreme indifference to me whether Jeffrey Wyatt pays heed to me or not, Papa. *I* never take notice of *him*."

Nathaniel silently cursed himself for mentioning Jeffrey Wyatt's name. Leah and the young man had disliked each other at sight, and time had not improved their relationship. Nathaniel guessed he would be forced to listen to another lecture all the way in to the village. He squirmed in the saddle. What made women like this, anyway? He had never known much about them. His own Leah had died when her daughter was born, and he had had little time for the breed ever since. He didn't know if young Leah's sharp tongue had been developed at school, where she had associated solely with other females, or if his own bloodline was responsible for her temper. One thing sure: she was a fighter, with the stubborn persistence of Beelzebub himself. Well, he was in for it now.

"Papa . . ." Leah's voice was suddenly soft and pleading.

Nathaniel eyed her suspiciously. Little as he knew of feminine ways, this sudden shift warned him that something was brewing. He had been around Indians long enough to have an instinctive feeling for the development of an attack from a new quarter. He said nothing and waited for his daughter to continue.

"Lieutenant Willard tells me there are merchants at Fort Albany who'll pay a wonderful price for indentured servants.

Ever since the garrison there was increased, the shopkeepers can't find enough help."

"Do tell." Nathaniel gnawed nervously at the ice which had formed on his mustache and hoped he was keeping his tone non-committal.

"If you sold Jeffrey Wyatt you'd probably get twice what you paid for him." Leah smiled.

So that was it! A hard lump formed in Nathaniel's throat. "By the gleamin' halos of all the saints of Creation—why would I want to sell him?" he shouted. "Jeff coaxes more lumber out of those saws than anybody who's ever worked my mill. He's quiet, he's decent—and he minds his own affairs. And—ain't he a sergeant now in the militia—with talk that Captain Stephens over to Fort Albany will give him a commission someday?"

"He's a jailbird, all the same. And you've given him so much authority and responsibility you'll live to regret it, Papa. Can't you see that we'd all be better off without him putting on airs about the place?" Leah's voice took on an edge again.

Nathaniel turned in the saddle and motioned to Matilda to draw closer. The girl had been listening to every word, of course, and her views might bolster his own stand against Leah's antagonism. At least it would be better than a repetition of the same old refrain. Without looking at his daughter Nathaniel addressed the servant girl.

"What do you make of Jeff, Matilda?"

"He's a fine gentleman, Master Nat." Matilda's round face was serious, and her fat fingers twisted around her horse's reins.

"He's a graduate of Newgate Prison," Leah put in swiftly. "And he'd be there still if the Crown hadn't decided to send convicts to the Colonies as servants."

"Yes'm." Matilda's tone was meek, but her expression was unyielding. She might be the bound servant of this spoiled girl, but she had her own ideas of right and wrong. "Jeff may be a convict like you say, Mistress Leah. But he's a gentleman. Have you ever seen the books he reads nights? Greek and Latin—and I don't know what all."

"Does he read the Bible, Matilda?" Nathaniel Hill's curiosity took hold of him, much as he hated gossiping with his own help.

"No, Master Nat. Not as I know of, he don't."

"Of course he doesn't," Leah jeered. "Men who are thrown into Newgate aren't usually the type who——"

"That will do, Leah." Nathaniel had apparently touched a responsive chord in the usually silent Matilda, and he wasn't

going to let his daughter's antipathy choke off any news he might learn. He knew precious little about the mysterious young Jeffrey Wyatt, and now was his chance to see if Matilda had gleaned any information. Jeffrey and Benjie Brown had been in prison together and had apparently known each other before they had become familiar with the inside of England's most notorious penitentiary.

When they had first come to the Hill farm, with fetter marks still showing on their wrists and ankles, Benjie had tugged respectfully at his forelock whenever Jeffrey had spoken to him. But that habit had ceased abruptly one summer afternoon. Nathaniel had heard Jeffrey's usually quiet voice raised in a distinct tone of command. Conversation had ceased abruptly when the millowner had walked in, but from then on Benjie had certainly been broken of the trait.

On a dozen occasions since, Nathaniel had tried to pry into Jeffrey's past but had always been firmly rebuffed. He had found it hard to become angry with a man who was always so confounded polite, though. Besides, in this new land it wasn't discreet to ask too many questions. Some of the most powerful men in New York—and in Massachusetts, for that matter—undoubtedly knew their way around the dank catacombs of Newgate.

Yet Nathaniel could not help being piqued. Jeffrey was a magnificent horseman who more than held his own, even against the field officers of the Royal Cavalry stationed at Fort Albany. And surely no one who had seen him ride and shoot in competition with the braves of the Iroquois at the treaty jamboree the summer before the outbreak of war would ever forget his victories that day.

Captain Stephens, her Majesty's commandant for the district, swore that young Wyatt was the only swordsman in the Colonies who could make him work up a sweat in a fencing bout; and Stephens had been forced into colonial service after killing two men in Guards' regiment duels.

Yes, there was something unusual about Wyatt, no two ways about it. Benjie knew more than anyone but had become as closemouthed as Jeffrey himself. But maybe he had revealed a few confidences to Matilda during the intimacy of whispered lovers' talk. Now was the time to find out.

Nathaniel looked directly at the chubby girl on his left and barked at her with calculated gruffness: "Tell me what you know of Jeffrey Wyatt."

Nathaniel failed to notice that Leah leaned closer to hear,

but Matilda saw the movement out of the corner of her eye and smiled quietly to herself.

Hill's bluff didn't scare her, and it wouldn't harm him to know it. "I know little more than you, Master Nat," she said. "Jeffrey has the manners—and the breeding—of the gentry. And that's more than can be said for most hereabouts."

"He was probably a valet to some noble lord and copies his former master's airs," Leah shot back. "And as for there being few who can make a leg as he does, I find his elegance a little comic in this savage region."

Nathaniel nodded his head in reluctant agreement. "Yes, I know what you mean, Leah," he replied. "When I catch Jeffrey unawares he talks and acts like such a great lord that I feel like I'm working for him."

Leah was quick to press her advantage. "Imagine how humiliated I am, then, Papa," she cried. "Jeffrey is always civil to you——"

"And he ain't to you?"

"He's too civil. No matter what I say to him, he's always overpolite. He bows to me—as though—as though I were kin to the Queen. No matter what I do, he never gets angry with me. I—I've tried to make him lose his temper so he'll tell me something about himself. But he just bows—and throws me another of his pretty little gentleman's speeches."

Nathaniel grinned. "And that's what's eatin' up your insides, eh? Seems to me like Jeff deserves to be congratulated."

Leah dug her heels into the horse's side. "You deliberately twist everything I say, Papa," she snapped. "It isn't what Jeffrey says to me. It's the *way* he makes his speeches. Oh, I—I'd give anything to wipe that mocking grin off his face. 'It's my duty to obey your slightest wish, Mistress Leah,' he says. And all the while his eyes laugh at me."

Matilda turned her face away, and Nathaniel found it difficult to stifle a chuckle. It was good for Leah to brush up against a man who didn't knuckle under to her slightest whim. Every bachelor officer and unmarried settler in the district had beaten a path to the Hill house to pay court to the prettiest girl on the western frontier.

What's more, Nathaniel was genuinely concerned over the interest of Lieutenant Simon Willard, the garrison commander at Schenectady. An officer of the Regular Army, he had been the model of soldierly propriety until Leah's return from school. Since then he had had precious little time to train his volunteer

militiamen, for he seemed to be popping in and out of the Hill house at almost any hour of the day. And Nathaniel wanted no professional soldier for a son-in-law. Soldiers didn't live long.

It had been such a simple life before women had complicated it. Beyond your land was Indian country, and you kept your long gun and powder horn handy at all times. You knew the Senecas were your enemies, and whenever you saw their vermilion and gold war paint poking out of the forests you fired your guns, and be damned to them. But this sly, feminine warfare against a trusted member of your own household was too much.

Nathaniel shook his head vigorously to clear it, then spat into the snow. He shivered and would have urged his horse into a faster gait if it hadn't been for the presence of the two girls. They could never keep up with him on this icy ground. Blast the whole stupid business of riding into the village today, anyway. Nathaniel had a lurking hunch that Lieutenant Willard had arranged his militia review solely to impress Leah. She had been adamant in her insistence that she was going, and Nathaniel was equally certain that nothing but his daughter's safety would have taken him away from the sawmill on such a raw, windy day.

Blinking, Nathaniel suddenly realized that they were riding past the property of Julius van Kirk. He should have kept his mind on where he was going, and his jaw tightened. Leah had looked past the dead, blackened trees and had buried her face in her hands. Matilda rode stolidly on, but her cheeks were pale beneath their ruddy wind burn.

The spot where the great van Kirk house had once stood was now nothing but a charred pit of twisted, scorched timber ends. A stale, sickly-sweet odor of death still drifted over the trail, and Leah gagged, then began to cry. Henrietta van Kirk had been her schoolmate for five years.

Until two weeks ago Julius van Kirk had been the most prosperous and respected figure in the community, and his family had without challenge been the most populous. On the night of his seventieth birthday the entire van Kirk clan had gathered at the big house to pay him homage. That was the night the Senecas had chosen to strike.

With typical boldness they had crept past other homes closer to the frontier and had burst in on the van Kirks at the height of the family party. The stories sobbed out by the single survivor, Julius's fourteen-year-old grandson Aaron, had made even toughened border fighters sick. Forcing van Kirk's sons to watch, and not permitting young mothers or their children to leave, the

savages had tortured old Julius for more than two hours, and when they finished with him they turned on his sons. The nearest neighbors, a quarter of a mile away, had heard the screams of the victims but had paid no attention. The van Kirk's had always been a loud crew, especially after a little schnapps.

Finally, near dawn, the women and children had been murdered en masse. The Senecas had tied them together, then tossed them like logs into the funeral pyre they made of the whole house.

"Damn the soul of that Satan-inspired bastard Paugus." Nathaniel Hill's curse came from the depths of his heart. Like virtually all who lived on the edge of Indian country, he nourished a black hatred for the dreaded Seneca chieftain. Paugus had been a legendary figure almost as far back as Nathaniel could remember. His worn, foul-smelling bearskin cape, almost as evil in its own way as his callous inhumanity, was as much a part of the savage kind as his reputation for duplicity.

The Iroquois nations had signed a treaty with the English Colonies some months before the outbreak of war in 1702. Several of the tribes, notably the Oneidas, and to some extent the Cayugas and Mohawks, had lived up to their pledges and were sending men to fight side by side, in their own units, with the English and Colonials.

But Paugus had placed himself on the side of the French, and the chiefs of the weak Tuscaroras, intimidated perhaps by the stand of their fierce neighbors, had also deserted. And so dreaded was Paugus that the Onondagas, largest of the tribes next to the Senecas, were performing an agile feat of fence-sitting. If they ever dropped off on the side of King Louis, this whole territory would be lost, for the Regulars at Fort Albany and all of the militia battalions together would be helpless then to stop the dark brown surge.

Nathaniel's ire rose until his face began to turn an alarming shade of purple. "'I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree,'" he murmured, "'Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not.'"

Leah looked at her father in consternation, and her mittened hand reached out and touched his arm. "Please, Papa," she said, "you'll make yourself sick. There's nothing you can do."

"If I were thirty years younger," Nathaniel muttered thickly, "I'd sneak through the forests like I used to, straight to Paugus's town. And I'd put a bullet through his ugly heart.

"Julius van Kirk would have done it for me. And I ought to

for him. Many's the time we've raided Indian towns together——"

"Please, Papa." Leah was genuinely frightened. It wasn't like her father to give in to his emotions so unconditionally. For the first time the realization struck her that he was growing old. In this rugged country a man often aged before his time.

"Once I killed Paugus, I'd sail up to Port Royal and plant a powder keg under King Louis's headquarters there," Nathaniel continued, unheeding. "And if there were any survivors I'd make damn good and certain that Baron St. Castine wasn't one of 'em. King Louis's favorite colonel. Ha! He's no more'n a savage himself. Married to one of Paugus's sisters—and, from all I hear, has two or three more wives, besides. He's worse'n any Indian. St. Castine. He stirs 'em up and then sits back, laughin,' while they do the mischief."

Leah blinked back the tears that threatened to flow again and looked about rapidly for a diversion. The trees were growing sparser now, and in a few moments the wooden logs that marked the outlines of Schenectady's stockade would become visible. Leah threw an imploring look at Matilda, and the indentured girl was quick to understand.

"Listen, Mistress Leah," Matilda called. "Do you hear the drums of the militia?"

There was no sound save the crunching of the horses' hoofs on the dry snow, but Leah answered at once, grateful for the opportunity to change the subject. "Yes, I believe I do," she responded quickly. "Mercy, Captain Stephens must have sent over his own drummers from Fort Albany for the parade." She paused and looked through lowered lashes to see if her words were creasing Nathaniel's consciousness. "Your ears are better than ours, Papa. Listen—and tell us if you hear the drums."

The trick worked! Nathaniel leaned forward in his saddle and closed his eyes. A moment later he opened them again and snorted. "The only drum you hear is your own heart poundin' in your ears, Leah. You're all of a tizzy over bein' the center of attention come about five minutes from now."

The shot hit home, and Leah forgot her stratagem of a moment ago. What Papa said was true. Every man in the militia company would be looking at her. And after the ride from the sawmill she might be a sight. She slowed her docile horse to a walk.

She smoothed the folds of her pretty great cloak and adjusted the silken scarf about her neck. Then her hands flew to her

hair. Oh, why did Papa forbid her to carry one of those fashionable new little pocket mirrors? Papa and his Holy Bible. Vanity the root of evil, indeed.

"Look at my hair, Matilda. Does it need combing?"

Matilda's practiced feminine eye swept up and down the length of the other girl's long, pale gold hair. She concealed a pang of envy and answered carefully: "No, Mistress Leah. It's perfect just as it is." She paused, then plunged on: "Do I—do I look—all right?"

Leah favored her companion with the briefest of casual glances. "Of course." No man would bother to notice Matilda—except Benjie Brown. And he was so much in love that he didn't care how red her face might be or how wildly her flat Dutch hair flew about.

After another reassuring pat on her own smooth locks Leah tested a ladylike but provocative smile on her father. "All right, Papa—I'm ready to go on."

Nathaniel impatiently kicked his horse into action. If he'd had Leah at home all those years she wouldn't have turned into a flirtatious vixen, he'd vouch for that.

"Smile at Lieutenant Willard like that—and he'll face a court-martial for neglect of duty," he rasped, urging his horse into the lead.

Leah giggled prettily. "Why, Papa, a stranger listening to you talk would think me a hussy."

"Yes, and they'd be right," he called back over his shoulder. "And if anyone don't believe me, well—I'm willin' to bet all the lumber that's been ordered for the new church that you won't waste *all* your smiles on Lieutenant Willard. You'll keep passin' 'em around until you think you've made Jeff Wyatt jealous."

"I forbid—I absolutely forbid you to make such inane, ridiculous statements," Leah cried, her face a picture of rage. "I don't care what Jeffrey Wyatt thinks of me. In fact, I'd be far happier if I never—*never* had to look at his superior face again. And if—if you ever *dare* suggest that I have the slightest interest in an indentured servant who doesn't know his proper place—I—I'll—I'm warning you, Papa—I'll do something drastic."

Nathaniel Hill hunched his shoulders and pulled his neck deeper into the folds of his big muffler. He was silent, and Leah was unable to judge the effect of her words.

But Matilda, bringing up the rear at the respectful distance prescribed for an indentured girl riding into town with her employers, was openly amused. She smiled wisely to herself.

Chapter Two

SERGEANT JEFFREY WYATT of the New York Colonial Militia was probably the only man in Schenectady who didn't consider the new Queen Fort awe-inspiring. He had gazed at it for too many long hours. As the sole non-commissioned officer familiar with the *Royal Manual of Drill,* he had been given the rawest of recruits to train, and he was forced to march them past the fort again and again—and again. His squad consisted of middle-aged Dutch farmers who were interested in nothing but their crops and livestock, and of unreliable young adventurers. The latter had come to the frontier looking for excitement, and they had no liking for parades on the coldest day of the winter. Every now and again one or another of them would look longingly down Front Street, where hot buttered rum at the taverns of Caleb Beck and Jacobus Cromwell beckoned invitingly.

Vainly trying to force the stragglers into some semblance of order, Jeffrey stomped his unwilling soldiers to the Ferry Street end of the parade ground, then back again. He was afraid this indifferent collection of human beings couldn't be whipped into a fighting military force, but he grudgingly admitted the necessity of discipline and training if Schenectady was to survive. Seneca raiders were weekly becoming bolder, and, as Father had always said, battles were won by armies, not mobs.

Looking back from the far end of the parade ground, Jeffrey was surprised to note that his was the only squad still at work. The others had disbanded, and the men were either lounging about on the damp, hard ground or, in direct disobedience of orders, had gone off to one of the taverns for a quick, warming drink. Jeffrey's jaw set in a grim line. Lieutenant Willard wasn't wasting any love on Jeffrey, and no mistake. What ailed the fellow? Didn't he know these recruits would be useless in the parade itself if they didn't get a few minutes' rest now?

Willard was probably waiting for him to make a complaint, Jeffrey decided. One false move and he'd lose his sergeant's

chevrons. He was sure the lieutenant had been hoping for a chance to pounce on him ever since Captain Stephens had promoted him. Bonded servants weren't given warrants as non-commissioned officers as a general rule, and Jeffrey thought that Willard looked at his chevrons as a personal slight.

Out of the corner of his eye Jeffrey saw Willard standing not far from the Green Street entrance to the parade ground, chatting with his two young ensigns. Suddenly a sharp voice cut through the air. "Sergeant Wyatt! You may present your squadron!"

Relieved at the prospect of a temporary respite, the fourteen men of Jeffrey's little command promptly started toward the lieutenant. All semblance of a military formation evaporated into the icy air, and despite Jeffrey's frantic orders and wild curses, the men straggled on. It was with difficulty that Jeffrey managed to place himself at the head of the squad before it reached Lieutenant Willard.

At least Jeffrey's salute was precise. Holding himself rigidly at attention, he spoke in clipped accents. "Fifth squadron reporting as ordered, sir."

"You may dismiss your squadron." Lieutenant Willard's drawl indicated a contemptuous indifference to the proceedings.

The men began to break away before Jeffrey could give the order. Flushed at being made to appear incompetent, Jeffrey called a warning to his bunglers. "Back here in ten minutes," he shouted. "And be sure you're sober. I'll thrash every last one of you if you stagger in stinking of liquor."

Another quick salute to Willard, and Jeffrey himself was free. He strode off quickly, wanting to put as much distance as possible between himself and the lieutenant. He heard one of the ensigns snicker, and it took all of his self-control not to turn back. With relief he saw Benjie Brown waving, and in a few long strides he reached his friend's side.

Benjie was resting his impressive bulk on an old blanket which he had thrown on the ground, and a quizzical grin creased his face as he watched the tall, lean figure of Jeffrey stop abruptly. Jeff was mad clear through, and no mistake. Benjie bit off his smile and decided to say nothing. Something must have happened down the parade ground between Jeff and Willard, but Benjie would ask no questions. Jeff was touchy enough these days, and a man in possession of his good senses didn't deliberately spark dry timber.

Giving Benjie no sign of recognition, Jeffrey dropped to the

blanket and stared moodly into space. Lost in thought, he unconsciously pulled his red-and-black stocking cap from his head and, as he always did in times of distress, ran his fingers through his thick sandy hair.

The gesture reminded Benjie of so many things. The terrible night they had been thrown into Newgate Prison . . . the morning they had set sail for the New World aboard Captain Riddle's *Seraph* . . . and, the worst nightmare of all, the afternoon the whole world had fallen apart . . .

Jeffrey's voice brought Benjie back to the present. "Willard does everything he can to humiliate me, Benjie. I know it, and I ought to be prepared for it, but something curdles inside me every time." He paused, and when he spoke again his voice was hard. "My time will come, Benjie. Mark well what I say. Someday I'll make every last one of these timber wolves pay for their insults."

"What did the lieutenant do, Jeff?" Benjie's voice, even when lowered, had a booming, carrying quality.

"First he kept my squad marching for a quarter of an hour after the others had gone off to rest," Jeffrey replied, almost spitting out the words.

"But the recruits need more work, Jeff. They'll still look bad in the parade, and——"

"Then he indicated I was an idiot," Jeffrey continued, unmindful of the interruption. "When he finally decided to let my men have a few minutes they broke their lines. And he—laughed at me."

"I saw the men run off," Benjie said, cautiously stifling a chuckle. When that wild gleam came into Jeff's eyes he wasn't responsible. And big and tough though Benjie was, he had no desire for a drubbing.

"Back home, if any man had treated me as Willard does, I'd have carved him to bits," Jeffrey fumed. "His expression said as plainly as words that he thinks I'm not capable of commanding a squad of men. Me! A stinking, puling little squad of dull-witted chicken raisers." Jeffrey laughed without mirth, then spoke again, savagely. "But wait, Benjie. Just wait. I'll turn those farmers into the best-drilled soldiers in the Colonies—if it kills me."

"Mebbe you're imagining what don't exist, Jeff," his friend said with heavy delicacy. "The whole garrison knows you're the best sergeant we've got. Willard knows it too. Look what he's done for you, Jeff."

"What?" Jeffrey's question was a challenge.

"He gave you the recruits. By rights Ensign Pulderwander should have had them. But the lieutenant knew you were the only man who could train them proper."

"Willard gave me the beggars the way you put an apple in the mouth of a roasted pig. He was convinced I'd fail—and he'd have the opportunity to complain about me to Captain Stephens."

"You're hard on him, Jeff. And that's for fair."

"Hard? I don't think so. . . . I tell you, Benjie, I don't have much respect for a man who turns himself into a drooling mess of pulp over a spoiled, self-satisfied vixen."

"You mean—Mistress Leah." So that was it. Benjie should have guessed. He and Matilda had spent many hours speculating on Jeffrey's true opinion of the beauteous Leah. And now he had proof that all of 'Til's guesses had been wrong. She had insisted that Jeff was in love with Mistress Leah without knowing it. But Jeff hated her. Yes, he hated her so much that he couldn't have any respect for a man who thought highly of her. He'd have to tell 'Til how mistaken she'd been.

"Leah." There was contempt in Jeffrey's voice as he rolled her name over his tongue. "She's frivolous, she's selfish, and she's vain. Any man with a grain of sense can see it. Yes, and it's proof that Willard has no brains or he'd recognize her for what she is."

A shadow fell between the two men, and Benjie, noticing it, tried to interrupt, but Jeffrey, warming to his subject, rushed on.

"I tell you, Benjie, it's women like Leah who cause most of the world's trouble. All they care about is their looks and—and how to attract men. Benjie, stop waving your hand in front of my face and listen to me.

"I know what I'm talking about. Remember Mary Watrous back in England? We've both cause enough to remember her, God knows." Jeffrey took a deep breath. "The Mary Watrouses may be sluts, but they're honest. They admit what they are. They don't put on airs. They don't smile at you one minute, then spit at you the next."

Jeffrey was unaware of the growing look of panic on Benjie's face. "May I have sense enough to stay away from females like Leah Hill, Benjie. And may the day come when I'll never again be made to salute the fools who run after her kind."

The shadow moved abruptly, and a hard, incisive voice broke into Jeffrey's tirade. "Your views are interesting, Sergeant Wyatt. Very interesting."

Jeffrey sprang to his feet and found himself looking into the

fiery eyes of Lieutenant Willard. How long had he been standing here? Jeffrey didn't know, but it was clear that Willard had heard plenty.

"My views were intended for the ears of my friend, Lieutenant. I didn't know I was speaking for the benefit of eavesdroppers."

"Confidential remarks should be made in an appropriate tone of voice, Wyatt. A lowered tone," Willard snapped. "I was seeking you out to compliment you on the way you handled your squad. But it was impossible to avoid hearing your vicious lies while I was still twenty paces away."

"I stand by the truth of every statement I made." Jeffrey's voice was deadly calm, and only the sudden clenching and unclenching of his fists gave away his emotions.

"It's a great pity," Willard replied in an almost casual tone, "that you're not a gentleman. I'd enjoy teaching you a valuable lesson."

Benjie, who had remained motionless, now pulled himself to his feet and tried to step between the two young antagonists. Although not more than a year or two older than either Jeffrey or Simon Willard, Benjie had sense enough to realize that serious trouble could result if the tempers of these bucks weren't curbed. He tried to squeeze into the few inches of space that separated them. But Jeffrey, never taking his eyes from Willard's, pushed his friend aside with a quick, deft snap of his wrist that sent Benjie reeling.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to teach a—so-called gentleman how to fight," Jeffrey said. With precise deliberation he removed the heavy woolen mittens which Matilda had knit for him last month. Unaware that the very size and shape of the gloves made his gesture ludicrous, Jeffrey took half a step forward and slapped Willard across the face with them.

Willard failed to see anything humorous in the situation either. He bowed, and when he spoke again he used the same disarmingly indifferent voice. "Governor Cornbury has forbidden his officers to duel," he said. "And though the present circumstances make me wish otherwise, I'm bound to agree with him. We need every man we can get here." Suddenly he laughed. "You'll be up and active again—in a few months, Wyatt."

A surge of fierce joy shot through Jeffrey. So this pompous young ass would fight him, after all. "What's your choice of weapons?" he demanded.

"There is no choice," Willard replied quietly. "With dueling prohibited, we can fight only one way. Frontier style."

"No holds barred?" His chance to even the score for countless humiliations had come sooner than he had expected.

"No holds barred. And, Wyatt, we'll fight until you apologize for your remarks about Mistress Hill."

"I think not. We'll fight until you admit the truth of every word I uttered."

With calm hands Jeffrey unbuttoned his greatcoat, threw off his muffler, then carefully removed his jacket. Simon Willard did likewise. Stretching his neck and flexing his shoulder muscles, Jeffrey untied the stock that wound around his throat and slowly rolled up his sleeves. He was so incensed, so eager for battle, that he was completely unaware of the wintry blasts. Willard apparently took no notice of the cold either.

They began to circle each other warily, looking for an opening. Although neither uttered a sound, and although Benjie stood in numbed silence, men began to appear from nowhere. Shouts of "Fight! Fight!" brought militiamen tumbling from Front Street taverns. The cries echoed through the little community, and several civilians rushed to the parade ground from the traders' stores on Lion Street. Because of the impending military review there were more people in Schenectady today than usual, and a large crowd was gathering around the two young men.

Jeffrey was unaware of the presence of anyone save Simon Willard until cries of "Give 'em room!" made him realize vaguely that this grudge fight would become a topic of conversation for many days. Well, he'd give them something to talk about!

Jeffrey lunged suddenly at his opponent. Willard side-stepped the onrush easily and, as Jeffrey floundered past, gave him a stinging blow on the side of the head. His temple smarting, Jeffrey whirled and was about to rush again when a half-forgotten phrase of his father's came back to him. Something about gauging the enemy's strength before you strike. That's what Willard had done—and had outsmarted him Very well. It wouldn't happen again.

Jeffrey stopped his advance and stood lightly on the balls of his feet. The crowd, seeking blood, hooted and booed lustily. Willard advanced very slowly and feinted twice with his left hand. Instinct told Jeffrey the lieutenant would strike with his right. Sure enough, Willard's muscular right sizzled through the air. Jeffrey stepped inside the blow and drove a series of hard punches to Willard's body.

His satisfaction was short-lived. A blow of bone-shattering impact landed in full force on Jeffrey's mouth. He realized blood

was dripping from his lower lip. A split second later another stunning blow crashed on his nose.

Willard was a better boxer than he. That much was painfully clear. And he realized he would have to do something quickly before he was slugged into unconsciousness. Sheer animal instinct propelled him against Willard, and they went down in a heap. Jeffrey twisted himself into a position astride his opponent's chest and beat on Willard's face with both hands. He had the satisfaction of seeing the lieutenant's left eye swelling and closing, and then he saw no more.

Willard's legs had risen from the ground and had wound themselves around Jeffrey's head; Willard's hands gripped his legs and tugged sharply, and he found himself being tumbled in a violent somersault. He landed flat on his back, the air left his lungs, and for a moment he blacked out. Days later he could not recall the instant when Willard landed on *his* chest. But he would always remember with painful clarity the punishment his face and head took from Willard's heavy fists when he did return to consciousness.

As though from a great distance Jeffrey heard shouts of advice:

"Bite his arm, ye hulkin' idjit!"

"Ja! Der lieutenant is not so goot. Kick him, Vyatt—kick him vere it hurts!"

With his remaining power Jeffrey grabbed Willard's wrists, and though it was a fight against odds almost too great, the blessed relief from pummeling gave him the energy to hang on. Bite Willard, had someone said? Kick him? For an instant Jeffrey was tempted, but for an instant only.

He was probably being a gallant fool. Willard had agreed to fight with no holds barred. But so far the lieutenant had fought clean, without recourse to frontier tricks. Jeffrey was damned if he'd be the first to use them. Maybe no one here considered him a gentleman, but he still had to live with himself. And if the fighting became dirty, then the initiative—and the onus—would be on Willard.

Willard's struggle to free his wrists from Jeffrey's tight grip gradually grew less violent. Jeffrey summoned his reserves of effort and threw the lieutenant off. Both rose shakily to their feet and shuffled toward each other.

The crowd, believing the time had come for the kill, set up a mighty roar. Jeffrey could hardly hear Willard mumble through puffed lips:

"Had enough?"

"Not from you!"

They struck at the same instant. Neither bothered now to defend himself. They were past all that. Blows landed on faces, shoulders, and bodies with abandon. yet both kept hitting—and hitting. Jeffrey barely noticed the lieutenant's punches any more. His own body was numb, and the savage satisfaction of knowing his own blows were landing kept him from thinking or feeling.

The crowd's excitement reached a new peak of frenzy. Every man there realized that both fighters were utterly spent, and the thrill of watching them go on was almost too much. Shouts and cries of encouragement were lost in the bedlam. Then a curious thing happened. Within a matter of seconds the crowd fell silent.

The noise had become part of a pattern for Jeffrey, and he suddenly missed it. He looked up, then blinked. Simon Willard was doing the same thing. Jeffrey couldn't quite believe what he saw. For the crowd at the south end of the parade ground had parted, and through the gap marched a tall blond girl.

There were those who claimed that Leah Hill never appeared more beautiful than she did at that moment. Others said she was so angry that she looked ugly. Jeffrey was never able to participate in those later discussions, for he wasn't seeing too well at the moment. Besides, the sound of Leah's voice drove everything else from his mind. Her words were like a lash, and he shrank into himself, feeling very small and, for no good reason, rather ashamed.

"Of all the revolting spectacles I've ever seen, this is the worst," she cried. "Look at you—two grown men behaving like wild animals. You're supposed to be training men to campaign against the Senecas——" She broke off and laughed. But now there was no music, only scorn, in her laughter. "You're not fit to associate with decent folks—much less the savages themselves!"

Simon Willard stood with his hands limp at his sides, his head hanging down on his chest. He dared not look at Leah, and Jeffrey felt sorry for him. Fortunately *he* wasn't in love with her, so he *could* gaze at her. But the flashing fury of her glance was too much for him, and his head dropped, too, as her voice mounted in ever-increasing anger.

"You're disgusting! You're like beasts—both of you! I—I never want to see either of you again! Don't you ever dare speak to me or—or to any civilized person!"

Leah flounced off, her skirts whipping out behind her. Matilda,

who had been holding a hurried whispered conference with Benjie, hastily scurried after her. Wyatt and Willard were completely forgotten for the moment, and the attention of the silent crowd was riveted on this slim girl who had somehow managed to make every man present feel as though he had been caught in an obscene act. Even Nathaniel Hill was awed. Saying not a word, he looked for a pitying second at the two crestfallen gladiators, then slowly followed his daughter back to the horses. He was nodding his head from side to side, and every spectator present felt sorry for him, knowing he'd be subjected to Leah's biting afterthoughts on the whole of the long ride home.

Jeffrey was so tired he could barely stand, but a glance at Willard told him his rival was in the same condition. All the fight had gone from both of them now, and they eyed each other warily. Suddenly, in spite of himself, Jeffrey grinned. Willard smiled back, and they simultaneously broke into hoarse laughter.

The lieutenant held out a swollen, battered hand, and Jeffrey pumped it firmly. "You fought fair, Lieutenant."

"So did you. You're a good man, Wyatt."

"You're better. You'd have beaten me if we'd gone on five minutes more."

"Couldn't have. I was finished."

"Me too."

Jeffrey couldn't wipe the idiotic grin from his face and continued to stand there, beaming on the man whom he had wanted to kill only a few moments earlier. He touched a cut on his lower lip gingerly with the tip of his tongue and was at a sudden loss for words. He wanted this man to be his friend; strange, but he had a new respect for Lieutenant Willard. And Willard seemed to feel the same way.

"I'm not sure what we've proved, Wyatt—except that we both need a drink."

"We sure do." Jeffrey had never felt much craving for alcohol. A glass of sack before dinner and a bit of heavy port afterward had more than satisfied his wants in England. But this wild country did something to a man. He knew that he couldn't live another ten minutes without something raw and strong and warm pouring into him.

Lieutenant Willard hastily scanned the thinning crowd. There would be no militia parade today; the crowd had already watched a better show, and audience and amateur soldiers alike were starting for their far-flung homes before dark. Willard at last spotted the man he was seeking: a greasy, ill-kempt Indian of early

middle age. An Oneida, he was dressed partly in the thick moccasins and heavy leggings of his native dress, and partly in a white man's heavy coat of obvious Dutch design. It was too big for him, and his dirty hands and jagged nails were hidden beneath the elaborate cuffs. A sharp observer might have guessed that he had stolen the coat from the van Kirk barn while the Senecas were busy torturing and raping and looting in the house.

The Indian's attire somehow symbolized the man himself. He was still a savage, yet he had acquired some of the settlers' ways. And in him were embodied the weaknesses of both.

"Meganumba!" Willard shouted, and the Indian shuffled over slowly, not heeding the urgency in the lieutenant's voice. "I have only sack at my rooms—and we'll use that to wash our cuts," Willard explained to Jeffrey. "I feel a need for something stronger, and from the look of you, so do you. Here, Meganumba —catch."

Willard reached into the inner pocket of the jacket he was donning and withdrew a worn leather purse. He plucked out a bright half crown and flipped it to the Indian. "Go over to Beck's Tavern and buy me a pint jug of the new rum from Boston. Tell Beck it's for me."

Meganumba nodded gravely and started to shuffle away. The lieutenant's shout pursued him. "If there's one drop missing I'll have your scalp, Meganumba," he warned. "Bring the jug to me without opening it, and maybe I'll give you a drink."

If Meganumba heard, he gave no sign. . . .

Some time later Jeffrey was sprawled out comfortably on a straw-filled mattress in Lieutenant Willard's quarters in the fort overlooking Ferry Street. Simon Willard was a great fellow. Good old Simon. They had exhausted every subject on earth common to two husky, healthy young men—save one. Women. Women meant Leah, and if this new-found friendship was to flourish, they must avoid her name at all costs.

Simon was pouring the last remaining drops of the heavy rum into a cup. Jeffrey looked at him and grinned. The lieutenant shook his head sadly. "Squeezin' the jug, Jeffie—but can't get any more out of it."

"That brown bastard Meganumba should be back any time now with the new jug. Wish you'd let me buy it, Simon."

"No need to spend your money. Queen Anne gra-graciously paid me two months' commutation yesterday. Have to keep the merchants happy—spread it around." Willard gestured expansively, and an empty tumbler crashed to the floor and broke into

tiny bits. Neither of the young men seemed to notice the accident.

Jeffrey rose and stretched. His muscles still felt sore, and he decided that Simon had the right idea: they'd drink until the stiffness of their bodies was eased. Crossing to the window, Jeffrey looked out across the heavy log walls of the fort to the harbor beyond. Several little boats, icebound, sat shivering under the pale glare of a January moon. There was no sign of life in Ferry Street below.

"Meganumba's prob'ly taken our good rum off somewhere, Simon. Drinkin' it himself," he muttered a trifle thickly.

"Better not, if he knows what's good for him. He knows I'll forbid him the town and send him back to the woods if he doesn't behave," Simon replied darkly. "And if Paugus ever gets his hands on Meganumba——" He broke off and in pantomime indicated the thorough wringing of a human neck.

"Wish he'd hurry up then. We haven't had any of that good rum for a long time. And I'm thirsty."

"Me too, Jeff. . . . You know, it's strange how a man can develop a thirst—a powerful thirst, my friend. Big enough for *two* more jugs of that good rum."

The moon was dropping from the sky and the first dirty gray streaks of dawn were showing when Benjie, who had been napping before the fire in the great hall of the fort, aided by the Indian Meganumba and Lieutenant Willard's personal orderly, piled Jeffrey onto the back of his weary, shivering horse. He swayed there perilously but refused to permit Benjie to tie him to the saddle, insisting he was a better rider when drunk than most men were when sober.

Simon Willard's sonorous, persistent snores followed them through his opened window as Jeffrey and Benjie rode out the main entrance of the fort at the junction of Church and Front streets. The time before dawn was always the quietest, and there was no sound now save the crunching of the horses' hoofs in the light snow which had fallen late in the night.

The stillness was punctured by Jeffrey's full-lunged voice. He felt like singing, and sing he did, despite Benjie's attempts to quiet him:

"The gentlemen of the Grenadier Guards,
A merry crew are they.
Heigh-ho, and nonny-hey,
A merry crew are they."

A shutter banged open, and a deep voice poured out a string of guttural oaths in sleepy Dutch. Jeffrey broke off and laughed raucously. "Wish my friend Simon weren't sleepin'," he said. "We'd tear these Dutchmen apart. Great fellow, Simon. Great fighter. Friend. My friend . . ."

Jeffrey was asleep in the saddle by the time Benjie guided their spent horses into the courtyard of the Hill house. It was as well for Jeffrey's peace of mind that he had lost consciousness, for had he been awake—and alert—he might have noted a suspicious flicking of the new muslin-curtained window of a front bedroom on the second floor. Leah's room.

Chapter Three

EVEN THE harshest of Nathaniel Hill's critics never claimed that he was a copper pincher. In fact, there were some who attended the wedding of Matilda Zimmerman and Benjie Brown whose comments went to the other extreme. It was wicked, they said, to put on such a prodigal display for two indentured servants.

But these were the minority, the new arrivals from England, unfamiliar with the frontier and its ways. Old-timers, English and Dutch alike, expected a lavish outlay of food and drink, and Nathaniel didn't disappoint them. He wouldn't be niggardly today, for after his many years on the edge of the wilderness he wanted Benjie and Matilda to have the best he could give. A man's ideas about his fellow man took firm and strange new roots here. Bonded or free, there was a spirit of equality, especially at a wedding. Occasional voices even murmured against the growing practice of the Southern Colonies, where, it was rumored, landowners were importing blacks to do their heavy work.

Of course it was different with Indians. They were untamed barbarians, and anyone who wanted to break an Iroquois for domestic work was welcome to try. The wise settlers made no such effort; they knew the captured Indian would escape again into his black forests at the first opportunity.

There were few Indians at the wedding out of respect to the ladies present. In these troubled times the women had a nervous habit of looking back over their shoulders if too many dark brown skins were visible at a gathering. Jeffrey saw only Meganumba and two or three Mohawks who had drifted into Schenectady for supplies and rum when the spring thaws had softened the ground.

Benjie and Matilda stood arm in arm under an arbor which Jeffrey had made of several young saplings. They flushed under each fresh new barrage of crude jokes as guests thronged about them to grasp Benjie's hand and to kiss the bride. It is an es-

tablished though unwritten rule that every bride is beautiful, and Matilda was no exception. In a burst of generosity that had wagged the feminine tongues of the district for days, Leah had sent to New York Town for a dress of white crepe for her, and a long white lace veil that had been worn by the first Leah Hill had been loaned for the occasion as well.

Bride and bridegroom stood up well under the raw humor of the frontier, but Jeffrey looked with some apprehension to see how the Reverend Mr. Phippeny, the new Anglican cleric recently arrived from Boston, was taking the blue-edged quips. His fears were groundless. The minister stood at one of the long board tables set up in the yard, munching cold roast pheasant and washing it down with a brimming tankard of claret.

Jeffrey had been in the New World for three and a half years, but he was still impressed by the bounty of the settlers. Two large venison had been smoked for the occasion, and the gamy meat hung in chunks from a heavy rack. For those who preferred beef or lamb or pork, there was plenty too. Potatoes, roasted Indian-style in their jackets, were heaped on platters, and vegetables of every description—squash, turnips, onions, beans, parsnips, wildroot, and peas—were disappearing into gaping mouths.

Nathaniel Hill had spread himself with half a dozen liquors, yet Jeffrey noted with amusement that most of the men drank rum. Reuben Parsons, a small, shifty-eyed man, was getting roaring drunk on sack, and Jeffrey didn't envy him the head he'd have in the morning.

Jeffrey himself had a curious lack of appetite. Benjie had been his only link to a world and life he had once known, and he felt shut out and lonely now. He had eaten a few bites of chicken which one of the women had cooked over an open spit, but his interest in food was negligible, and his depression grew. Without realizing he was doing so, he stiffened as Leah came out of the house, followed by Simon Willard and two other men, laden with trays of food. Jeffrey watched her as she directed the placing of the delicacies. He grudgingly admitted to himself that she looked exceptionally attractive today in a light green gown made of something unfamiliar. He wasn't accomplished at identifying women's clothing materials. The neckline, he decided, spoiled the dress. Deep-cut necklines might be all right at the theater in London or even at a ball in Philadelphia or New York Town, but any gown that exposed a girl's bosom in a community on the very edge of nowhere was vain and silly. Of course, Jeffrey told

himself, Leah did have reason to be proud of her fine white skin. She was lovely. Yes, she'd be lovely anywhere.

But didn't she know it! Leading poor old Simon and those idiotically eager young bucks around by the noses like trained bears at Covent Garden. No female was a real beauty unless she behaved like one. And Leah's flirtatious smiles, her suddenly lowered lashes, her quick little attentions first to this one and then to that were a sheer disgrace. If she were his wife—no, if she were his daughter, that's better—he'd take her across his knees and spank a little sense of dignity and propriety into her.

How Simon could be blinded by the minx, he didn't know. He longed for a heart-to-heart talk with his friend on the subject; he would open Simon's eyes fast enough. But he knew there could never be such a talk. He and Simon would remain friends only so long as they refrained from bringing up Leah's name.

Look at the fellow now! Someone had started playing a tune on the harpsichord in the parlor—the only instrument of its kind in the district. And Simon had offered his arm to Leah for a dance. A sensation he couldn't identify flooded over Jeffrey as he watched them disappear into the house together, laughing and chatting intimately, their heads only a few inches apart.

A sly and malicious feminine voce spoke so close to his ear that Jeffrey jumped.

"It 'pears like there'll be more'n one weddin' hereabouts this springtime, don't it?" The speaker was Hannah Parsons, justly feared as the worst gossip in Schenectady.

Jeffrey opened his mouth to reply but could think of nothing to say and stalked angrily away. If Leah was going to marry Simon, let her! Good riddance to her! She'd move into town and live at the fort as first lady of Schenectady, and there'd be a little peace at the sawmill.

Jeffrey found himself in front of a bowl filled with a rum-and-apple-cider punch. Wild strawberries floated about on top. and the concoction looked as innocent as a baby's twinkle, yet Jeffrey knew it carried a deadly potency.

He had a sudden desire to get drunk; to blot that picture of Leah and Simon laughing together out of his mind. But he hesitated. He had not tasted one drop of alcohol since the night last winter when he and Simon had sealed their friendship. The agonies he had suffered the next day had lessened his appetite for liquor appreciably. Well, now was the time to regain it.

He had downed one brimming mug of the fragrant punch and was just starting another when he heard someone call his name and looked up to see Captain Stephens approach, followed by Nathaniel Hill. He hastily set the pewter mug on the table and hurried to the officer's side.

Captain Christopher Stephens looked as much an officer as the drawings of the Crown's Finest which Jeffrey had studied as a child. His black boots were polished to mirror-brilliance. His scarlet tunc fitted smooth and firm across his broad shoulders, and its infantryman's red facings and cuffs seemed a part of him too. His square, tanned face with its crisscross of saber scars emerged with dignity from under the plumed and slightly ridiculous dress hat which army regulations prescribed for Her Majesty's officers on formal occasions.

There was a gleam of amusement in his eyes now as Jeffrey stopped before him. "I've been hoping for an opportunity to watch you drink, Wyatt," he said dryly. "I've heard rumors that the last occasion on which you succumbed to the lure of Bacchus was—monumental, to say the least."

"I—I've been wanting for some time to explain to you about that incident last winter, sir," Jeffrey stammered. "I don't want you to think badly of Lieutenant Willard. It was my fault, Captain. I—I provoked him into the fight."

"Hear that, Nat?" Captain Stephens asked Hill, who had joined them. "The boy takes full blame on his own shoulders. I like that."

"Told you he was a good lad, Chris. You'll be doing well to forget Governor Cornbury's rules in his case. There's a war on, so you can do things that you dasn't any other time."

"My mind was already settled, Nat. What you've told me about the boy has simply strengthened my resolve," the captain replied, leading Jeffrey to a more secluded corner of the yard.

Nathaniel, beaming with pride, followed and stood a few paces away to chase off anyone who might want to interrupt. Captain Stephens represented authority and the Crown in the district, and his rare appearances at social gathering usually degenerated into a series of worried questions and soothing replies.

Jeffrey was silent and bewildered, waiting for the captain to speak his mind. He had long expected to be reprimanded for the fight on the parade ground, but from Nathaniel Hill's beaming face it wasn't likely that any punishment was forthcoming.

"Wyatt, I've news for you," Captain Stephens said after what seemed like an interminable pause. "As you probably know, Gov-

ernor Cornbury requested—and was given—a bill by the assembly in New York Town some time ago—a bill prohibiting the issuance of commissions in the Colonial Militia to any man with a prison record."

"Yes, sir. I know." Jeffrey swallowed hard. He wanted to tell the captain his whole story; to explain that he had spent time in Newgate through no fault of his own; that, on the contrary—but no. There were some things you couldn't explain because no man would believe them. Better to hold your tongue and listen.

"Then there's another law," the captain went on. "No indentured servant is permitted to hold a commission in the Colonial Militia either. Bad for you, eh? Two ways. However"—he cleared his throat, and his left eye closed partially in a suggestion of a wink—"qualified officers aren't easy to find. The assembly has looked the other way once or twice before, and I wouldn't be overly surprised if they could be persuaded to do it again."

Jeffrey's heart began to pump, and for a moment he felt slightly dizzy and lightheaded. Was Captain Stephens suggesting that Jeffrey was to be offered a commission? He was.

."If Nat here will arrange to give you a day free next week, ride over to Albany and we'll settle the details. I could offer you the oath and swear you in here, of course. But under the circumstances we'd—ah—better follow the legal formalities to the letter. Don't you think?"

Captain Stephens took Jeffrey's hand in a firm grip, and Nathaniel Hill pounded him on the back enthusiastically. Jeffrey could only grin and stammer his thanks. Ensign Wyatt. He was at the very bottom of the ladder of commissioned ranks in a badly organized, ill-formed colonial militia at the very end of the world, but the title had a ring to it all the same. Certainly it was a vast improvement over the number a callous prison recorder had jotted down beside his name the night he'd been thrown into Newgate. Yes, he was coming up in the world, and next to his freedom that was the biggest step. When he wore the epaulet and the plumed hat he would be—officially and while in uniform, at least—a gentleman.

The smiles of Captain Stephens and Nathaniel Hill followed Jeffrey into the house, but he had already forgotten his benefactors. This was his first triumph of significance in years, and he unconsciously was seeking someone to share his happiness.

A dozen or more couples were bowing and scraping their way through the stately measures of a rout on the hardwood floor of the Hill parlor as Jeffrey walked through the open door. If Leah,

curtsying to her partner, Lieutenant Willard, noticed him out of the corner of her eye, and if her smile became a shade more brilliant, her laugh a trace more coquettish, Jeffrey was unaware of it. Nor did he realize that a deep scowl raised furrows in his tanned forehead as he looked at her, then looked quickly away.

He became aware of a sense of irritation edging in and then destroying his new-found feeling of well-being. He decided he was annoyed with himself. Why should he permit a flirtatious hoyden to spoil his greatest pleasure in years? Yet he felt the unreasonable urge to tell Leah the good news. He wondered how she would react.

Perhaps Simon would tell her, but that was unlikely. Captain Stephens had just given Jeffrey himself the word, and in all probability Simon didn't know. But here he was, crossing to Jeffrey's side, smiling broadly, his outstretched right hand held before him.

"My best to you, Ensign," Simon said. "Now I can really put you to work."

Jeffrey expressed his thanks for the lieutenant's good wishes, then tried to ignore his illogical pang of disappointment. Leah had stopped to chat with someone for a moment and apparently hadn't heard. Oh well, she would know soon enough. And anyway, what difference did it make?

Leah appeared at Jeffrey's side suddenly, her stylish silk apron rustling musically. She commanded Lieutenant Willard to fetch her a cup of punch, and he moved off at once, leaving Jeffrey alone with her. She regarded him regally.

"Is there still enough food on the tables for everyone?" she demanded.

"Yes, Mistress Leah." Jeffrey slipped into the mockingly servile tone he used only with this haughty young female.

"Have you refilled the punch bowls?"

"I'm keeping close watch over the punch, Mistress Leah. There was more than plenty a few minutes ago. Enough to last until sundown, at the present rate."

She nodded her bright blond head, apparently satisfied, then said, "Mark you that you remember to keep my guests satisfied, Jeffrey."

"Have I ever failed in my duties, Mistress Leah?" In spite of his efforts to keep his voice calm, Jeffrey's ruffled ego showed in his voice, and Leah's head came up sharply.

She bit her lip in vexation, then controlled herself and answered coldly, with an inflection deliberately devoid of expression. "I al-

ways find it wise to remind servants of their obligations. It means less excuses afterward—for work half done."

The harpsichord player chose this moment to begin a new tune, making up in enthusiastic vigor what he lacked in ability. Leah went through one of those lightning changes of humor which fascinated Jeffrey as much as they repelled him. Her foot began to mark time to the music. Her head bobbed and her body swayed slightly. She smiled at Jeffrey, and there was no mockery in her eyes.

"Aren't you going to dance with me, Jeffrey?"

He studied her briefly, hoping to find some tangible sign of the new impulse which prompted her to make light of him. He discovered none and became convinced that the minx was a better actress than he had given her credit for being. Surely she didn't *want* to dance with him.

Jeffrey bowed deeply from the waist and looked Leah full in the face. "You're too kind, my lady," he said, and his intonation was as chilly as hers had been a few moments before. "While you honor me beyond my wildest hopes, it would never do for someone in your high position to be seen dancing with a servant, especially a miserable creature whose indenture still has seven long years to run."

He bowed again and was gone before the bright flush appearing on Leah's cheeks had risen to her brow. When Lieutenant Willard returned with the cup of punch a few seconds later he was disconcerted to find that Leah's mood had changed. And for the rest of the evening he wondered what he had done to annoy her.

Jeffrey enjoyed the sawmill most on those rare occasions when he was alone there. And this morning, the day after the wedding of Benjie and Matilda, he was looking forward to the prospect of a day of solitude.

Nathaniel Hill had given the newlyweds a full week for a honeymoon and had even arranged for them to spend the time at the Red Lion Inn at Albany. He had found an excuse to ride there with them himself this morning, and Jeffrey suspected that not business but a desire for a day of companionable drinking away from the watchful eyes of his daughter was responsible. In any event, he wouldn't be back until late that night.

Leah had gone off for an early ride and a picnic with Lieutenant Willard, and Jeffrey told himself he was delighted that the house was free of her presence. He felt less stifled when Leah wasn't about.

Although the day was cool, Jeffrey's body glistened with sweat as he hacked branches off the big oak and elm logs that filled the far corner of the mill. As he finished preparing each one he half rolled, half pulled it to a second pile near the circular saws. The heavy metal blades rotated slowly on their pulleys, which occasionally emitted a lonesome whine as the river relentlessly kept them in motion. There would be no need for the saws until the wood was seasoned, but Jeffrey nevertheless found a quiet pleasure in placing the logs in position for immediate slicing.

He knew he should wait until Benjie came back before trying to put the inside of the mill in order. It would be easy for two men to lift the heavy logs into place. But he achieved a sense of savage relief in hard physical labor. There was no time to brood, no time to think.

He had removed his shirt, and it lay now near the ever-present flintlock. Occasionally as he worked Jeffrey glanced out of the open window facing the river, or through the partly closed doorway on the other side. According to the latest reports of Lieutenant Willard's scouts, the Senecas were making no moves from their villages at the moment, but it never paid to relax vigilance. The old frontier saying that you were only scalped once was an uncomfortable but sobering truth.

Jeffrey wondered if Leah had been told yet about the commission Captain Stephens had secured for him. She had not spoken to him at breakfast this morning, and he had long been at work when Simon had called for her.

The words of the old gossip, Hannah Parsons, came back to him with sudden force: "It 'pears like there'll be more'n one weddin' hereabouts this springtime, don't it?"

The little hand ax crashed down on an unoffending tree branch and buried itself in the body of the log. Jeffrey tried to wrench it free, and the handle came loose in his hand. Damnation! Now it would take him a quarter of an hour to repair the ax. What's more, he had ruined a good log. It was all the fault of that blasted female with her blue eyes—or were they green? Every time he thought about her there was trouble.

He was so busy pulling the axhead from the log that he didn't hear footsteps until they were almost inside the mill. His head jerked up, and he simultaneously reached for the flintlock, then hastily pulled back his hand. Leah stood framed in the doorway, her long riding skirt and slim jacket looking miraculously fresh and unrumpled above her dusty boots.

The thin, elegant riding crop which had been Lieutenant Will-

ards' Christmas present beat a light tattoo against the side of her skirt as Leah surveyed Jeffrey with cool impudence. He had an impulse to reach for his shirt but conquered it. If the vixen chose to stroll in on him unannounced, let her find him as he was. The perspiration rolling down his shoulder blades was honest sweat.

"I wondered where you were, Jeffrey. I didn't hear you working out here," Leah said at last.

"I've been here all day. And I've been working." Blast the girl! What was there about her that always put a man on the defensive?

"Then I'm sure Papa will commend you for your industry when he comes home tonight." Her derisiveness matched his own.

Jeffrey watched her but said nothing. He wished she would go up to the house and leave him alone. Maybe he had been working harder than he had realized, but he was suddenly unaccountably tired. And he had no desire to match wits with Leah Hill.

"Well, I've found you, anyway. And that's all that matters to *me* at the moment. I have a little errand for you, Jeffrey. I want you to ride into Schenectady and bring back my little book of Mr. Lovelace's poems. I forgot it and left it in the pocket of Lieutenant Willard's saddle."

Jeffrey's teeth ground together in impotent rage. This incredible female truly thought of nothing but her own whims of the moment. Not only was she suggesting that he leave the farm —and Leah herself—unprotected, but she had chosen the humiliating role of errand body for him to even the score for his insult at the wedding. Now, to make matters worse, she started to laugh at him.

"You needn't glare at me like that, Jeffrey. It isn't becoming to you. And it doesn't matter, for I shall insist that you do as I ask." There was undisguised scorn in her voice as she added, "Although you may think the task is below the dignity of a militia officer, you're *still* my servant—as you reminded me yesterday."

So! She had heard about his promotion. He knew for an absolute certainty now that her method of obtaining revenge was not accidental. Leah had deliberately left her book of poetry in Simon's saddlebag.

"I'm not leaving the farm, Mistress Leah." The vigor of Jeffrey's reply was as much of a surprise to him as it was to the girl. "I'm well aware of my obligations to you. So very aware of them that I wouldn't think of leaving you at the mercy of any savages who might be about in the forest."

"You'll do what I tell you," Leah cried stamping her foot. She looked very pretty with her face that shade of pink, Jeffrey decided irrelevantly.

"My first duty is to your father. He told me to protect his property—and by implication—his daughter. And I intend to do so. I'm sure your book can wait until some later time."

An uncontrollable fury mounted in Leah. Her breathing became difficult, and her breasts, half girl's, half woman's, rose and fell rapidly, straining against the fabric of her well-cut jacket.

"I'll decide where your duty lies," she shouted, losing all semblance of self-control. "You—with your gentleman's talk and your fine manners. You've been due a lesson for a long time now!"

Jeffrey stared at her in amazement. Lord, but she was beautiful when she ranted and raved this way. For the first time he admitted to himself that here was the loveliest girl he had ever seen. And although he knew it was mad, a fierce desire to possess her swept over him.

But Leah was past noticing Jeffrey's feelings. Her whole body trembled and shook as her voice raged on. "I'll teach you that you're to obey me! Before I'm through with you, you'll crawl to me—on your hands and knees!"

The riding crop swished through the air and caught Jeffrey on the left shoulder. Instantly an angry red welt appeared.

So this was what he had coming. Jeffrey planted his feet firmly in the thick dirt floor of the mill and stood his ground. He had heard stories of the whippings of indentured servants, of course. Benjie had been full of such tales when Nathaniel Hill had first purchased them, and Matilda had always been reticent to discuss her former employers and had rubbed her arms gingerly whenever the subject had come up.

But Jeffrey had never really thought about the indignity of a physical beating before. Certainly it had never crossed his mind. that this girl, whom he despised, would so humiliate him. Well, let her. He would show her he could stand up against the worst punishment she could give.

Again the riding crop sang through the air, then again. Jeffrey's shoulders began to tingle with the first aftereffects of the numbing pain, but a curious sense of exhilaration lifted his spirits. Did Leah think these fleabites would force him to comply with a frivolous demand that no adult could take seriously?

Through the rain of blows which fell indiscriminately on his head and shoulders Jeffrey looked at Leah and was shocked.

There was a strange wildness to her beauty now that was unlike anything he had ever seen or known. Her eyes gleamed with an unnatural brightness, and her long blond curls fell in disarray over her temples. A fine line of perspiration had formed on her upper lip, but the always fastidious Leah ignored it. She seemed unaware of anything but the stubborn male target looming up before her, and her plain intent was to cut that target down.

Her frenzy gave her strength, and Jeffrey wondered hazily how much longer he could bear the sharp slashes which cut into his skin. He wasn't thinking clearly any more; he knew that much. But he was engaged in a contest of wills. When he had fought Simon Willard, only sheer physical endurance had been important. This was a different sort of fight.

This was something more primitive, something stronger and deeper. Dimly—he was having trouble thinking at all now—he knew that behind this weird conflict lay the fact that he was a man and Leah was a woman. She had chosen muscular combat as her means of crushing him. And so he had no choice but to outstay her. It was more important than anything on earth that his strength, his stamina prove superior to hers.

Jeffrey swayed on his feet now but he didn't know it. Nor did he realize that each time Leah raised the riding crop in her tired hand the motion was slower, clumsier. He was conscious of only two things now—the searing pain that enveloped his head and the upper part of his body, and of Leah's face, more exquisite than ever, looming up before his agonized eyes.

He had a sudden impulse to kiss her, to crush her face beneath his. The idea made him want to laugh, and before he could stop it the laugh rolled out of him. Leah was startled by this first sound from her antagonist in the strange duel, and the riding crop fell to the dirt as her exhausted arm dropped motionless at her side. Her eyes had cleared. Their unnatural glint had vanished, and she looked in panic-stricken horror at the man whose body she had mutilated.

Jeffrey took an unsteady step forward and bowed from the waist, coldly, formally, correctly. He had no conscious sense of control over his movements but felt as though strings jerked by unseen hands were starting and stopping him.

"I come to you, Mistress Leah, but not on my knees," Jeffrey said through stiff lips. "Never—on my knees."

The impulse to kiss her swept over him again, and this time he made no effort to master it. He took her in his arms, and as his lips touched hers he was revived for a few brief seconds.

Through the mist of his mental chaos he knew that this was the girl he had been seeking ever since he had first become aware of women as creatures to be desired. His surging hatred for Leah, his lack of ease, his sensitivity in her presence—all were understandable now. The riddle had been solved.

But he was certain he had gone mad. For Leah wasn't returning his kiss. And no wonder—she had just administered a beating to a disobedient servant. In her eyes he wasn't a man, a human being with hopes or desires—or even feelings. He was a bondsman, sworn on penalty of death to serve her as she, not he, saw fit.

Never again would he be as close to her as he was at this moment. Never again would he hold her as man is meant to hold woman. Savor this instant in the eternity of time, Jeffrey. Remember it, prolong it. . . .

His tall body went suddenly limp, and he slumped, then crumpled to the dirt. His mind teetered on the edge of a yawning chasm, and then the darkness mercifully swallowed him up and he was blanketed in the soothing folds of unconsciousness.

He would never know that Leah stood for a second looking at him with her heart in her eyes, then dropped to her knees, running her hands lightly over his swollen face, murmuring incoherent words and phrases, until his eyelids at last fluttered. Then she scrambled to her feet and fled toward the house.

Chapter Four

THE TRADER from New York Town was bored. He had languished in Schenectady for a week now, and Schenectady in June was hot. His plans to relieve the settlers of large bales of furs in return for small amounts of cash had misfired. These Dutchmen were shrewd, and their English brethren were no easy marks, either. The trader would have departed three days ago, but he still wanted to show a profit for this miserable trip into the hinterlands.

He sat now at a rear table in Beck's Tavern, drinking ale and drumming impatiently on the scarred oak. Did nothing ever happen here to relieve the monotony of living and dying? Two ancient Dutchmen, smoking long clay pipes and sipping tiny glasses of *weisswasser* were seated at the next table, and the trader tried to shut out the sound of their dry, cracked voices but could not.

"Vyatt is a goot poy," the one with the white beard was insisting. "I am not so sure he vould shoot his friend."

"Reuben Parsons vas right dere and saw vat happen," the other aged patriarch declared emphatically. "So today dey vill hang young Vyatt by the front of the fort. Drink, Pieter, and ve go vatch. And stop arguing for vat you don't pelieve."

So there was to be a hanging. Perhaps there'd be a little activity in this Godforsaken hole after all. The trader leaned across his table toward his neighbors.

"I beg your indulgence, gentlemen." Two wrinkled scowls tried to glare him into silence. "If I may, I'd like to buy you a drink."

Neither of the old men answered, but there was a perceptible thaw in the atmosphere. The bearded one pulled himself closer to his companion, thus making room for the stranger. The trader joined them with a speed bereft of dignity but retained sufficient caution to ask no questions until several glasses of weisswasser had oiled the parched throats of the ancients.

Then he was treated to a curious tale. Lieutenant Simon Willard, Schenectady's garrison commander and first citizen, had been

shot ten days ago. And one of his own officers was accused of attempted murder, with the trial to take place today.

The case had many unusual features, but none intrigued the trader as much as the fact that Lieutenant Willard, who had suffered only a slight wound, was acting as his own judge. His position as chief military officer in the town made it necessary for him to appear on the bench, and neither of the old Dutchmen considered it important that he might be somewhat prejudiced against the alleged criminal.

The accused, one Ensign Jeffrey Wyatt, was purportedly a friend of the lieutenant, though the bald, unbearded Dutchman solemnly asserted there was bad blood between them. The two young men had fought a savage battle some months ago, and a member of the Colonial Militia named Reuben Parsons was the authority for claiming that Wyatt was in love with the lieutenant's girl.

The case was complicated by the fact that Wyatt was an indentured servant in the home of the young lady herself. When the trader expressed surprise that a bondsman should hold a commission in the militia, the bearded ancient patted him on the back and said that all Schenectary agreed with him. This was what happened when a man was raised to a position beyond him.

It took considerable time and the expenditure of gold sovereign on quantities of weisswasser for the trader to learn the details of the crime. The militia, it seems, had gone out on a practice march. The soldiers had divided themselves into two groups for a sham battle, with Lieutenant Willard leading the attackers while Ensign Wyatt commanded the defenders.

Wyatt's platoon had scattered dry leaves around its position at the base of a little hill, and the men were hidden behind thick trees. Obviously they expected footfalls on the leaves to reveal the approach of Willard's force. But the lieutenant had laughed when he saw the trap. He told his men of an old Oneida trick: make no attempt to move the leaves; simply wet them with water from a canteen—or by other means—and they would be rendered soundproof.

Lieutenant Willard had been in the midst of his explanation when a shot from the direction of Ensign Wyatt's platoon had cut him down. And Reuben Parsons, who had been off in the brush doing a little scouting on his own for the lieutenant (he'd said), came rushing up, crying that Mr. Wyatt had taken aim at the lieutenant and had then shot him, cool as you please.

The trader was interested now. Maybe Schenectady wasn't as

dull and sleepy a river town as he had thought. What explanation had Ensign Wyatt given? None, the ancients announced in unison, their manner indicating only too plainly what they thought of young Wyatt. In fact, they hastened to add, several witnesses had heard the accused flatly state that he would offer no defense. He had said that so much had happened to him in the past through no fault of his own that he knew now it was his destiny to die at the end of a rope. Talk like this, the ancients argued, proved that the Crown's policy of sending prisoners from Newgate to the Colonies could end only in tragedy.

What of the girl? the trader demanded. One never knew about women, he declared, winking in his most sophisticated manner. He wouldn't be surprised if her sympathies were all with the would-be murderer. The old men blinked like two indignant owls and contemplated the trader with a new hostility. Clearly he knew nothing whatsoever about ladies—Schenectady ladies, anyway. Leah Hill had completely removed herself from the case.

She was the kindliest and most charitable girl in the community, they said, and she had spent most of her time since the shooting at the home of Reuben Parsons and his wife Hannah. The Parsons family had been going through a period of financial uncertainty, and Mistress Hill could be seen any morning of the week arriving at the ramshackle Parsons house with a basket of food over her arm. What's more, she had refused to discuss the Wyatt case with anyone in town.

There were rumors, the old gossips declared, that the girl's father, Nathaniel Hill, had declared his unbounded faith in his servant. And a fellow bondsman, Benjie Brown, had been involved in two fist fights—one right here in Beck's Tavern—defending the cold-blooded young assassin. But Wyatt had no other supporters and was sure to hang. Even the jury, with the possible exception of the Reverend Mr. Phippeny, had no doubts.

Afraid he would miss the trial, and unable to budge the old Dutchmen from their chairs, the trader hurried down Front Street to the fort. En route he passed no one; the town seemed deserted, and he guessed that all Schenectady was attending the trial.

Arriving hot and breathless at the fort, a sentry directed him to the assembly hall, and as he squeezed into the room his suspicion was confirmed. Not one inch of available space was going to waste. At least two hundred people were crowded into the room, and despite the fact that all six windows were open, the acid odor of unwashed bodies stung the trader's nostrils. He

wished fervently that he had stopped at his room for a vial of scent.

On a crude platform at the far end of the hall sat a handsome dark-haired young man in the full-dress uniform of a senior lieutenant of infantry. Because he was seated and because his left arm was worn in a sling, the trader identified him at once as Lieutenant Willard.

Flanking him on either side were four tall militiamen in various degrees of uniform dress. Only their long frontier rifles looked polished and well kept. The trader shivered. Barbarians! He didn't envy the prisoner.

Fifteen chairs were placed in a row on the floor, directly facing Lieutenant Willard, and the trader supposed that the ill-kempt men slouched in them must be the jury. They were laughing and whispering to each other, and the trader was mildly surprised to see a jug pass up and down the row. Only one juror consistently refused a drink, and from his dull black coat of rough homespun the trader knew this must be the minister.

A frightened, very young militiaman was standing at the foot of the platform, testifying, but his voice was raised no higher than a whisper, and the trader was unable to hear a word. Somewhere in the audience a baby wailed plaintively in its mother's arms.

There was a sudden buzz of excitement as a side door opened and the prisoner, Ensign Jeffrey Wyatt, was escorted into the hall. His sandy hair was uncombed, and a week's stubble of beard was noticeable on his chin. He looked like a murderer, the trader decided, all the while admiring Wyatt's long, rangy build. The voices in the hall died away, and there was no sound now save the clanking of the chains fastened to Wyatt's ankles and wrists as he walked slowly to a position halfway between the jury and Lieutenant Willard.

The man had his nerve about him! He bowed first to the jury, then to the lieutenant. And the trader was amazed at Willard's friendly grin. Here was a man who bore no rancor and was going out of his way to show his jury that the prisoner was his friend and therefore innocent.

Suddenly Lieutenant Willard's voice filled the silence. "This is the third time you have been called before the court, Mr. Wyatt," he said, and his tone was as quietly warming as his smile. "Do you plead innocent of the charges placed against you —or do you plead guilty?"

A shorter hour earlier the trader had never heard of any of

these people, yet he found he was breathing with difficulty and he craned his neck, as did everyone else, to catch a glimpse of the prisoner's face.

"I am not guilty, sir." Wyatt's reply was clear and surprisingly firm.

Lieutenant Willard shook his head sadly and stared down at the young man before him. "Jeff," he said in a low, pleading voice, "please, in God's name, don't be so stubborn. If you'll just elaborate—give a few details—I can recommend an appeal to higher authority. And once you're over in Albany, Captain Stephens can——"

"I can't prove my innocence, sir. I can only claim it." Two bright splotches of red appeared through the pallor of Wyatt's cheeks.

Lieutenant Willard shrugged and sighed, and the whole hall sighed with him. But there was an animal intensity to the crowd's relief that contrasted strangely with the lieutenant's obviously genuine regret. The mob had feared it would be robbed of the day's sport, but now, certainly, there *would* be a hanging. The trader fingered the lace at his cuffs and began to wish himself elsewhere.

The lieutenant turned to the jury, the crowd's eyes following him. He cleared his throat twice and seemed to find speech difficult.

"Gentlemen," he said at last, "please rise."

Fifteen chairs scraped back, and one juror, buoyed by the contents of the big jug, bounced to his feet so rapidly that his chair overturned and skidded noisily away.

"You will retire and consider your verdict in this case," Lieutenant Willard continued. "Before you leave, however, I feel it my duty to remind you——"

"Hell, Willard, you don't have to give us no lecture." The big fellow at the end of the row, apparently a self-constituted foreman, was speaking. "And we don't have t' do no retirin' nowheres. We're all sot in our minds. This bastard's guilty."

Several jurors nodded in agreement, and the big man looked pleased with himself as he squinted out the nearest window, then sent a stream of tobacco juice with uncanny accuracy at the head of a weed showing above the sill.

Lieutenant Willard was annoyed but checked his temper. The trader watched him as he looked at each juror in turn. "Regardless of your opinions, you will retire to another room and give due consideration to the matter, as required by law," he said

flatly. "When you arrive at your verdict you will return. Not before."

"Damned waste o' time," the big man muttered, but he obediently shuffled after his colleagues, who were slowly making their way toward the side door.

The trader would never forget what happened in the next few seconds. There was a scuffling at the back of the hall, and the crowd parted suddenly. A girl—the loveliest creature the trader had ever seen—walked slowly toward Lieutenant Willard's platform. Her right hand was tightly enclosed around the wrist of a seedy little wisp of a woman who half stumbled, half ran with birdlike steps after this determined young vision.

Lieutenant Willard was on his feet in an instant, and even the prisoner seemed to take an interest in the proceedings for the first time as he gaped openmouthed at the girl. The jurors had stopped their march from the hall, and every eye was riveted on the dramatic figure moving toward the front of the courtroom.

"I demand that this trial be stopped," the girl said, and the trader was struck by the extraordinary musical quality of her voice. Lord, here was a wench who would do a man proud. Why hadn't he seen her around town before? He had no notion that such a beauty was hiding in the mud of Schenectady. A real beauty she was, and a lady. The trader found himself admiring her spotless dress of yellow linen and the shawl of a matching hue that covered her head.

There was a stunned silence in the hall, and the young woman repeated her cry: "I demand that this trial be stopped!"

Lieutenant Willard's reply was meant for her ears alone, but the room was so still that everyone present heard him. "What's the meaning of this, Leah?"

Leah! Of course! If the trader had been thinking he would have guessed her identity at once. So she had no interest in the trial, eh? He took a step forward to see and hear her more clearly and almost started a stampede toward the platform.

"The meaning, Lieutenant Willard, is that an innocent man is about to be punished—punished for a crime he didn't commit." Leah took a deep breath, then plunged on: "Mrs. Parsons here has something to tell all of you."

With a sudden jerk Leah pulled her frightened companion to a position directly in front of the lieutenant. Mrs. Parsons, white-faced and nervous, stood rubbing her chafed wrist. Suddenly a shabby figure elbowed through the crowd toward the little group in front of the platform.

"My wife ain't sayin' nothin' t' anybuddy. Ye got no right t' make her blabber."

Reuben Parsons—for it must be he—was in a frenzy of fear and excitement as he shoved and clawed and kicked his way toward his wife. At a quick nod from Lieutenant Willard four of the burly militiamen stepped in front of Mrs. Parsons and blocked the frantic little man's path.

"Ye dirty pigs, let me through here, damn ye! Hannah—keep your mouth shut and go home! Mind me, now, or I'll whup ye till I've broke every bone in your stupid body!" Reuben Parsons screamed. Froth was dribbling from the corners of his mouth, and he danced up and down in impotent rage as he attempted in vain to reach his wife's side.

Lieutenant Willard cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted at the top of his lungs to make himself heard in the ensuing bedlam. "If Mrs. Parsons has anything to tell this court she shall have her chance to speak. The militia will remove any person creating a disturbance or attempting to interfere."

The crowd dropped back, and the trader discovered he could breathe again. His fine lawn stock was awry, and someone had dirtied his boots, but this was no time to consider such things. Mrs. Parsons was about to say something. Her head drooped, her whole body sagged, and she spoke in a voice so low it was barely audible.

"Mr. Wyatt didn't shoot you, Lieutenant. He had nothin' t' do with the shootin'."

"What did happen, Mrs. Parsons?" the lieutenant urged as the tired little woman brought one gnarled hand to her throat.

"Ye remember, Lieutenant, ye lent me and Reuben ten pounds last fall when our crops didn't come in?" There was a plea in Mrs. Parsons's voice now. If only these people would understand and not force her to say it all. Well"—she swayed and the trader thought she was going to faint—"we couldn't pay you back. We don't have more'n three shillin's to our name. So—so——"

"There he goes!" One of the militiamen unleashed a shout so harsh that the trader's heart stopped beating for a second. His startled eyes followed the soldier's grimy forefinger, and he saw Reuben Parsons, who had been all but forgotten, scrambling madly through the wide-open window.

Events of the next few minutes followed each other with such rapidity that the trader was never precisely sure of their sequence. But as he told his New York cronies at the White Hart Inn on King Street later, it was no time at all before half a

dozen men flung themselves through the window in pursuit. Mrs. Parsons collapsed on the floor, sobbing—or did that happen afterward?

Of one grim fact there was no doubt. A series of sharp rifle-shots rang out across the parade ground and echoed through the windows. And for two nights and a day Reuben Parsons's bullet-riddled body lay sprawled in blood-soaked mud as a warning to all criminals who might try the temper of frontier justice. . . .

The trader loitered about the main entrance to the fort with the crowd, and he cheered as lustily as anyone when Leah Hill appeared, Lieutenant Willard and Ensign Wyatt behind her. He continued to shout as the two men shook hands and then jostled each other in an attempt to help the girl onto her horse. He was still yelling as young Wyatt mounted another horse. And along with the rest of Schenectady, he found himself shouting as the man and the girl rode past.

It would have been a disappointment to the trader had he accompanied Jeffrey and Leah back to the Hill Farm. They rode in silence for the better part of a mile, and for the first time there was no wall of embarrassment or strain separating them. The sun drifted softly through the leaves of the tall elms that lined both sides of the trail and cast grotesque little shadow patterns in the dirt beneath the horses' hoofs. At last Jeffrey spoke.

"Thank you, Leah—Mistress Leah," he said. That was all. The reticence in his voice was more than balanced by the obvious depth of his sincerity. Leah had divined, somehow, that Reuben Parsons had shot Simon, and she had spent a week coaxing and cajoling and hinting, until she had wormed the truth from Parsons's wife. In doing so she had saved Jeffrey's life, and he was finding it very pleasant to be alive. "Thank you, Leah," summed up all that he felt.

"Please, Jeffrey—don't thank me. I knew you weren't the kind who'd try to kill an—innocent man without reason. So I—had to prove it. I'd have done the same for—for anyone." Leah was very sure in her own mind that she had connived and schemed for the sake of justice alone. It never occurred to her that she might have a personal interest in Jeffrey.

Both were curiously content. The incident at the sawmill was half forgotten by now, deliberately pushed into the background reserved for passions too raw to be fitted into the polite prisms of accepted patterns of behavior.

Jeffrey took Leah's statement at face value. In his opinion, she was virtually engaged to marry Simon Willard, and if he had

analyzed her efforts of recent days he would have said her purpose was to clear her future fiancé's name of scandalous implication. Yet she had helped *him*; she had gone out of her way to be kind—more than kind—to a man for whom she had previously expressed nothing but loathing and contempt.

As they drew ever closer to the Hill property they unconsciously slowed the pace of their horses, wishing to prolong the deep satisfaction of their first peaceful moments together. And if their horses walked so close together that the fabric of Jeffrey's trousers occasionally brushed against Leah's skirt, neither was aware of it. They knew only that they were happy—very happy.

Chapter Five

NATHANIEL HILL had predicted that July would be hot, and if the first four days of the month were an accurate sample, he was right. Jeffrey had learned that Nathaniel could always judge the weather. It was the old tomahawk wound in his left thigh, he said. Whenever it ached there was a change for the worse.

A swarm of gnats buzzed around Jeffrey's head as he stood at the river's edge, staring dispiritedly at the smooth, placid water. Even the river was too tired to move today. Tree leaves drooped under the melting glare of a merciless sun, and there was no sound save the faint tap of an occasional pine cone as it gave up the struggle and fell to the listless grass.

Jeffrey had been cutting timber ends in the mill since daybreak, and he was pondering an important question: should he or should he not take a quick swim in the river before dinner? He guessed there'd be time. Leah was in charge of the kitchen this week as the Browns, Benjie and Matilda, had been sent to New York Town to trade a boatload of neatly spliced lumber for a variety of supplies, mostly bolts of cloth. Nathaniel could have sent Benjie alone, but he had softened when he saw Matilda's eyes when she thought she would be separated from her husband.

Nathaniel was in his room taking a late morning nap, and Leah had been working furiously in the kitchen since breakfast, brewing huge batches of apple butter over roaring flames.

Jeffrey grinned and wondered what there was about Leah that impelled her to do the hottest and most uncomfortable work on the year's most sizzling day.

He pulled his sweat-soaked shirt over his head and was about to kick off his loose moccasin shoes when he heard the rustle of skirts. He turned, but the sun blinded him, and he heard Leah's voice before he saw her.

"Jeffrey! Jeffrey—come up to the house at once!"

Damnation! Leah had a knack for catching him shirtless. The soggy, rumpled piece of rough linen which lay in the moss at the

riverbank was unfit for further wear, and Jeffrey kicked it away before Leah reached his side, as if to disassociate himself from such an undesirable garment. All at once he saw her as she hurried through the fringe of trees, and he could tell she was excited.

"Major Stephens is here to see you," she announced breathlessly.

"*Major* Stephens?"

"Yes, he's been promoted—and—and so has Simon. Hurry, Jeffrey—don't just stand there gawking at me! He wants you immediately!"

Jeffrey wondered why a newly promoted major would ride all the way out here to see a lowly ensign of militia, but without another word he strode off toward the house with such long strides that Leah was forced to lift her skirts and half run, half skip to keep pace with him.

She glanced obliquely at his bare chest, and if she was reminded of the last occasion on which she had thus seen him, she gave no sign.

"Papa's come down to the parlor, Jeffrey. He's talking to Major Stephens, so you'll have time to make yourself presentable," she said as they reached the house. And as he was about to climb the stairs to his tiny attic room she added with a twinkle, "After the major leaves you'd best bring back your shirt from the river —or it'll mildew."

Jeffrey made no effort to conceal his chuckle as he mounted the sagging steps. Leah's eyes were as sharp as those of a Mohawk scout, and no mistake. There wasn't much she missed. He was still chuckling five minutes later as he entered the little parlor of the Hill home.

The laugh died abruptly as he looked at Major Stephens. Despite the heat, the officer was wearing full campaign dress, the bright crowns on his epaulets standing out stiffly from the heavy broadcloth coat. Jeffrey wished he'd worn a jacket and suddenly felt gauche and ill at ease.

"Congratulations—Major," he said. "It's good to have a field-grade officer in the district. Now maybe Colonel Schuyler will treat us less poorly at munitions-muster time."

"So long as I have the right officers, I don't care whether Schuyler and the governor ignore us or not," Major Stephens said, shaking hands and reseating himself. "The governor's been busy this week, you know. Willard's a captain now. And that's good news for *you*."

Jeffrey nodded without understanding what his superior meant.

He had learned long ago it was always best to agree with a senior officer, and if you were lucky he might become a trifle garrulous and explain.

"Willard's promotion means we have a vacancy in the rank of lieutenant—for the right man," Stephens added. "And if a task I have in mind is carried out properly—well, I don't think there'll be any trouble. In fact, the assembly will probably hand you a new commission by acclamation."

Jeffrey stared hard at the fireplace and studied the rainbow hues of the sun's rays on a silver box belonging to Leah which stood on the mantel. His muscles tensed warily. It wasn't like Stephens to offer a plum like this so jovially. There must be at least a dozen ensigns in the district senior to Jeffrey, and any one of them normally deserved the promotion first. A man was given nothing in this world; he earned every good thing he ever received, Jeffrey had long since learned.

Nathaniel Hill, who had been sitting in the only comfortable chair the room boasted, an overstuffed, reclining half couch near the door, rose to his feet and edged toward the exit. It was insufferably hot, and his hands were already unfastening the top hooks of his shirt. But a gesture from Major Stephens stopped him, and he hesitated a foot or two from his goal.

"There's no need for you to go, Nat," Major Stephens exclaimed. "You know why I'm here. Actually, if we're going to be proper about this, it's your place to tell Wyatt you've given your consent."

Nathaniel returned to his chair and considered his fingernails for several minutes before he spoke. "Man don't question the will of the Lord God Almighty, Jeffrey," he said, his voice unusually grave. "We obey His commands and ask Him to preserve and protect us."

"This is a commission for the Colony of New York, Nat. And I'm the one who chose Wyatt, not the Lord God," Major Stephens interrupted, but Nathaniel ignored him.

"When I bought your time for ten years, I figured you'd be a strong worker, but it never came to mind that you'd grow beyond me. Well, you have. And while I'll miss you, it's like Major Stephens says. You won't be gone forever, and what you'll be doin' will be a help to all the folks hereabouts, not just me."

Jeffrey's tension mounted as he watched first Nathaniel, then Major Stephens. Something of importance was certainly in the wind. A rustle outside the opened door caught his ear, and he

knew he wasn't the only one who was curious. Leah was blatantly eavesdropping.

Nathaniel cleared his throat and glanced at Major Stephens for reassurance before continuing. "Mind you, now—you don't need to accept. Not me nor the major, nor even Governor Cornbury in New York Town, can make you do it."

"Do what?" Jeffrey asked. Nathaniel seemed to take it for granted that he'd explained everything.

"I'll tell you the rest, Mr. Wyatt," Stephens cut in. "I simply wanted Nat to let you know he's given his consent to your part in the project—if you're willing." He paused, then lifted his head and called out sharply, "Mistress Hill!"

Leah appeared in the doorway and managed to hide her sheepishness at being caught by smiling, thus effectively showing her dimples.

"Either come in and join us—or go about your business elsewhere," the major declared, his tone softened unconsciously. Even a field-grade officer commanding a whole district couldn't resist the force of those dimples.

Leah needed no further invitation, and a moment later she was perched on the arm of her father's chair. Nathaniel frowned at her, but her attention was riveted on Major Stephens. Jeffrey felt a strong compulsion to look at her but knew he mustn't miss a word, an inflection, a gesture of the older officer. And the major seemed to have forgotten Leah's presence as he turned back to Jeffrey.

"As you already know, Mr. Wyatt, the loyalties of the Iroquois nations are divided in our war with the French," he said slowly. "The Oneidas, the Cayugas, and the Mohawks are with us. The Senecas and the Tuscaroras are allies of King Louis."

At the mention of the Senecas, Nathaniel leaned forward and would have spat into the fireplace, but a frown from Leah and a gentle pressure of her hand on his arm sufficed to restrain him.

"The Onondagas are still teetering on the fence," the major said, and from the note of finality that crept into his voice Jeffrey knew that the full situation—and his part in it—would become clear in a moment. "King Wexar of the Onondagas signed the treaty with us at Albany, of course. So far he hasn't abided by it. On the other hand, he hasn't broken it either."

Stephens eased himself into a more comfortable position and leaned his sword against the leg of his chair. "He needs persuasion. So I have it in mind to send two officers through Indian country to see Wexar. If he'll join us it'll be a great help to our

cause—to say the least. I don't need to remind you that, after the Senecas, the Onondagas are the biggest and most powerful of the Iroquois nations."

Only a portion of what the major was saying stuck in Jeffrey's mind. Two officers would be sent through hostile territory to see Wexar, and he was to be one of them. Unfortunately his eyes never left Stephens's face, for Leah was looking at him now, and had he seen and interpreted her expression correctly, he would have known far more than either of them had ever guessed about themselves.

"I see you know I'm asking you to volunteer for this trip," Major Stephens said quietly, then added in afterthought: "The other officer who will go is Captain Willard."

Leah gasped audibly, and Jeffrey became aware of her presence. She must be very deeply in love with Simon, he thought. This isn't pleasant for her. She was born in the wilderness and she knows the risks.

The major leaned back and waited for Jeffrey to reply. Slowly the young man turned his head, and his gaze met Nathaniel's squarely. The gray, balding head nodded vigorously. Jeffrey's eyes slid past Leah's. She seemed to be staring in complete absorption at a smudge on the woven rug before the fireplace. He remembered that he had made the spot that night in the early spring when Leah had initiated him into the mysteries of Indian popcorn. Why had he been so clumsy when he had poured out the little pitcher of melted butter?

Gradually he realized that the room was very silent and that he had spoken not one word through Major Stephens's long recital. He tried to control his eagerness. Better to sound as matter-of-fact as Stephens himself had been. An officer always accepted danger as routine, never as anything extraordinary. That had been Father's counsel.

"I shall accept the assignment, sir. As Mr. Hill has kindly given his consent, I can see no obstacle to prevent me from performing my duty for Her Majesty." Jeffrey felt rather proud of himself. He had sounded almost indifferent, as though a trip of more than one hundred miles through Seneca-infested land were a normal—and boring—routine.

Major Stephens lived up to tradition too. He nodded matter-of-factly, almost complacently. "Fine," he said. "I thought you would."

Leah arose abruptly and moved to a place directly before the

major's chair. There was a puzzling expression in her eyes, a look Jeffrey couldn't fathom.

"Why have you chosen Jeffrey?" she demanded. "Surely there are other officers better qualified. Men who've spent all their lives in Indian territory, for instance. Or——"

The major laced his fingers together and smiled at her as he would at a sweet but not too bright child. "There is no officer better qualified for this mission, Mistress Hill," he said. "You were away at school several years ago—at the time of the Albany treaty negotiations—or you'd understand."

"I'm afraid I *don't* understand," was the swift reply. "And if you don't consider me an overcurious woman, I'd appreciate——"

"Certainly. For the entertainment of our brown-skinned visitors we held a series of games. Our young men and their braves all took part. And Mr. Wyatt won both the riding and shooting contests. King Wexar of the Onondagas was very much impressed, and so was his adjutant, Drago. I was assigned by the governor to act as their host on the last day of the games, and I remember their reactions distinctly."

Jeffrey thought that life played complicated tricks on a man. He had entered the contests at Albany in a spirit of rebellion, for he had been but recently sold into bondage, and his dignity was still suffering from the ego-crushing blows of imprisonment and forced transport to the Colonies. Something within him had impelled him to seek recognition and admiration from the crude backwoodsmen and their savage guests, and he had fought his way through the games at Albany as though inspired. And as a direct result he was being called upon to risk his life now on a dangerous assignment.

Major Stephens arose and pulled an ornate gold watch from his fob pocket. "You'd better pack, Wyatt," he said offhandedly. "Captain Willard will stop here for you within the hour."

So the major had been sure of Jeffrey's answer from the first, so sure that he had made arrangements accordingly! Jeffrey saluted and started from the room, but Stephens hailed him back.

"I forgot to mention that you'll have a guide for the journey," he added. "Meganumba."

Jeffrey's heart sank. "Meganumba is going to lead us to the Onondagas, Major?"

"I'm sorry, Wyatt. I know he's a lazy, unreliable beggar, but he's the best we have. He does know the route, and if you and Willard can make him behave himself you'll eliminate several days of hard travel."

"Yes, sir." Jeffrey could think of no other reply. Meganumba, indeed. Chances were the thieving scoundrel would disappear with half their possessions. Or get drunk and give them away to the enemy. Oh well—better make the best of it and be glad they had a guide.

"Be sure you wear your service uniform, Wyatt. If the French should take you they'd be more likely to treat you as prisoners —instead of spies."

"Yes, sir."

Leah's hands were clasped together so tightly that her knuckles showed white. She opened her mouth, but it was several seconds before she spoke, and her voice was small and unsteady.

"Suppose the Senecas capture them, Major Stephens," she said. "What then?"

Three pairs of masculine eyes swung in her direction. As one who lived on the frontier, she knew better than to ask stupid questions. But trust a woman to bring into the open the fears that male pride forbade expression.

Jeffrey was embarrassed for Leah. "I'll go upstairs and pack," he said.

Less than an hour later two young men in tanned buckskins adorned with epaulets and crossed military straps, long packs strapped to their backs, and rifles in their hands, stood at the front door bidding farewell to a girl and her father. Some feet away a middle-aged Indian stood indolently scratching himself. Meganumba was in no hurry to leave. He had already been paid half of the fee Major Stephens had promised him, and he was toying with the idea of disappearing alone into the forests. He could live comfortably for a year on the money that rested in a pouch on his fat stomach, and he had no desire to risk his life dodging Paugus's braves in the forests.

But he was growing older, and he liked the white men's ways—some of them. The strong, sweet rum that came from somewhere across the mountains had a never-failing appeal for Meganumba, and the warmth of the whites' houses in winter was a convincing argument for cooperation too. If he ran away now he could never come back to those things. Major Stephens would have him shot on sight. He sighed, and his fingers idly explored his thigh for vermin.

He wouldn't mind this trip so much if the white men would show a little common sense once in a while. But look at these two young warriors. Both of them were ogling the pale-haired girl as though they wanted to possess her this very minute. They com-

peted with each other, so neither won her. That was very, very foolish, Meganumba decided. The Indian had better methods. If two braves wanted a woman they drew lots for her. And when the winner grew tired of her he turned her over to his friend. Then everyone was satisfied. These stupid whites tried to please a woman rather than properly demand that she serve them.

He thought he might suggest the Indian system to them if the opportunity presented itself on the journey, but after a moment of reflection he rejected the idea. He had been around the settlements of the whites long enough to know they were strangely touchy when anyone mentioned their women. He looked again at the two young men and the girl and allowed himself the luxury of a sneer. A sticky stream of saliva dribbled from the left corner of his mouth, but Meganumba made no effort to wipe it away. The day was too hot for a man to bother with trifles. . . .

Leah laughed with an artificial gaiety as she pressed Simon Willard's big hand with both of her smaller ones. "If any couriers should be coming to Schenectady and Fort Albany, you'll write and tell me of your success, won't you, Simon?" she asked, dimpling prettily.

Captain Willard bowed in mock gravity. "I'll write you every day, Leah. Every single day," he said. Both of them knew that no courier would be foolhardy enough to attempt the trip from Lake Onondaga to Schenectady, but it was easier to spend these last minutes pretending.

"And you'll bring me a present, won't you? Something so—so unusual that every girl in town will be jealous of me?"

"I promise to bring you Wexar's feathered cloak."

Jeffrey stood a few feet behind Simon, only dimly aware of the chatter of Leah and his friend. He was busily and belatedly trying to compose a speech of farewell, and words didn't come easily to him. What he said must be dignified and personal—yet not too personal. He wanted Leah to know that he now held her in high regard—in the highest regard. Yet he must be sure she didn't misunderstand. He must let her know that he realized she was as good as betrothed to Simon and that she could never look on an indentured servant as a possible suitor.

Nathaniel Hill had already bidden farewell to both young men, and he shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other, wishing Leah would leave off flirting. The boys would have to delay until tomorrow if they didn't go soon.

"Not many hours of sunlight left," he announced to no one in particular.

A laugh died in Leah's throat. Her fingers closed convulsively over Simon's, and for a horrified moment she was afraid she was going to break into tears.

"Take care of yourself, my dear," she said. "If—if anything should happen to you, Simon, I couldn't stand it. I think—I'd die."

Simon gave her the most reassuring grin he could muster under the circumstances. "Nothing will happen, Leah," he declared stoutly. "There's so much ahead that I—I've got to stay alive. And I will."

He bent forward to kiss her, but in the emotional confusion of the moment his lips brushed her cheek. He would never know that at the last possible second Leah turned her face a fraction of an inch away from him. Swallowing a sigh, Simon shouldered his long rifle and moved off down the path, Meganumba slowly stirring himself and following reluctantly.

Jeffrey took a step forward, and at long last he stood face to face with Leah as an equal. Such a moment might not come again until the end of his term of indenture, but a man who risked death for his Queen could bid farewell to a pretty girl only as man.

Time stopped as they looked intensely into each other's eyes. Jeffrey forgot his speech, and for an instant of utter panic his mind was a blank. The intoxicating nearness of Leah drove words and thought from him, and he was aware of nothing but the warmth and life and beauty of the girl herself.

"Good-by, Leah," he managed at last.

Her reply was so low that he had to strain in order to hear her. "Good-by, Jeffrey. May God bless you—and keep you."

Simon Willard, turning to wait for Jeffrey at the edge of the tree line, caught a quick glance of Leah's expression as she looked at Jeffrey before fleeing into the house. And with all his soul Simon wished that she had favored him with such a look—just once.

But Jeffrey was morosely unaware of the subtleties of Leah's feelings, and as he reached Simon's side he clapped his friend on the back with unnecessary force and muttered, "You're a lucky devil."

Simon was bewildered and wondered what he meant. Seconds later the forest enveloped them, and all else was forgotten in the grim endeavor to stay alive. . . .

In later years Jeffrey could remember only brief snatches of that week-long trip through the sweating forests.

They traveled at night and, adapting themselves to the habits

of the Mohawk, they climbed into the branches of trees for safety and slept by day. Jeffrey felt self-conscious and a little silly the first time he tried it, but by the third day he slept quite soundly.

He would never forget the near brush with a Seneca scouting party when they were four days out of Schenectady. At the same instant he and Simon heard a distant snapping of twigs. Meganumba, as always, had been slower in his reactions, but he, too, suddenly realized that an enemy party was nearby. Then he acted with amazing alacrity.

He pulled Jeffrey and Simon into the muddy waters of the river and, setting an example for them, slid with soundless wiggling hip movements through the water until they reached the protection of some heavy, overhanging willow branches. Jeffrey would always recall how they stood there, scarcely daring to breathe, while the waters of the Mohawk oozed through their leather breeches, until the sound of the Seneca raiders died away in the distance. It was a hot day, but Jeffrey shivered, wondering how many luckless devils would be scalped and mutilated before sundown.

He would never forget that first glimpse of the big village of the Onondagas, either. They had been slogging wearily across an endless expanse of waist-high grass when, from the top of a knoll, a motley collection of mud dwellings appeared with dramatic suddenness below them.

Nor was he likely to forget the numbing sensation that followed as a dozen Onondaga sentries materialized out of thin air and thick grass, brandishing flintlocks and long curved knives.

Meganumba, who hadn't uttered more than fifty words in the course of any single day, proved his worth then. Suddenly fluent, he unleashed a torrent of explanation. The Onondagas listened suspiciously, but one, who seemed to be something of a leader, finally beckoned to the two white men to follow him and started briskly down the slope toward the village.

Chapter Six

MEGANUMBA LIVED up to the young officers' worst fears about his reliability and disappeared at a time when he was needed most. Jeffrey and Simon followed the tall, rank-smelling Onondaga warrior who paced soundlessly on bare feet, and the same question formed itself in both their minds: where was Meganumba? In spite of the danger, Jeffrey grinned. Probably the old rapscallion had another of his wives here. There was no reason why the Onondaga tribe should be an exception. One thing was certain—Meganumba would have his ears boxed when he straggled in again.

Captain Willard tugged briefly at Jeffrey's sleeve, and Jeffrey glanced in the direction which his companion, with a slight turn of his head, was indicating. In a small clearing was a large stake, at least six feet high, secured firmly in the ground. Near it was piled a loose collection of dried twigs and tree branches. The ground surrounding the stake looked naked and black in contrast with the lush, thick green carpet elsewhere.

Jeffrey was puzzled. There was a warning in Simon's eyes that Jeffrey couldn't fathom. "What is it?" he asked in a low voice.

Simon Willard's answer came in an almost inaudible whisper. "Toasting parties. Reserved for Englishmen."

Jeffrey's heart sank. Through the long days and nights of travel through Indian country his spirits had never once drooped. But now that they were actually here, the enormity of their immediate peril struck him full in the face. If King Wexar of the Onondagas was unfriendly, Willard and Wyatt would die. There would be no recourse, no appeal. They might be taken and murdered without warning. Such things had been known to happen before. And if they were killed he'd never see Leah again. Strange, but only Leah mattered now. His past . . . England . . . vengeance against those whom he hated—all these things seemed far away. Nothing counted but the present. And Leah was the present.

Jeffrey's pessimism must have shown on his face, for his friend suddenly punched him in the ribs, then winked. Jeffrey knew

Willard must be thinking of their proximity to death—and of Leah too—but he winked back, then resolutely pushed thoughts of what might happen out of his head. Let the next day, the next hour, take care of itself. Concentrate on the moment. Where was this damned savage leading them?

The breeze died suddenly, and a powerful stench immediately became noticeable. Jeffrey knew the Onondaga was the offender, but he couldn't imagine what caused the odor. Simon Willard sensed his companion's unspoken question and focused his eyes on the wide bands of light blue and yellow war paint which criss-crossed their way down the Indian's bare back. "See the paint?"

Jeffrey nodded. "What about it? Don't tell me that's what is causing this stink, Simon."

Willard laughed silently, then whispered a reply. "It's the paint, all right. See how luminous it is? Well, how do you suppose they get it that way?"

The last subject on earth which Jeffrey wanted to probe was the topic of the manufacture of Indian paint. "How?"

"Their dyes are a secret formula of some sort. But I know this much—they chop up the scales of the fish they catch in their lake and mix the scale powder with the paint dye. That's what gives it the shine."

Jeffrey laughed aloud in spite of himself. "That explains it," he said. "These heathen don't bathe from one month to the next, I dare say. And the sun must do something to the fishskin in time."

"It does." Simon's reply was cheerful. "Jeff!" An ejaculation burst from the captain's lips. "Look up ahead—through the trees. There's the lake!"

Lake Onondaga was the best known of the Indian lakes. The few travelers who had seen it were lyrical in their praise of it. And Jeffrey could understand why as he peered through the tree branches. "The Great Smile," the men of Onondaga proudly called their body of water, and no lake had ever been more aptly named. Not a ripple marred its surface, and the brilliant, deep blue of the water was almost unbelievable. There was no sign of habitation anywhere, and the quiet was as uncanny as the dramatic appearance of the lake itself.

The only sound was the soft thud of Jeffrey's and Simon's feet as they walked through the tall grass. Someday, thought Jeffrey, all this will be ours. The colonists will come here and settle. A mental picture of Leah and a small, chubby boy racing into the lake and splashing about shot through his mind.

He shook his head. This was no time for romantic visions. Through the clump of trees was the Onondaga village itself, the cluster of huts they had seen from the hill; the same huts which had so mysteriously disappeared once they had started downgrade. Jeffrey would have stopped to take in the sight, but the Onondaga warrior gestured impatiently.

Suddenly the village seemed to come alive. In the doorways of the long rows of huts crouched immobile, ugly women, their long black hair braided and held together with ornamental bits of bone. Beside them stood small naked brown children, equally immobile. All stared with expressionless eyes at the two white men.

The silent guide rounded a corner, and in an open clearing a dozen or more young braves were squatting or sitting on the ground, oiling and cleaning their flintlocks. Jeffrey recognized the guns as French, and he could tell that Simon knew it too. The braves were attired in nothing but loincloths, and their faces and bodies were smeared with the greasy blue and yellow paint. The fore portions of their heads were freshly shaven, and the remaining hair was brought sharply to a V in front. Their heads had been well oiled, and their scalps gleamed in the midafternoon sunlight.

There was no mistaking the reaction of these warriors to the two colonists. Unquestioned hostility shone from their dark eyes. One, younger than his companions, brandished his gun at them. Jeffrey glared at him, and the youth sank back on his haunches unconcernedly and resumed work on his weapon. In a moment all of the braves were once more absorbed. There was no sound from any Indian as the little party moved on, the Onondaga guide in front, Jeffrey and Simon walking side by side.

The huts in the lane into which they now turned seemed larger than the dingy dwellings they had passed. No squaws stood in doorways here. A few men appeared silently to eye the intruders. These were the elders of the tribe, Jeffrey guessed. Almost without exception they were mature and solidly built, and their costumes seemed more elaborate than those of the braves. At least they wore leggings over their loincloths, and the upper parts of their bodies were loosely encased in what appeared to be some sort of leather vestee. But their reactions were like those of the others: not one elder made a sound; not one moved.

Without warning, the guide turned into the doorway of a hut at the end of the row, motioning the white men to follow him. Jeffrey blinked in the semidarkness and could see nothing. The

warrior wheeled about and started toward the doorway. Without thinking, Jeffrey followed him. The guide stopped so suddenly that Jeffrey almost tumbled into him.

The Indian pointed back into the hut with a stern forefinger and motioned several times toward the inner recess of the room. There was no mistaking his meaning: Jeffrey and Simon were to remain here. A moment later the guide was gone.

With unspoken accord they moved to the window cut in the mud of the hut. It was small, triangular in shape, moving toward a point at the top. The window stood shoulder-high and admitted only a thin stream of daylight. But until their eyes became accustomed to the darkness it was the only place where they could see each other's face. They stood silently for a few seconds looking at each other, unwilling to break the unnatural stillness.

When Jeffrey spoke at last, his voice unconsciously dropped to a whisper. "What do you make of it, Simon?"

"Don't know."

"I'll murder Meganumba when I get the chance."

"*If* you get the chance."

"All right. If," Jeffrey answered, then laughed. "Do you suppose Willard and Wyatt will be served for supper?"

"I think not," was Simon's immediate response. "Only the Cayugas are cannibals. The rest of the Six Nations simply burn their victims to ashes."

"Well, we'll have to be patient, Simon. These brown field wolves are clever—and they're probably trying to provoke us into doing something rash."

Simon Willard took the heavy leather knapsack from his back and swung it to the dirt floor of the hut. "They'll have a long wait, then. Sit down, Jeff. Welcome to the home of the Onondaga nation."

The two young men sat down on the floor of the hut, and for the first time Jeffrey began to examine his surroundings. The room was easily fifteen feet long and almost as wide. At the far end were three piles of straw, used for bedding purposes, apparently. Probably the inhabitants had been moved out temporarily to house the white envoys. There was no furniture of any kind in the room, but a pole embedded in the wall at one corner caught Jeffrey's eye.

"What's the pole? You've been in these blasted coops before."

"Oh, that. They toss their clothing—such as it is—over the top, Jeff. Hang their spare food from it too."

"Food. That reminds me. I'm hung——"

"I wouldn't if I were you." Simon held out a restraining hand as Jeffrey was about to reach into his knapsack. "Hold off a bit. Let's see what entertainment these beggars have in store first."

Jeffrey was about to inquire why he should wait to eat when he was hungry, then changed his mind. Simon always knew best about such things. Jeffrey looked about him again, and for the first time he realized that the hut was half underground. From outside the huts looked squat and short; but, once inside, one realized that the natives had cut an excavation at least four feet deep and had packed the floor hard. Hence, while the huts rose only four feet from the earth's surface, there was at least eight feet of head space in them.

Steps were apparently unknown to the Onondagas, for the floor sloped down gradually from the gaping hole that was used as an entranceway.

The realization dawned on Jeffrey that light should be coming into the room from the entrance. Almost simultaneously he saw that some sort of curtain had been drawn across the doorway on the outside. It was made of partly tanned skins, and it did more than keep out the light: only a thin trickle of fresh air crept in through the tiny window, and the hut was suffocatingly hot.

Jeffrey tried to imagine spending one's whole life in quarters like this, but his mind refused to follow him. It was an impossible suggestion. Then he remembered something that bothered him. "Simon, did you notice those curious clumps of poles driven into the ground at the edge of the settlement? They were placed together in little groups of threes—and there were twenty yards or so between clumps."

Captain Willard roused himself. "Sorry, Jeff, I——"

"The poles at the edge of the settlement——"

"Yes, of course. They're for protection."

Jeffrey grinned. "The savages are stupid, but I never thought they'd be that foolish. What are they trying to do—copy our stockades without grasping the principle which we——"

"On the contrary, my friend." Simon shook his head. "The Indian is far from stupid. And his protective system is more ingenious than anything we've devised. You see," he explained, "they've strung strands of rope made of tanned deerskin from one pole to the next. The rope is about six inches from the ground; it's been dyed the color of grass and is virtually invisible. They've connected a whole maze—and any intruder who happens along will trip over the rope and fall, bringing the poles down with a crash and alerting the sentries."

Jeffrey grimaced sheepishly. "We ought to use the same warning system ourselves."

"We can't." Simon smiled. "It wouldn't be effective against the Onondagas. They know how and where to put the ropes."

As Willard spoke the leather flap at the entrance to the hut swished aside, and an Indian girl stood framed in the doorway. She was tall and still young enough to be without excess flesh. Her deep black hair, braided and ornamented with carved bones, hung in two plaits over her bare breasts. Her skirt was of a soft leather, fringed, and decorated with curious designs of colored beads which had been pasted onto the surface.

The girl was probably the daughter or the wife of a mighty warrior, for the beads on her skirt were formed into crude but recognizable pictures and depicted several scenes of mighty valor. She's worn her best dress for us, Jeffrey thought.

On her wrists were bracelets, about six inches wide, made of soft beaten copper. They had undoubtedly been acquired in a trade of some sort with the Indian tribes who lived in the unexplored land to the north and west, around Michilimackinac, Jeffrey realized. She was bare-footed, of course, for it was summer, and only the rulers and elders of the Indian tribes were allowed the luxury of footwear in hot weather.

She tried to display the customary remote dignity of her race before these two foreigners, but she was overcome by curiosity, and her sharp black eyes darted first at Simon, then at Jeffrey. The young men were equally absorbed, and it was several moments before Jeffrey realized that she carried a large steaming bowl in her hands. At the same second Simon Willard came to life and with a gracious gesture beckoned the girl into the room.

"Greetings. Have you food for us?" Simon spoke in the strange pidgin tongue used by the settlers and those Indians who had contact with them. But the maiden's face remained blank. Clearly she had never been away from her own people.

But Simon's gesture had been plain enough, and the girl advanced into the center of the hut. With a deep ceremonial bow she knelt and placed the bowl on the dirt floor between the two men. At last she spoke, and the harsh, guttural accents of the Onondagas sounded off key in her high-pitched, squeaky voice. Jeffrey and Simon looked at each other and shrugged. Neither could understand a word. If only Meganumba were here they might learn something of value from the girl. Were her people kindly disposed? Would the envoys have an opportunity to present

their gifts to King Wexar and to plead the cause of the English before him?

They would never find out from the maiden—that was certain—for after a second attempt to make herself understood she rose to her feet abruptly. Suddenly her poise deserted her, and with a piercing squeal she fled from the hut.

The men peered into the earthenware bowl and saw a number of large chunks of flabby, whitish meat mixed with an orange-colored vegetable. Jeffrey found he was proud of his knowledge of the New World.

"Carrots," he said.

Willard looked into the bowl a moment longer. "Carrots—and a fish from their lake," he announced.

There were no utensils available, so Simon dipped a large brown hand into the bowl and brought out a steaming chunk of meat, which he popped into his mouth. Not to be outdone, and ravenously hungry, Jeffrey lowered the fingers of his right hand into the bowl. He lifted out a small piece of the meat, to which several bits of carrot were clinging.

To his intense surprise the dish was delicious. It was highly seasoned, though he wasn't familiar with the ingredients. He needed no invitation to take more, and Simon was already digging in.

"Now you know why I told you to leave the bread in your pack, Jeff," Simon said. "I thought they might feed us, and we've got to finish every last drop. Otherwise they'll think we're slighting their hospitality."

"It won't be difficult to convince them we were hungry. Not with food like this, Simon. What's in it?"

"Herbs. I'm not sure what they use. Garlic, of course. Orégano, probably, and a couple of others we know nothing about."

"I'd like to take some of their herbs back to Leah. She's always complaining she can't get enough."

Simon hesitated for a moment at the mention of Leah's name, then scooped the last bit of fish from the bowl and chewed it with relish. He picked up the bowl and examined it carefully. "I say, Jeff—look at this. I'm only a soldier, but with your education, you ought to know something about this art work."

Jeffrey took the utensil from his friend and held it up to the ray of light from the tiny window. "It's earthenware, of course. They've baked it to harden it, and in some way they've managed to bake these figures onto it," he said.

Around the lip of the bowl, in figures an inch and a half high,

were etched the silhouettes of various animals. Though simple and crude, they were recognizable. And the Onondaga artist who had painted them had the true painter's sense of balance. The drawings were in groups of four: a deer, a timber wolf, a beaver, and a horse comprised each group. Then the pattern was repeated, but in each the color was a subtle variation of the omnipresent yellow and blue of the Onondagas, the deepest shade approximating a deep purple, with the lightest yellow almost a true white.

Jeffrey ran his fingernail along the drawings and found they neither chipped nor rubbed off. In their own way the Indians had learned the secret of colored pottery work. Certainly this bowl was as attractive as any English or European product Jeffrey had ever seen back home. Home! He was certainly far from home now. Yes, here he was, stinking of Indian fish and garlic; there was a week's growth of beard on his cheeks, and his tough-fibered breeches and shirt were soiled and torn. The air in the hut was stale, and the room was becoming increasingly humid. Perhaps the Onondagas were going to kill them by suffocation.

It may have been the heat, or it may have been their satisfied hunger, but no matter what the cause, Jeffrey discovered he was growing drowsy. Simon had already stretched out on the dirt floor and, using his knapsack as a pillow, was dropping off to sleep. Jeffrey debated briefly whether to try the pile of straw matting or use the floor too. The latter won, and he was just beginning to doze when the leather curtain opened with an authoritative slap. His whole body instantly awake, Jeffrey sat bolt upright.

In the doorway stood Drago, the chief warrior of the Onondagas, first assistant to the chief, Wexar. Jeffrey turned to arouse Simon but found that his companion was already awake and rising to his feet. Jeffrey hastily scrambled to do the same and to manage the operation with some dignity.

Drago was even taller than Jeffrey had remembered him from the conference at Fort Albany. Both Jeffrey and Simon Willard were six feet, yet the Indian towered above them. He was fifty years old, his black hair plentifully flecked with gray. Yet he was as lean as a young brave, and his muscles were those of a man half his age.

His attire would have caused a sensation in London. On his feet were a pair of embroidered moccasins, with an acorn—the mark of Onondaga nobility—prominently displayed on each. He apparently scorned the leggings of the tribal elders, for his limbs were bare. A loincloth was draped carefully about him, and above

it he wore the pure silk shirt of maroon and scarlet affected by cavaliers at the court of the French King Louis.

But the most striking feature of Drago's apparel was his headdress. Several hundred of the smaller birds of the region had contributed to its making. Soft, tiny underfeathers had been carefully dyed and woven with painstaking care into the shape of an acorn. Yet no acorn ever looked like this, for Drago's symbol of rank was as multicolored as a rainbow, and as brilliant. This weird headdress was at least four feet in height and sat on the back of the Indian's head. Learning to balance it must have taken years of diligent practice.

Around his waist Drago sported a silver chain belt, and hanging from it was a sword which, Jeffrey realized with a pang, had originally been the property of a Royal Cavalry officer. One of Drago's victims, no doubt.

The Onondaga carefully removed his feathered headdress and, holding it stiffly under his left arm, he advanced into the hut. He had thrown the leather door flap up over the roof, and light and air now streamed into the room. Drago strode several paces, then stopped short and bowed ceremonially.

"Welcome to realm of Wexar," he said in English flavored with an accent unmistakably French. "I, Drago, wish your journey pleasant. The *fleuve* was placid?"

Drago straightened up and extended his right hand, European style, to greet the white men. Simon and Jeffrey found themselves shaking hands with him enthusiastically.

"Captain Drago, this is a great honor," Simon said, speaking distinctly. "You remember me, I believe."

The Indian answered gravely. "You Willard, commandant of Schenectady. This the *garçon* my braves do not shame."

Jeffrey smiled and was about to speak, but Simon was saying something, speaking rapidly. "We have come here at great danger to our persons, Captain Drago, as special envoys to your King. We bring him greetings from our Queen across the sea."

"Wexar follow you to Lake of Great Smile—from white man town of Schenectady," Drago answered slyly. "Wexar hope white Queen kneel to mighty Wexar."

"Our noble Queen Anne bows low before the mighty Wexar of Onondaga," Simon said, choking on the words. "And as proof of the esteem in which she holds King Wexar, she has sent him gifts."

A gleam appeared in Drago's eyes, and he made no effort to control it. "Gifts, *mon ami?*"

Simon Willard took a deep breath. "I must give Wexar's gifts to him—in person," he said firmly. "However, good Queen Anne has also heard of the great warrior, Captain Drago. It has come to her ears that he speaks our tongue perfectly. And she has asked me to give you some tokens too."

The savage's interest mounted rapidly. "Drago take white Queen's offerings now," he stated bluntly.

Jeffrey reached for the knapsack, and Simon's fingers flew at the straps. Pulling the case open, he hastily drew out the first object his hand encountered. It was a delicate porcelain music box, which played the first bars of an old English hunting song. Drago glanced at the little box with undisguised disappointment. But Simon quickly inserted a beribboned key into the slot, twisted it sharply, and then uttered a silent prayer that the box had not been broken in transit.

In a second the strains of the tune filled the hut. Drago reached out with eager fingers and jerked the toy from the young officer's hand. He lifted it to his ear and stood silently entranced while the spring in the box unwound and the music played. When the song stopped he tossed the box into a pouch which hung from his belt behind him and turned back to Willard.

"What more white Queen offer to Drago? Any—*boire?* Drink?"

Simon's fingers were again exploring the inside of the large leather case. His tone was dry. "Her Majesty has heard of your liking for spirits, Captain Drago."

With the unconscious air of a conjuror Simon withdrew a large jug from the knapsack. Jeffrey recognized it as the liquor Benjie had made last autumn from the corn grown on the Hill farm. He cleared his throat. "Captain Willard," he said, "don't you think Her Majesty believes Captain Drago's palate would be better satisfied with the rum from Boston?"

Simon concealed a smile and bowed to his friend. "Quite true, Ensign Wyatt," he said. "If you'll give me a moment, Captain Drago . . ." His hand returned to the case, and Jeffrey stood holding the jug of harsh distilled corn juice.

But he did not hold it long, for Drago reached out with a huge hand and snatched it from him. Eagerly the Onondaga ripped out the stopper. "Drago take this," he said. He lifted the jug to his lips and drank.

Jeffrey and Simon made no attempt to hide their astonishment as Drago poured a huge quantity of the contents of the jug down his throat. Last winter Jeffrey had taken one swallow of the foul stuff and had almost choked to death. He had advised throwing

the whole batch out, but Benjie had demurred, insisting that it might be handy someday. Handy, to be sure.

At last the Indian was forced to lower the jug in order to breathe. He wiped his mouth with the back of his free hand. The alcohol had no apparent effect on him. "Later Drago take rum," he said. "Now go the *maison* of mighty Wexar."

Drago bowed the two white men out of the hut, his eyes following the knapsack which Captain Willard clutched firmly. Jeffrey stepped into the sunlight and waited. Drago was still in the hut and, turning his head slightly, Jeffrey caught a glimpse of the Onondaga taking another great draught of the corn liquor. In a moment he joined them. Simon was careful to walk on the right side of the warrior, and Jeffrey remembered—just in time—to do the same. The Indians had strange protocol and were deeply insulted if any slight, no matter how unintentional, was offered.

They walked toward a line of trees at the edge of the lake. Behind the pines was a hut similar in design to the others in the village but considerably larger. It was set off by itself, and two young braves stood on the near side of the trees, flintlocks in their hands. Plainly this was Wexar's home, and the two men on guard were his private sentries, pressed into duty, perhaps, because of the white men's intrusion. Jeffrey tried to see everything he could, but Drago was speaking, so he forced himself to listen.

"Maison you use b'long Captain Drago," the Onondaga was explaining proudly. "Like maison of white chief."

"You have a fine home, Captain Drago," Simon was saying. "And had we realized it was yours, we would have enjoyed it doubly."

The Indian's eyes lingered on Willard's face, and a spark of amusement kindled in them. "You talk like smiling redbird of great forest to Captain Drago, now? French make *guerre*, and you like Wexar and Drago fight with Anglais?"

"Meganumba has been talking, I gather." Captain Willard was angry but kept his voice cool.

"Meganumba." Drago's lips curled in contempt. "Meganumba with *femme*. But Drago know why you come."

They had arrived at the edge of the grove. The sentries looked menacing, but Drago said something to them sharply, and they allowed Jeffrey and Simon to pass. With Drago in the lead they skirted around the big hut to the waterside and with startling suddenness found themselves in the presence of Wexar, King of the Onondagas.

The doorway of Wexar's hut faced the lake, and the chieftain

was sitting on the ground before it, staring out at the water. He was so still Jeffrey thought he was sleeping, but his eyes were open.

Wexar was an old man, and his hair was pure white. He wore it long, almost to his shoulders, and it hung in thick straight lines. Jeffrey wondered if Indians ever became bald. He had never seen one who was.

The King's head was massive and bare, and his face was incredibly wrinkled. His body was heavy, and his round, sagging stomach protruded before him so far that Jeffrey wondered how he could sit crosslegged and immobile. Most surprising of all was Wexar's attire. In contrast to Drago's gaudy costume, the King's dress was almost shockingly simple. He wore a pair of plain, sturdy moccasins and, under them, knee-high woolen stockings. Their color was a suspicious dark gray, and Jeffrey suspected they were filthy. On his body Wexar wore nothing but a loincloth, and over his shoulders was a faded green woolen cloak. From the exaggerated padding in the shoulders, Jeffrey was sure it had been a gift from the French—a long time ago, for the style was that of an outmoded fashion.

Wexar seemed unconscious of his nakedness and unashamed of the thick folds of fat that rolled down his stomach. Indeed, he gave no sign of awareness of their presence but continued to stare across the quiet waters of the lake. There was a simple, unfeigned dignity—a natural dignity—about the man that impressed Jeffrey. Here was no strutting peacock like Drago, he thought, but a very wise, very shrewd leader. He hoped Simon wouldn't handle Wexar as he had Drago, and was about to whisper something to that effect to his companion when Drago abruptly motioned both of them to a position directly in front of the Onondaga leader.

"Bow to Wexar," said Drago, and to set them an example he prostrated himself face down in the dust. His fancy headdress was still firmly secured to his head, and it, too, dipped into the dirt. His finery won't last long if he does this often, Jeffrey thought as he and Simon lowered themselves to the ground.

Jeffrey would have preferred to keep his head raised sufficiently to see what was happening but Drago's face was pressed against the ground, and he realized he had to do likewise. Dry dust filled his nose and mouth, and his eyes smarted. He felt an ant crawling up the back of his neck, yet he dared not move a muscle to brush it off. For what seemed like an eternity Jeffrey remained prostrate on the ground. There was an absolute silence.

He began to think that Wexar might be blind and unaware of

their presence. But that was foolish. He had heard Drago order them to bow. Of course the savage chieftain might be deaf. In that case they could stay in this ridiculous position for hours.

Wexar's voice broke the silence. It was a deep, rumbling voice, vigorous and powerful despite his advanced years. He said something in his own tongue, and Drago promptly ordered the white men to rise. As Jeffrey struggled to his feet, trying ineffectually to brush the dust from his clothes, he looked again at Wexar and found the old Indian's eyes boring into him.

In a flash he realized why they had been forced to perform the ceremony of prostration before the King. Wexar was putting them at a disadvantage. The wise old man knew they had come here to bargain, and after making them spend five minutes with their faces in dirt Wexar knew he had the upper hand.

The old man spoke again, and Drago moved to a position at his right and stood facing the two envoys. Jeffrey couldn't understand a word Wexar was saying, but nevertheless he was fascinated. The deep voice boomed on and on; the old fellow was making quite a speech. Drago stood quietly, his beady eyes half closed. When Wexar stopped, his adjutant translated.

"King Wexar want to know why Anglais invade his land. You agree in parchment word talk at Fort Albane that no white man come to here. But Wexar is sage King. Mighty Wexar know Anglais not want to lose scalps. Come to here because want help of Wexar. But Wexar say Anglais not bring happiness to Onondaga—not in ten thousand moons.

"But French are ami to Onondaga for many moons. Louis of French have sent much present to Onondaga. Anglais make much talk at Fort Albane and give Wexar fine words. Parchment not keep Onondaga *chaud* when great snows fall. Parchment not buy muskets for Wexar's braves."

Curse the niggardly policy of Whitehall and of Governor Cornbury and the New York assembly! Jeffrey thought. The French throw a few gold coins about and win the friendship of the savages, while we stumble along on half promises—and lose our scalps.

"Two times thousand braves of Onondaga wait for word of Wexar. Then join guerre. Wexar have much on his time. Cannot waste to make parchment writings with Anglais."

The old fraud, thought Jeffrey. He sits here looking at the lake, daydreaming. Not much time!

"Mighty Wexar of Onondaga is just. If Anglais bring more than parchment, Wexar listen."

Drago folded his arms and tried to assume a facial expression similar to that of his master. Simon, who had been shifting from one foot to the other through the long speech and its translation, now took a step forward. Not daring to look at Jeffrey, he began speaking in slow, measured tones.

"Our gracious Queen Anne, like Wexar, is wise and just," he said. "And so it pains our Queen that Louis of France should not be satisfied with the lands he owns. Wexar is satisfied with his lands, but Paugus of the Senecas always wants more."

Simon Willard paused for Drago to translate to the elderly chief and was rewarded by a fierce gleam of hatred at the mention of the name of Paugus. Encouraged, he struck out more boldly.

"Louis of France is like Paugus. That is why they became such good friends when Paugus went to Paris in '98." Simon blandly swallowed his lie and hurried on: "Now Louis is making war on my Queen. This makes Her Majesty very unhappy, for she is content with what she already has and wants war with no man.

"Our Queen is very powerful and knows she will win this war. And when she does she will punish those who have broken the peace and have dared to bring bloodshed and misery to her subjects."

Simon's voice had risen in righteous wrath, and Jeffrey looked at his friend with admiration. Damned if Simon wouldn't be at home on the stage of Old Drury. Jeffrey's attention was completely caught as his companion built to a climax.

"When that day comes, the enemies of Queen Anne of England will die. None will be spared. No quarter will be shown. But the wise ones who have befriended Her Majesty will enjoy the wealth of those who would have robbed her."

Simon bent down and scooped up his knapsack. The two Indians leaned forward, and Simon's air was definitely that of a magician as he reached repeatedly into the bag and, continuing to speak, drew out a steady stream of objects and tossed them at Wexar's feet.

"Our great Queen does not believe in idle promises or in false words. And so she sends these paltry gifts to the mighty Wexar, that he may know a little of what will be his when the day of victory comes. This fine gold watch will tell Wexar the time of day. . . . This silver cloth will—ah—make a fine robe of state for a great monarch. . . . These jugs of rum will warm the inside of Wexar of the Onondaga and make him merry. . . . These necklaces of precious—ah—beads are fit to grace the neck of any ruler. . . . Here is a silver-plated pistol [it was made of nickel] with which

the all-high Wexar may defend himself against his enemies. . . . And here is an iron pan in which the food of Wexar may be cooked—a pan that will guarantee to prepare all food to the supreme taste of the King!"

Beads of perspiration stood out on Simon's forehead. He stood watching the savage leader, trying as best he could to conceal his anxiety. Wexar picked up the gold-plated pocket watch and shook it. Jeffrey quickly leaned forward, took it from the old man's fingers, wound the spring, and handed it back. The Indian heard the watch ticking, held it to his ear, and grunted his satisfaction. He tucked the watch into the top of his loincloth, then turned and stared out at the lake again.

Jeffrey's heart sank. The mission was a failure. Wexar spoke a few words, and Drago bent quickly, scooped the pistol into his pouch, then translated:

"Wexar of Onondaga give small gifts to sons of his sons. Mighty Wexar make talk only with white man who bring him *argent*—gold."

Jeffrey was amazed to see Simon grin, reach into the collapsed knapsack, and bring out a moneybag of considerable size. Where the devil had the money come from? This was the first Jeffrey knew about it, and Simon had not only kept his own counsel but had wisely saved the cash for the very last. Slowly he untied the strings at the top of the bag and with a supremely dramatic gesture turned the bag upside down, allowing a stream of golden coins to drop into the dust. At last the bag was empty, and Simon turned to Wexar with a brief bow.

"These are a personal gift from our Queen to the mighty Wexar," he said. "The Queen gives them to you in the hopes that you will join her in her war of justice against the venal French and their cruel allies."

Drago started to pick up the coins but stopped himself in time. Old Wexar was leaning forward, scooping up the money and fingering it lovingly. Jeffrey, who had not spoken a word until this moment, felt suddenly inspired.

"Queen Anne wishes the great Wexar to know that if he will become her ally in this war she will send him a plentiful supply of gold each year," he cried.

Drago translated, but Wexar seemed not to hear. He sat for many minutes, happily dropping the gold from one hand to the other. His heretofore expressionless eyes shone avariciously. Then he put the coins in little piles before him, carefully counted them, patted them lovingly, and looked directly at the two white

men. He spoke abruptly and stopped again. Jeffrey tried to interpret the tone of his words but found himself unable to do so.

"Wexar talk to his ancestors of offer of Anglais Queen," Drago said. "When sun rises Wexar give his *mot*."

The King of the Onondagas turned his eyes toward the lake once more and resumed his position of immobility. Jeffrey noticed, however, that the golden coins reposed only a few inches from him. Drago moved to a place in front of the King and bowed low, so Jeffrey and Simon did the same. As they moved off toward the trees Jeffrey looked back over his shoulder at Wexar, who sat in frozen contemplation, staring quietly into a void.

In a moment Jeffrey and Simon had passed through the grove of trees, and Wexar's home was once more hidden from sight. Drago, who had stalked several paces in front of them, whirled suddenly and stopped short. Strangely, his air was almost identical with that of a chamberlain Jeffrey had once seen at St. James's Palace after someone's interview with Britannic royalty had gone especially well.

Drago's face lighted into something approximating a smile. "When sun rises Wexar give you treaty—maybe. Now—you *affamé?*"

"Not especially, thanks. Are you hungry, Jeff?" Simon asked.

Jeffrey's answer was immediate. "Not hungry—but dirty. Is there anywhere in this—is there anywhere we can find a bath, Captain Drago?"

The Onondaga's eyes twinkled with merriment. "Anglais always want *bain*," he said. He thought hard for a second, then pointed toward the cool lake. "Onondaga draw fish from Lake of Great Smile. Anglais use for bain." He was so sure of their answer that he didn't bother to wait for a reply but spun around on his heel and stalked off toward the row of houses ahead.

Jeffrey and Simon looked at each other in bewilderment at their host's abrupt manners, then with one accord turned through the trees toward the shore. "I'm near perishing for a swim, Simon, but there's something I must know first," Jeffrey said.

Captain Willard was already peeling off his shirt. "The money, I reckon." He grinned.

"Yes. Where'd you get it?"

"Major Stephens. He knows these savages better than all the assembly-men together. Last year he saved a considerable sum from his supply moneys. But instead of giving the extra gold back to Governor Cornbury, he saved it for an emergency. And

we both thought this was sufficient of an emergency to warrant a bit of spending."

"It was a miracle," Jeffrey replied fervently. "My heart dropped to my boots when the old fox demanded gold. How much did you carry in the bag?"

"One hundred and ten pounds."

Jeffrey whistled. "Enough to buy flintlocks for a full company of his braves—if he decides to war against us."

"It's one of the risks we take," Simon Willard answered soberly. "There's no predicting which way Wexar will turn. But if he comes with us, the major won't mind the loss of the last farthing."

"We'll need a regiment or two less if the Onondagas join us. Come on—I'll race you into the water!"

Two tanned bodies splashed Into the shallows of the shore line and plunged out toward deeper water. Jeffrey ducked his head below the surface and took several strokes before coming up for air. Ah, this was something! For the first time since leaving Schenectady he felt comfortable and refreshed. And to think the Onondagas never used the lake for swimming. The realization that the Indians did use lake water for drinking purposes crossed Jeffrey's mind, but this was no time to develop complicating thoughts of sanitation, and he cleared his head by the simple process of immersing it once more below the surface of the lake.

Simon, who was happily floating on his back several yards away, suddenly gave vent to a flurry of wild kicks and splashes and pointed a wet forefinger toward the shore. Jeffrey looked—and took in several large mouthfuls of water. A crowd of thirty or forty Indians had gathered, and several feet from the water's edge a large fire was building. Four or five Indian women were squatting in angle-deep water and indulging in some strange ceremonial. They were pounding rocks together rhythmically, and the sharp retort of stone on stone echoed across the expanse of the lake.

The swimmers, cautious but curious, moved closer to the group on the beach. Braves, young women, small children, and elderly squaws stood silently peering out at the figures in the water. All at once Simon guffawed.

"The old crones are washing our clothes," he shouted.

Jeffrey squinted his eyes and looked at the women in the water more carefully. Sure enough. Every last item of clothing he and Simon had discarded was being carefully pounded

between heavy stones in the shallows. So this was Indian courtesy!

The water felt increasingly chilly, and despite the crowd awaiting them, the two young men swam slowly toward the shore line. In a few moments they found themselves chest-deep in water and paced closer and closer inland. The crowd on the beach immediately moved to the water's edge.

One of the young women suddenly emitted a squeaking, high-pitched titter. Half a dozen stern faces turned in her direction and, shamefaced, she shrank back into the crowd.

Jeffrey and Simon strode up the grassy slope, and the natives pressed toward them. Jeffrey saw that in a few seconds their progress would be totally blocked. He was conscious of the fact that the sun was dropping and that the warmth of the air was fast dissolving. There was a slight commotion at the rear of the Onondaga crowd, and a tribal elder suddenly stepped directly before the naked white men, offered them a slight bow, said a single word in his own tongue, and held out two ornately painted bowls to them.

Jeffrey took a bowl and saw a muddy gray liquid splashing about inside. He raised the bowl to his lips, shut his eyes, and took a deep swallow. The earth rocked, and he felt as though someone had punched him in the stomach.

A foot away, Simon was coughing and choking. Tears filled Jeffrey's eyes, and for a second he was paralyzed. The elderly Onondaga took the bowl from his nerveless hand and allowed himself a slight smile. The earth began to right itself, and a fiery warmth crept over Jeffrey. Suddenly he understood. The Indians knew they'd be chilled and had brought them a homemade liquor of some sort. Well, it had served its purpose, but never, Jeffrey vowed, would he touch the slimy stuff again. Now the immediate goal was to retrieve his clothes.

He pushed through the crowd toward the fire, Simon at his heels. The elderly squaws who had done the washing were sitting now in a semicircle before the fire. One of the old women favored Jeffrey with a toothless grin, then rose ponderously to her feet, took a pair of damp breeches from a pole near the fire, and handed them to Jeffrey.

In a few minutes the white men were again fully clothed. Now how would they find their way back to the hut which had been given to them? As if answering their unspoken question, Drago stepped out from the shadow of the trees. Jeffrey hadn't noticed him there in the gathering twilight—or had he

been there? These blasted savages had a confounded curious way of melting into their scenery.

"Anglais like bain?" he asked.

"We had a fine swim," Jeffrey said.

"Ah. Now . . ." Drago's voice dropped to a whisper. "Young braves of Onondaga capture two young *femmes* of Macquas. *Très jolie.*" His left eye drooped in the suggestion of a wink. "Captain Drago know white men like."

Jeffrey shook his head in a violent negative, and at the same moment Simon exclaimed, "No, Captain Drago. We appreciate your—ah—hospitality. But we're not here to make love to your women."

"Not femmes of Onondaga," Drago said in an injured tone. "*Macquas.*"

"Thanks all the same," Jeffrey said. "We've had a long journey and we prefer to sleep alone," he added in an attempt to preserve the "face" which Indians considered so important.

Drago was frankly bewildered. "French *officier* from Port Royal visit Wexar at last quarter moon. Like Macquas maidens," he said in an aggrieved tone.

"We're—different from the French," Captain Willard said. There was a recognizable lift to his voice, and Jeffrey understood the reason. Drago had unwittingly revealed the fact that the French had also sent envoys. Well, they could only hope that Major Stephens's gold cache was the larger.

Drago shrugged his shoulders. The stories he had heard were doubtless true. There were vast differences between these cold-blooded English and the French. If he were King he would swing the tribe to the side of the friendlier, more understandable French. He turned in his characteristically abrupt fashion and started off toward the huts which stood in the clearing beyond, and the two envoys trailed after him.

Drago stopped at the entrance to his hut. His usual calm had returned, and he removed his high headgear and bowed low. Not knowing his reason, and none too sure of what was expected of them, Jeffrey and Captain Willard returned the salutation. There was a pause, then finally the Onondaga warior bowed again and disappeared into the night.

Jeffrey and Simon stepped into the hut. A long, tapering candle, beautifully fashioned and unquestionably of French make, stood in the middle of the floor. Its flickering light threw a series of grotesque shapes on the thick mud walls of the room. Four earthenware dishes piled high with smoked meats sat before it.

Nearby was a cold bowl filled with a mashed vegetable which Jeffrey recognized as Indian squash. The meal had been laid out for the two captive Macquas maidens as well as for Jeffrey and Simon. Well, they'd have enough to eat, in any event.

Hungry after their swim, the two young travelers pitched into their meal with vigor. The Onondagas had used hickory wood in the smoking of the meat, and the tang was delicious. Few words were exchanged as they wolfed down their supper. One taste of the cold, flat squash was enough for both of them, however, in a mutual distaste they pushed the bowl from them.

A glazed earthenware jug with a tall, thin neck stood on the far side of the candle. Jeffrey arose, picked it up, and sniffed at it suspiciously. He raised the flagon cautiously to his lips, and an experimental trickle ran into his mouth.

"Water!" he exclaimed in a satisfied tone, and drank deeply. He passed the jug to Simon, and after he, too, had drunk, they rinsed their hands.

There was a half-moon shining outside, and the night had become unaccountably chilly, even with the leather barrier lowered before the door. Simon arose and stretched. "Let's see the sights, Jeff, and do a turn about the village before bedtime," he suggested.

Jeffrey was agreeable, and they moved to the door of the hut and pushed back the flap. Not three feet away stood a young Onondaga brave, a flintlock in his hand, a fresh smear of blue and yellow paint glistening on his face and shoulders in the moonlight. The two white men stood and stared at him for a moment in silence. Unblinking, he returned their gaze.

Jeffrey sighed and re-entered the hut, and Simon followed him reluctantly. "We'll see no sights tonight," he said. "I reckon Wexar wants to take no chances with us. He's a wise old animal." He pulled his blanket from his pack and spread it on the dirt floor. "Better get some sleep. No telling what's in store in the morning."

"No telling." Jeffrey unpacked his blanket and pulled it around him.

Simon blew out the candle, and the hut was enveloped in darkness. Only a thin ray of moonlight filtered in through the tiny window. Exhausted, Jeffrey dropped off to sleep. He dreamed of Wexar and gold—and Leah.

Chapter Seven

JEFFREY'S HANDS were callused, but his palm felt scorched as he tried not to juggle the long Indian pipe which Wexar handed him. No wonder it was hot: Wexar and twenty of his tribal elders had each taken a long puff from it as they passed it around the circle. Jeffrey's legs ached, too, from hours of sitting cross-legged as he half listened to the drone of Onondaga ceremonial speeches.

But he was content. The little personal discomforts of the moment were unimportant. He handed the pipe to Simon, and their eyes met for a brief moment. Jeffrey knew his friend was elated too. Their mission had been crowned with complete success.

Already a team of runners had left the Onondaga village for Fort Albany, and in a few days Major Stephens and all of New York Colony would know that a strong ally had joined the Queen's cause. In the back of Jeffrey's mind was the nagging thought that the New York assembly would be unhappy over the agreement to pay Wexar one hundred and ten pounds in gold each year the war lasted. But he refused to worry. He and Simon had done their part, and finding the money was Governor Cornbury's job.

Three times the long ceremonial pipe passed around the circle before Wexar rose to his feet with surprising ease. The elders bowed to their chief, then to each other, and finally to the white men. Jeffrey and Simon inclined their heads in return, and a moment later they were alone. The councilors of the Onondaga nation followed their King in single file as he disappeared through the trees near the lake, his faded blue cape flapping after him.

"We've done it, Jeff!" Simon could relax now, and he pounded his companion on the back.

"I still can't believe it. I haven't been able to—all morning." Jeffrey grinned.

Simon shaded his eyes and glanced with calculating thoughtfulness at the sun which stood almost directly overhead. The smile vanished from his face. "We're not through the forests yet," he said quietly. "We're a long way from home, Jeff."

"I know. Where in blazes is Meganumba? Drago must have left an hour ago to tell him we're starting at once."

"We can't leave without Meganumba," Simon replied.

They began walking toward the hut which had been their home for the past twenty-four hours, and Jeffrey marveled at the unspoken accord with which he and Simon thought and acted. It was good to have a friend like this. They were so much alike—that they were in love with the same girl. Sometime on the trip home he'd find the opportunity to wish Simon well. Somehow he'd manage to say that he hoped Simon's marriage to Leah wouldn't loosen their bonds of fellowship. He'd say—

Drago, hurrying with giant strides, bustled down the path, and Jeffrey's reverie broke off sharply. The savage's imperturbable air was gone, and he looked thoroughly upset.

"Meganumba gone," he shouted as he drew nearer. "Look in maison of femme. She tell Drago—Meganumba gone when fire-god rise in sky."

Meganumba had run away! Afraid of capture on the trip back to Schenectady with two stumbling white companions, he had vanished. Jeffrey's first reaction was one of violent, stormy anger, and he cursed viciously under his breath.

But Simon was wasting no time on fruitless displays of emotion. "We'll take care of Meganumba in due time—in our own way," he said grimly. "Meanwhile it's dangerous for us to hang about. Every day increases the chances that the Senecas and Tuscaroras will learn we're here. So we ought to start home immediately—even without a guide."

Drago nodded agreement, and his plumed headgear bobbed gently. "Better. Go," he declared. "But white men need eyes of eagle. Or lose way."

Jeffrey made no attempt to hide his annoyance. "We had an old crow, but he's gone. And there are no eagles to guide us. We'll have to risk it—and trust to luck to get back," he growled.

"Drago give guide to Anglais. Fix quick when Meganumba run." The warrior drew himself up proudly. "Lose scalps if go alone. Anglais amis now with Onondaga. Guide ready. You go."

Unexpectedly Drago clapped his hands together sharply, and two young braves materialized from behind the scrub foliage

lining the path. Jeffrey didn't like their looks. One was tall and lugubriously thin, with eyes that darted about constantly and rested nowhere. The other was of medium height, with a hideous livid scar reaching up from the base of his neck to a point directly below his right eye. But Jeffrey knew it would be foolish to object. He and Simon couldn't go far through the dark, trackless forests alone.

He almost forgot his misgivings as he and Simon hastily packed their few belongings while Drago loitered at the entrance to the hut, apparently waiting for something. Captain Willard, wise to the Indians' ways, handed him a small but businesslike dirk as a farewell gift.

A few minutes later the dagger glinted in the sunlight at Drago's waist, and its flickering beam followed the young whites as they plunged after their silent guides through the tall grass. . . .

The Onondaga warriors maintained a swift, relentless pace all afternoon, and after several hours of the grind Jeffrey's legs were ready to buckle under him, but he gritted his teeth and stalked on, unwilling to be the first to call a halt. From the sweat pouring down Simon's face, he knew his friend was having trouble too. But they mustn't complain. Drago's guides covered as much territory in an hour as Meganumba had managed in an afternoon. If they could keep up this pace they would be home in less than four days.

Jeffrey admired the grace of the savages as they slid through the forest and, studying their gait, tried to copy their slightly pigeon-toed, silent step. But in spite of all his efforts, he occasionally stumbled over a gnarled, hidden tree root or crashed with the full force of his foot on a dead twig. At last he decided that the Onondagas relied on instinct to carry them with such sure-footed swiftness, and he gave up his attempts to ape them.

They continued to walk in single file long after sundown, and Jeffrey was so tired he was about to request a halt when the taller brave turned suddenly into a little gully and stopped. Jeffrey and Simon followed and threw themselves on the ground, winded. Neither of the braves gave any sign of fatigue. Squatting cross-legged on the moss-covered earth, they opened little leather pouches at their belts and pulled out handfuls of dried wild corn.

There was no sound save the grinding of the meal between the sharp teeth of the Onondagas. Jeffrey and Simon munched halfheartedly on strips of venison they had taken from their

kits. Neither made more than a desultory attempt at conversation. Their legs were sore, their backs ached, and they longed for sleep. Yet, in spite of his exhaustion, Jeffrey felt ashamed of himself. He had thought himself in perfect physical condition, but he was no match for either of the guides, men who were little better than animals, yet able to master their environment as no white man could hope to do.

The night was very dark. No moon shone, and the stars were hidden behind a blanket of black clouds. The Onondaga braves, their meal finished, curled up on the hard ground and promptly dropped off to sleep.

Simon yawned and inclined his head toward the guides. "We'd best follow their example, Jeff. They'll probably be up and ready to start hours before dawn."

"I can stand some sleep, Simon," Jeffrey replied, stretching out full on the moss and trying to find a not too uncomfortable position for his throbbing back. "But tell me something first," he added, unconsciously lowering his voice to a near whisper. "Did you get the feeling that our friends there were purposely trying to wear us out?"

Simon's answer was thick with sleep. "Don't know, Jeff. And don't care. We don't talk their language, nor they ours. So we'll never know. Doesn't matter—so long as we get home soon."

"Sooner the better," Jeffrey agreed, but his companion's deep breathing told him that Simon hadn't heard him. A moment later Jeffrey was asleep too.

Once during the night he awakened briefly, thinking he had heard the distant pounding of drums. But he was too groggy to think clearly and, deciding the sound had been nothing more menacing than the rumble of far-off thunder, he turned over and knew no more.

It seemed only a moment later that Simon was shaking him violently. Ordinarily Jeffrey enjoyed emerging from sleep slowly through layers of consciousness, but he was denied the luxury this morning by the expression on Simon's face. His head aching dully, he was awake instantly.

"Those bastardly Onondagas have disappeared, Jeff!" Simon was coldly furious.

"Maybe they've gone off somewhere to find us breakfast." Jeffrey knew it was a stupid reply, but it was the best he could muster.

"They've vanished, I tell you. And they've stolen our rifles to boot."

"Damn their souls!"

"They haven't any, blast them!"

"Cursing them won't help, Simon. We're in for a rough time of it."

"Could be worse, Jeff. At least they left us our supplies."

"No credit to them, though. They'd have taken everything —if they hadn't been afraid of waking us."

Jeffrey struggled to his feet and tried to peer through the tangle of the forest. "I wonder if Drago was responsible for this," he said half aloud.

"I think not. No advantage in leaving us on our own. But our guides—ah yes. They got our guns. None of these blasted savages has any moral code. They're as bad as timber wolves."

"We'll have to be timber wolves ourselves for the next few days if we hope to see Schenectady again."

They were both in a rush to resume their journey, but common sense told them to eat first. A few berries from a nearby branch—sweet red things with tiny seeds in them—plus a few mouthfuls of the cold venison sufficed, and with Simon in the lead they started off.

Divining direction as best they could from the rising sun, they moved due east. Long hours of practice marches through the woods near Schenectady were recalled as both young men strained to remember all they had ever learned of travel through unknown territory. After a few hours their bitterness against the treacherous guides began to disappear, and the buoyant, resilient optimism of youth reasserted itself.

Jeffrey was surprised to discover they were less noisy than they had been the previous day. Keeping his eyes directly before him, he found he could distinguish the tree roots, and it wasn't too hard to avoid dry twigs and underbrush. Danger, he decided, sharpened the senses and helped a man adapt himself to his surroundings.

When they stopped for a hasty bite of food at noon Jeffrey was beginning to be well pleased with himself. He could think of a number of people in England who would be vastly surprised at his clever woodcraft.

Simon was a perfectionist and said they must be even more quiet hereafter. There was no telling when they might come across a party of hostile scouts, and one crunching footstep could mean their lives.

Jeffrey agreed, but later in the day he was convinced that Simon was being an unnecessary alarmist. Their tread was so quiet they

came upon a speckled deer drinking at a small brook, and only when they were ten feet away did the animal raise its head in abrupt shock and plunge off through the trees. . . .

On the third day, after they switched to traveling after dark, they had to admit they were lost. No landmarks were familiar, and the strain of constant peril was beginning to tell on both of them. Their meager food supplies were exhausted, for they had traveled light, planning to shoot game on the way, and were helpless now without weapons. Their clothes were torn by thorns, and Jeffrey's heavy leather jacket was all but useless. Nor did the insects add to their comfort. Thick swarms of black flies buzzed around them during the day, and gnats and mosquitoes bothered them at night. This afternoon Jeffrey had been awakened in his tree perch after several hours of sleep by a series of agonizing pains shooting up his legs.

Too late he discovered that dozens of large red ants had been gnawing his ankles, and both legs were now heavy and swollen. Simon was even less fortunate. His left shoulder, arm, and hand, down to the fingertips, were inflamed.

On the fourth day they were reduced to eating roots and chewing grass. Jeffrey began to wonder if he would ever see Leah again, but Simon never once mentioned her name, and Jeffrey was careful to do likewise, though time and again he found it necessary to restrain himself from talking about her.

They caught a large fish in a river below a little waterfall on the fifth day. Afraid a fire would attract attention, they ate it raw and, the first wave of nausea conquered, their spirits began to revive. The ant bites were giving them less trouble, and that night they covered more territory than at any time since the Onondaga guides disappeared.

On the morning of their sixth day in the forests their luck changed, or so they thought. They stumbled onto a cluster of wild peach trees, and the juicy, yellowish meat was so delicious they gorged themselves until they could eat no more. For the first time in almost a week their hunger was satisfied.

Smoothing a place in the dirt for a crude map, they traced the course they had followed from Wexar's capital and decided to continue due east. They might have wandered far from Schenectady, but eventually they would find their way to an English settlement. At least they hadn't been caught in the trap of the inexperienced traveler, who beat a path in ever-narrowing circles when he wandered through the forests.

Simon found a neatly scooped depression beneath an over-

hanging bluff that offered concealment, and they jubilantly agreed to allow themselves the luxury of sleeping on the ground. Jeffrey was drowsing even before he stretched out and cradled his head in his arms. . . .

His first waking thought was that ants were swarming over him again. His ankles and wrists were stinging, and he felt a sharp choking sensation in his throat.

As he opened his eyes he heard breathing close to his ear and supposed that Simon was waking him up again. Why was it that Simon was always the first up?

Then he saw bright lines of gold and vermilion paint on high burnished cheekbones, and he knew. Captain Simon Willard and Ensign Jeffrey Wyatt had been taken captive by Senecas.

There were seven men in the Seneca party, and through the paralysis of his stupor Jeffrey noted that they were taller than the Onondagas. Taller—and harder. These savages were a chosen people of the forests, and they well knew it. Their backs were straight, their eyes were arrogant and proud, and even their freshly shaved heads and brightly painted bodies reflected haughty conceit.

Jeffrey was jerked to his feet by strong hands, and for the first time he realized that his ankles, wrists, and neck had been l ound with a cleverly contrived noose of strong leather. One strand of rope wound itself about him with the persistance of a snake. Jeffrey could walk if he took no more than twelve-inch steps and if he bent over almost double. There was so little slack to the rope that when he stood up his feet were pulled together and the end of the thong that was fastened about his throat tightened convulsively. His hands were bound behind him, and in order to breathe and move his legs he had to double over. Even then the tight knots at his ankles bit into his flesh.

A quick look told him that Simon was similarly trussed. A sick wave of utter shame passed over Jeffrey. That two of Her Majesty's officers should be taken prisoner in so humiliating a fashion—and without a fight!

A heavy, unexpected blow from a flintlock butt at the base of his spine sent Jeffrey spinning. The Senecas formed in two lines at either side of their prisoners, and a harsh, guttural command put the whole group into motion.

Half stumbling, unable to take more than a tiny footstep at a time, and forced to exert every ounce of energy in order to keep up with the long strides of the savages, Jeffrey and Simon started down the path to captivity. Whenever they lagged or

unconsciously lifted their shoulders for a moment—and then gagged—a new blow from one of the Senecas spurred them on.

There was no time to think, no time to be afraid. Every nerve was concentrated on the heretofore simple business of staying alive. The Seneca method of effectively hobbling prisoners and preventing escape was so efficient that it was obviously the end result of generations of experiment and refinement.

The thongs cut into Jeffrey's wrists and ankles, and blood began to ooze over the leather. Every time the thin ribbon that encased his neck began to pull, his head sang, and he felt giddy. A sluggish apathy started creeping over him, and he knew he couldn't keep up this insane pace much longer. Once he grew too tired to care, his body would stiffen and the leather would stop his breathing. . . .

After two tortured hours Jeffrey looked through a fog of pain and saw that they were approaching a large town. In their ignorance he and Simon had fallen asleep only a short distance from an important Seneca community! Jeffrey was only dimly aware that men, women, and naked children were pouring out of long buildings and were making their way rapidly toward an open space at the far end of the village.

Jeers and shouts of derision filled the air, and an occasional stone was flung at the captives, but Jeffrey and Simon were too exhausted to mind. The men who had made them prisoners stopped at last, and a second later Jeffrey felt the blessedness of relief from pain. The thong was deftly cut away from his ankles and neck, though his hands were still securely fastened behind him.

The seven braves melted into the crowd that now formed a huge semicircle about the two white men. Jeffrey stood up to his full height and gulped in air. For the first time he and Simon could speak to each other, but, oddly, there was nothing to say.

Acutely aware that his remaining earth span might be very brief, Jeffrey stared over the heads of the chattering crowd, which made no attempt to approach. Beyond, on all sides of the open square, stood row on row of long houses, each about twelve feet high and perhaps one hundred feet long. They had been constructed by placing thick poles side by side in the ground, the exact opposite of the white settlers' method of laying logs horizontally on top of each other. Chinks between logs were filled with a sticky clay substance. Each building was topped by a peaked, slanting roof, and through gaping holes poured thick

gray smoke, which on first glance made each house appear to be on fire.

The crowd was falling silent, and Jeffrey knew something was about to happen. Seneca braves in various stages of attire, from loincloths to gaudy, beaded leather coats, were in the first row. Behind them stood their women, some dressed only in short skirts, others were modest with brightly colored breastbands wound around the upper parts of their bodies. Irrelevantly Jeffrey thought the cloths must have been supplied by the French at the instigation of their priests, who were determined that these wild savages achieve a degree of modesty.

Small naked boys were darting under the legs of their parents, and several dozen mangy, decrepit dogs ran back and forth, howling mournfully.

Suddenly ten braves, all wearing head feathers, appeared at the vacant end of the square. On their shoulders they carried a huge chair of carved oak. Seated in the chair was a man, the most evil-appearing human being Jeffrey had ever seen.

About fifty years of age, the chair-borne Seneca was rugged and lean, but a life of corruption and malevolence showed in every line of his hard face. His hair was cut in a thin, bristling fringe which extended from the center of his brow to the base of his neck. On both sides it was freshly shaved. He scorned the feathered headgear of lesser sachems, and his body was hidden under a huge bearskin of splotchy brown which, despite the heat, enveloped him from his neck to his feet. According to legend, he had killed the bear with his own hands when he had been sent out into the forests for his trials of strength and endurance at the age of thirteen summers.

Jeffrey had seen this bestial person only once before—on the final day of the treaty games at Fort Albany. But one quick glance now sufficed for recognition. No one who had ever seen Paugus, King of all the Senecas, would ever forget him.

Directly behind Paugus's bearers strode six more braves bearing a smaller chair. Jeffrey blinked in involuntary surprise as he saw that the occupant of this lesser traveling throne was a woman. And in spite of his jeopardy, the thought registered in his brain that she was extraordinarily beautiful.

This must be Paugus's youngest sister, Adiawando. An old trader whom everyone thought mad had stoutly declared at Schenectady last year that he had seen her once and that, Indian or white, no woman on earth could compare with her. He might have exag-

gerated, but not much. She sat now, proud and straight-backed, indifferent to the jostlings of her bearers.

Her blue-black hair was brushed back from a high forehead and hung in simple straight lines to her shoulders. Her skin was a light, almost delicate shade of bronze and was accented by the thin, perfect arches of her black eyebrows and the natural red fullness of her mouth. Most surprising were her eyes, which were large and limpid and, unlike the dull brown of most Indians, seemed to be a soft shade of deep violet.

Her short skirt of butternut leather reached only halfway down her thighs and revealed a smooth expanse of long, well-shaped legs. Like those of most Seneca women, her feet were narrow, but her rank gave her the special privilege of shoes, and slabs of shaped leather protecting the soles of each foot were fastened by means of thin leather thongs which crisscrossed her ankles. Around her breasts was wound a piece of bright yellow French silk, the result, no doubt, of the pleas of French missionaries, but the material was so thin that the contours were plainly discernible.

The two thrones were placed carefully on the ground, Adiawando's slightly to the left of her brother's. Paugus stood up suddenly, hugging the bearskin about him. Simultaneously his people fell to the dirt and, pressing their noses to the ground, beat on the bare earth with clenched fists. Looking at his white captives, Paugus waved sharply, indicating unmistakably that they were to salaam too.

"I'll see him in hell first," Simon muttered. These were the first words he had spoken since they had been captured.

Jeffrey knew it was a foolhardy gesture to defy Paugus, but the blood pumped through his veins, and his chin shot forward.

A harsh voice called out an order, and the crowd struggled to its feet. Paugus resumed his seat and carefully adjusted his bearskin cloak. Jeffrey thought briefly of appealing to the savage ruler. If Paugus were reminded of the treaty he signed at Fort Albany, promising to treat all captives with dignity and honor . . .

No. It would be a waste of precious breath. Obviously the doom of the white officers was sealed. The crowd was becoming cheerfully restless, and the air filled with a cacophony of gibes and hoots. Yes, the savages were expecting a carnival of blood, and no mealymouthed plea would cheat them of it.

Jeffrey felt rather than saw that someone was watching him with something other than anticipation of blood lust. He raised his eyes and found Adiawando gazing at him with a curious,

intent expression. In these last minutes of his life he was reminded of an incident in his childhood: he had accompanied his father to a county fair in Cornwall and had been haunted for days by the intense, calculated avarice in the eyes of the buyers who had crowded around the horse stalls. Strange that he should remember it now.

A mighty shout filled the air, and Jeffrey promptly forgot Paugus's sister. Twenty braves, each at least six feet tall, were trotting into the open square in single file. All were naked save for tight-fitting loincloths. Streaks of brilliant tribal paint were smeared over their faces and bodies. And in their hands glittered short Indian axes or French knives.

With almost the precision of a troupe of dancing girls they ran up to Paugus, salaamed before him, and in a single motion were on their feet again. Still trotting, they formed two ranks of ten men each, leaving an aisle about three feet wide leading to their King's throne. Silently the two rows faced each other. The whole ceremony hadn't lasted more than one minute.

Paugus peered at the two captives and grinned amiably. He addressed them, and to Jeffrey's surprise his French was excellent. Belatedly he recalled that Paugus was unique among the Indians of this continent. As a young man he had spent a year in England, then two in France. It was the French, Jeffrey was sure, who had corrupted him.

"My friends from London did not choose to bow before Paugus," the Seneca said conversationally. "Now they will learn that Paugus is patient—and forgiving. You are welcome to approach Paugus. He who touches this robe," he said, waving the bearskin, "will be spared."

Jeffrey stared in amazement as he translated to Simon. To reach Paugus's throne they would be forced to pass between the two lines of waiting braves. Forty alert eyes and forty tensed, poised hands were waiting.

"It's a gantlet," Jeffrey said in a low voice. "A Seneca gantlet. Look here, Simon!" He wheeled suddenly toward his friend. "I'll go through their grisly line, and while they chop me to bits, you run for it. You're fast—and with a little luck you can be through that crowd before they know it."

"No, Jeff. We're finished. Both of us." Simon's voice was as calm as it was grave.

"Damn it, man, don't argue. Think of Leah."

"I am thinking of her, Jeff. I've thought of—little else."

"Then try to break away. You owe it to her. She—loves you."

Simon looked at him for a long moment, then wet his lips before speaking. "I could die happy—thinking that," he murmured.

The screams of the crowd were reaching a new pitch of animal frenzy. Jeffrey took a step closer to the waiting braves, then stopped and held out his hand. "Good-by, Sime. If you change your mind in the next few seconds there's still time."

Simon gripped his hand hard and shook his head. "I'll run the gantlet first, Jeff. Yes, I insist. As senior officer, it's—my privilege. Good-by, Jeff, and may God bless you."

Before Jeffrey could move, Simon turned and marched toward the waiting Senecas as though leading his troops on parade. His head was high, and there was no hesitation, no fear in his stride.

"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done . . ." Jeffrey didn't realize he was praying as he stood very still, watching his friend approach the first two savages.

He continued to mumble the Lord's Prayer as Simon broke into a quick run and started directly down the center of the narrow pathway. The first Indians swung their axes but missed. One of the next pair must have landed a glancing blow—Jeffrey wasn't sure what happened—but Simon stumbled.

There was no mistaking the events of the next few seconds. The Senecas were lightning-quick to take advantage of their foe's misfortune. An ax found its target with a sickening thud on Simon's skull, and at the same moment a long knife ripped a gash in his right side.

He fell to the ground in a heap, and Jeffrey thought he was dead. But through some miracle of will power he was still alive —and in motion. On his hands and knees now, blood spurting from his side and from his head wound, he continued to crawl forward, inching painfully and slowly toward the impossible goal of Paugus's oaken chair.

Grinning broadly, the next brave in line lifted his ax high above his head and waited with fiendish patience for his victim to approach a bit closer. Then he would deliver the final blow.

A sharp command from Paugus stilled the brave's hand. The warriors listened as their King, wasting no words, delivered a short, direct speech. The crowd picked up the phrases and in a second's time were shouting the same words over and over in a barbaric chant.

A beacon of light on his left caught Jeffrey's eye, and with a sinking heart he realized that a fire had been kindled and was

burning brightly. A large stake was being hastily driven into the ground by willing hands.

Two of the warriors, unmindful of the blood that poured over them, picked up Simon and carried him to the stake. Jeffrey blinked and closed his eyes. When he opened them Simon was firmly bound to the pole, his head rolling feebly from side to side. But no moan of pain or plea for mercy passed his lips.

Jeffrey knew now that Simon had been right. There was no possible chance to escape. The only escape was death. Why not bring release quickly, then? Only his arms were bound. Unlike Simon, he could still run. The howling, chanting mob had all but forgotten him—momentarily. He might cover fifty yards before they noticed him. Then a quick rifleshot would bring oblivion and release.

While he debated with himself men and women alike crowded around the brush fire, seeking sharp, burning splinters, which they then plunged into Simon's flesh. As each new miniature torch seared its way into his skin a new howl arose from hundreds of Seneca throats.

Jeffrey was almost past feeling now, but he continued to watch, unable to tear his eyes from the gruesome scene until a convulsive jerk of Simon's head told him his friend was beyond the torture of the Senecas. But the savages failed to realize that their victim was dead, and for several minutes more they continued to apply the flaming barbs. Then someone tossed a heavy pile of brush around the base of the pole, and a second later a thick cloud of smoke hid the funeral pyre.

It was all over. Simon was dead. Leah would go into mourning now and for several years at least—perhaps for the rest of her life—would look at no man. He felt closer than ever to Leah in this moment of their common loss.

Jeffrey whispered fervently, commending Simon to God's care, and prayed for the strength his friend had showed. The time for his own ordeal had come.

Flames still enveloped Simon's body as the warriors re-formed the lines of their gantlet. Jeffrey drew back his shoulders and took a deep breath. He didn't hear the maddened screams of the mob, but he was dimly aware that the savage maiden Adiawando was still watching him, a speculative half-smile playing around the corners of her mouth.

She leaned toward her brother and said something to him. Paugus, eager for the coming spectacle, his appetite whetted by the death of one of the white men, shook his head impatiently.

Adiawando put her hand on his shoulder and spoke again. Suddenly the Seneca King burst into loud laughter.

Jeffrey told himself he was glad someone could find his coming death so amusing. He took a step forward and thought of Leah. A deep, unquenchable yearning for her filled him, and with a stab of pity he realized how much more difficult all this must have been for Simon, who had won Leah's love, only to lose her before making her his bride.

Beads of sweat poured down Jeffrey's forehead into his eyes. He was about to hurry the ordeal and broke into a run, only to stop abruptly. Something unscheduled was happening.

Paugus, still roaring with laughter, had risen to his feet and shouted a new order. And the twenty braves milled about like so many hogs in a pigpen at feeding time. Some yelled angrily, and others brandished their weapons at Jeffrey, who stood watching them openmouthed. There was no longer a gantlet to run.

Adiawando had jumped to her feet, and her voice was added to the bedlam. A corner of Jeffrey's mind recorded the fact that, unlike most of her people, her speech was soft.

The majority of the braves turned away from Jeffrey in ill-disguised, venomous disappointment as Paugus ranted and waved his arms threateningly at them. Jeffrey realized that some test of the King's authority was at stake, and as he saw the veins bulging larger and larger at Paugus's temples he wondered what the crowd would do if their monarch were to drop dead before them.

Unexpectedly a brave who had turned away and had started from the open square stopped short. Spinning on his heel, he made a wild leap at Jeffrey and brought the blunt end of his ax down on the white man's head with paralyzing force. Unprepared for the blow, and unable to defend himself, Jeffrey staggered and tried to free his tightly tied hands. But a second blow ended his struggles, and he slumped to the ground, senseless.

He never knew that two more braves joined his attacker and rained blows on his head and body. Nor was he ever aware that Paugus, leaping from his throne with bull-like vigor, had hurled himself into the fray. In no time at all one of the warriors lay as still as Jeffrey, his neck broken by Paugus's fierce assault. The other insurgents were led from the field, to await with stoic resignation the penalty imposed on those who failed to obey the command of an absolute monarch.

As Jeffrey slowly regained consciousness he became aware of the miracle that he was still alive. And in time he recognized

something else of importance. His hands were no longer bound behind him. Dizzy and sick, he dropped off into a more natural sleep, questioning nothing.

Many hours later he awoke. Though he had no way of knowing it, a full night had passed, and the early morning sun slanting through a large bare window frame was calling him back to the world of the living.

There was a lump on the back of his head, but the pains in his shoulders and back had lessened. Never had he felt so weak, so exhausted. He opened his eyes and found that the was lying on a dyed, woven grass mat which was laid on smoothed, bare earth. He rolled over on his stomach gingerly, and to his relief no bones were broken. Looking up, he became aware for the first time that he was in a Seneca house, and all that had happened since he and Simon had fallen asleep in the forest came back to him in a rush.

The building was much smaller than most Seneca houses, but the principle of construction was precisely the same. Tall, thick tree trunks had been stripped of bark and secured in the earth side by side, and clay had been packed into the air holes.

To the right was a stone fireplace made by the simple expedient of placing half a dozen large boulders in a circle. And directly over it was a hole in the slanting roof to permit the escape of smoke.

A gust of hot wind swept through the open doorway of the hut, and Jeffrey was covered by a fine spray of dust. All at once he realized that he was virtually naked. The upper part of his body was completely bare, and his feet and legs were equally nude. In fact, he was attired in nothing but a loincloth, which fitted as snugly and tightly as those which his would-be executioners had worn.

There was a slight sound behind him, and Jeffrey knew he wasn't alone in the room. He turned his head warily, and from his eye level on the ground the first thing he saw was a pair of legs as devoid of covering as his own. But these were feminine legs, and he knew instantly, before looking higher, that they belonged to Adiawando. The Seneca princess was sitting cross-legged on a broad stool, eating from a large painted bowl which she held in one hand.

She ignored the figure sprawled on the floor. At least she gave no indication that she knew he was awake. Jeffrey watched her in silence for a while, and to his intense surprise she suddenly dipped her fingers into the bowl and tossed him a chunk of meat.

The food landed a few inches from Jeffrey's face, and the odor of hot cooked venison made his mouth water. Despite the humiliation of having food thrown to him as though he were an animal, he reached out with weak and trembling fingers, picked up the greasy morsel, and lifted it to his mouth.

Either there was plenty of food in the bowl or Adiawando was a generous young woman, Jeffrey thought, for time and again she flung meat in his direction. They finished the strange meal in silence, for Adiawando still gave no direct sign that she was aware of the presence of anyone in the room save herself. And Jeffrey, glad to be alive, was warily determined to let her make the first move.

At last Adiawando was through. She licked her fingers slowly, then arose and, shaking her thick back hair out of her face, stretched her arms to their farthest length. Relaxed and smiling slightly, she strolled toward Jeffrey, examining him so candidly from the top of his head to the soles of his dirty feet that he felt uncomfortable. Finally she spoke.

"*Gie-ha-no,*" she said.

Jeffrey wished he had spent some time last winter, during the long cold evenings, studying the language of the Senecas. But it was too late for wishes now. What in thunder did the wench mean?

"Gie-ha-no," Adiawando repeated, pointing a long, slender finger at Jeffrey.

He tried to struggle dizzily to his feet, but she pushed him back to the ground before he had risen to his knees. He stared up at her blankly.

"Gie-ha-no?" he asked, shrugging his shoulders.

Adiawando nodded her shapely head. Pointing again at Jeffrey, she then made the motions of a salaam, then pointed to herself. Still he didn't understand. She looked around the room thoughtfully, and suddenly her eyes lighted. Crossing quickly to the crude fireplace, she picked up a slender birch switch. Jeffrey was to learn later that the Senecas used these supple little weapons to keep the dogs away.

In a second Adiawando was again before Jeffrey. "Gie-ha-no," she repeated pleasantly, and struck him full across the face with the switch.

"Gie-ha-no," he answered dully.

He knew his first word of Seneca now. "Gie-ha-no" meant slave. More specifically, it meant that he, Jeffrey Wyatt, late ensign in Queen Anne's Colonial Militia, had sunk to new depths.

He was still alive, but he wondered if death might not be preferable to a future as personal slave to a haughty young female savage.

Still calmly smiling, Adiawando drove a well-placed kick into Jeffrey's shoulder, and the unexpectedness of the thrust sent him sprawling. Satisfied, the Seneca princess strolled quietly from the hut.

Chapter Eight

IT WAS late summer, and the old men of the Seneca village enjoyed napping in the shade of the long houses. But their rest was interrupted each morning by a loud, weird ordeal which was so like itself each day that it became something of a ritual.

Just as they were settling into sleep they were disturbed by the approach of the *honio'o*, the white one. This wild, bearded figure, clad in a dirty, stained loincloth, with long matted hair drooping into his eyes, struggled downhill from the home of the Honoye Adiawando, Princess Sister of the Great Paugus. Always this bedraggled figure carried two large buckets which it was his duty to fill at the village spring.

The sight of a *hadjino*, a male, doing the work of squaws was in itself disturbing enough to the old men. But the commotion that attended this simple ceremony was unbearable. A crowd of jeering children invariably followed the honio'o, shrieking and pelting him with stones and bits of wood. Sometimes squaws joined the procession and added their curses to the chorus. And the dogs! The appearance of the Honoye Adiawando's slave each morning was all that was needed to bring every four-footed animal in the village yapping and barking and cavorting.

A delegation of the old men visited Paugus one day and complained. The mighty gods of the skies and fields would be pleased, they said, if the honio'o were quietly killed in the Fire-that-Burned-for-Six-Days. The gods would be appeased by the spectacle and thereafter could enjoy their rest. But Paugus, whom the elders secretly suspected of infidelity to the faith of his ancestors, merely laughed. His sister, he said, had a right to enjoy herself if she so wished. As one directly descended from the gods of the skies and the fields, she could do no wrong in their sight.

In time the old men came to have a grudging respect for the tattered figure of the honio'o. No matter how great the provocation, he never paid the slightest attention to the mob that howled

at his heels. But the elders would have been startled at his thoughts.

In a peculiarly perverse sense Jeffrey looked forward to the daily shame of that walk for water, for it renewed and hardened his resolve to escape. Each day he studied the geography of the community; each day he examined the far ends of the settlement as best he could, trying to see where sentries were posted. As time passed he became bolder and used new routes of approach to the spring.

His tormentors thought he was trying to avoid them, and he let them think so, for it suited his purposes to have them believe him timid and weak. Actually, he was in better physical condition than ever before in his life, for Paugus had decided he wanted a house constructed of stone, and Jeffrey had been given the almost superhuman task of building it.

Each afternoon, he rolled and lifted huge boulders into place, and when they failed to fit snugly he rolled them down again and pounded off excess chunks with a heavy iron mallet. His shoulder and back muscles were becoming constantly stronger, and after the daily workout his legs suffered from the weight of the big stones, he knew he was capable of staying on his feet for long periods of flight without fatigue.

He had moments of elation as he felt his growing prowess, and at such times it was difficult to curb his impatience for freedom. But he knew he must move slowly and cautiously, for if his attempt to flee should fail, he was certain he would die in the most delicately prolonged ceremonies of torture which the Senecas could devise.

For a time nothing bothered him more than his inability to think of Leah with a clear head. With the death of Simon his feelings for her had undergone a subtle change. Gradually she had become a symbol to him, a symbol of a life he had once known, a life which had now become unreal. And so he thought of her less and less.

The most difficult aspects of Jeffrey's day-to-day living were concerned with Adiawando. She was indifferent to him, and yet she was acutely aware of his presence, for they lived in an intimacy that made it impossible for her to ignore him. As she had done from the beginning of his captivity, Adiawando threw him leavings from her bowl of food at each meal, and Jeffrey soon learned that it was easier to swallow his pride than to go hungry. Nevertheless, each mealtime was a mortification, and he was invariably relieved when these silent periods of the day were past.

But Jeffrey wasn't always ignored. Adiawando spent a full hour and more each day teaching him the language of the Senecas, and never had there been such unusual lessons, nor such a strange relationship between teacher and student. At lesson time Adiawando forced Jeffrey to kneel before her as she sat cross-legged on her broad stool.

When her mood was light and her temper patient, she painstakingly taught him one word at a time, illustrating its meaning and waiting until he had grasped its sense before going on to the next. At other times she attempted to cram phrases and even whole sentences into his mind at once. When he stumbled or looked blank she would pick up her little birch whip and strike him across the face with it to make him more alert.

The pain was endurable, and the whip itself was too lightly wielded to be a serious menace to Jeffrey's mental processes. But his mind traveled back to the day in the sawmill when Leah's riding crop had cleared an atmosphere full of suspicions and misunderstandings. Thinking of Leah at these moments confused him, and Adiawando's pupil became so absent-minded that again and again she gave up the day's lesson in disgust.

One experience during these months would always remain with Jeffrey. One of many war parties of Seneca braves from a distant settlement, accompanied by their wives and children, passed through the village on their way north to join the French armies. Like all of the tribe, they were subjects of Paugus; and while he ordinarily contented himself with a brief speech to the men and their families, he entertained the leader of this particular group.

Adiawando acted as hostess for the occasion, and Jeffrey was obliged to bring steaming bowls of food to the campfire where the Seneca elite were banqueting. He soon realized that the squaw of the chief visiting warrior was watching him intently and that she made passing comments about him to Paugus and Adiawando. Although he knew a little of Seneca tongue by now, she spoke too softly for him to catch the context of her words.

As the meal ended Adiawando brusquely summoned Jeffrey to her side. He salaamed before her as he had been taught, bitterly enduring his sense of shame. Adiawando bade him rise, and the guests crowded around him, feeling his muscles, poking and punching him as though he were some inanimate object. Only a tremendous exertion of will power prevented him from making a rash move that would have meant instant death.

The visiting squaw muttered something to her husband, and

he slowly unwound a long belt of yellow beaded wampum from his waist. At last Jeffrey understood. The wife of this minor chieftain wanted Jeffrey as her slave, and Adiawando was being offered money for him. But the deal was never consummated, for the Seneca woman made some remark that sent Adiawando's temper blazing.

She began to curse, and although Jeffrey didn't know what she was saying, he recognized some of the words. They were the same as those the adolescents shouted at him on his daily trips for water. The visiting warior and his wife backed hastily away, bowing low and murmuring apologies.

Jeffrey thought the incident was closed, until he saw Paugus's ugly face, which was even blacker and more menacing than usual. The Seneca King began to speak rapidly, and Jeffrey caught only two words, but they were enough: "honio'o" and "*s'hondowek*": "white one" and "death." Paugus had plainly decided that the presence of Adiawando's slave was a nuisance, and he was demanding that Jeffrey be killed.

But the princess pleaded valiantly for him, and as he stood shivering slightly despite his nearness to the fire, Jeffrey's admiration for Adiawando grew. So did his gratitude, for she was as sincere as she was eloquent. Her speech was too rapid for Jeffrey to understand, but her facial expressions and gestures were clear.

If Paugus had a soft place in the hard rock of his warped soul, his sister filled that spot, for he finally relented and, waving his huge horny hand as if to disassociate himself from the matter, he drew his bearskin about him and stalked off into the night.

Without thinking, Jeffrey dropped to one knee, raised Adiawando's fingers to his lips, and kissed them.

It was autumn, and the old men carried thick French blankets with them now as they strolled outdoors for their morning naps. Instead of avoiding the sun, they sought it, deliberately shunning the shade of the buildings.

The elders enjoyed that autumn, for they slept undisturbed every morning. The honio'o made his daily trip for water in peace, as the children and squaws had given up trying to find pleasure in baiting someone who was unaware of their presence.

Now and again one of the old men would raise a sleepy eyelid and nod at Jeffrey approvingly. Hoy, but there was a fine figure of a hadjino! Few Seneca braves could boast such sinewy muscles or such a lean, flat stomach. The honio'o had finished building Paugus's new house and had started constructing one for the

Honoye Adiawando. And while it was backbreaking work, the honio'o was becoming a man of iron.

It was the custom of the warriors of the village to ignore Adiawando's slave. As men, it was unbefitting their dignity to admit that such a creature existed. But some of the younger braves secretly envied the honio'o's muscular physique, and when they were sure no one was watching they cast jealous glances in his direction.

In many ways this was the most difficult period of Jeffrey's captivity. Adiawando, for whose intelligence he had an increasing respect, had either noticed some change in his attitude or had guessed that he was planning to escape. He knew his way around the village now and was secretly storing bits of food. Some night he was going to steal a gun, and when Adiawando fell asleep he would creep away and disappear.

But one morning, when his scheme was almost ready for execution, Adiawando took him on a tour of the outer perimeter of the settlement. With painstaking care she pointed out the location of each sentry and quietly stressed the impossibility of an intruder making his way into the village—or a fugitive getting out.

As he saw the elaborate precautions the savages had taken Jeffrey knew at once that his plan had been unsound and foolish. He could never leave the settlement without attracting instant attention. He was destined to remain a prisoner here, unless he could someday join one of the parties that went off on hunting or fishing trips into the woods. Then he might slip away. . . .

Meantime life was becoming more complicated. It was Adiawando's invariable custom to dress and undress before Jeffrey each morning and night. Her unconcern, her lack of realization that she, a desirable woman, was showing off her body to a man had sufficed for a time to make Jeffrey indifferent, too, once his initial enbarrassment had disappeared.

Now, as Leah's image faded, he began to find himself looking forward to those moments each morning and night when Adiawando's full, ripe figure was on display before him. He sometimes wondered how his father would react to the idea that Jeffrey wanted to possess a savage. But not even this notion chilled his growing desire, for Adiawando had so degraded him that he felt the need to prove himself a man in her eyes.

If she knew that her proximity was an ever-increasing disturbance to him, she gave not the slightest sign of it. Jeffrey suspected that she was attracted to him, too, but couldn't prove it to him-

self. A Seneca wore a facial mask when convenient, and no mere white man could penetrate its mystery. . . .

No word of the progress of the war reached Jeffrey's ears, though on several occasions he overheard snatches of conversation—then an abrupt silence as he approached the speakers. Apparently Paugus had given strict orders that the war was not to be mentioned in front of this former enemy officer, for on the few occasions when he had made delicate attempts to probe the subject Adiawando stared at him stonily.

But he needed no lengthy explanations to know that the war was going badly for the English colonists. With sickening regularity parties of braves returned from foraging expeditions with thick clusters of scalps tucked in their belts. On two occasions groups of English prisoners passed through the town en route to French prisons at Port Royal or Quebec under French military guard, and on both days Jeffrey was sternly forbidden to leave Adiawando's hut.

He knew that Paugus's agreement with Baron St. Castine at Port Royal provided that all captured officers were to be handed over to the French authorities, and each time he paced the hut desperately, trying to work out some scheme that would bring him to the immediate attention of the French officers commanding the detail. But the wily Paugus was too wise to permit slips, and a husky brave, literally armed to the teeth, stood guard outside the door.

It was midwinter and the old men rarely emerged from their long houses, preferring the warmth and stench of crowded quarters to the blustery, icy winds which whistled across the flat snow-covered earth of the settlement. Even the younger people ventured out of doors only when necessary, and the sentries keeping their eternal vigil were virtually alone under the shivering trees. Almost alone, but not quite. The honio'o labored each day to complete the new house he was building for the Honoye Adiawando.

He was permitted the luxury of a faded, greasy buckskin coat to wear over his loincloth while he toiled over his mounting pile of rocks. His feet were still bare; he rubbed them with resin and the cold had little effect on them. And though he didn't realize it, his long hours in the open air in all kinds of weather were making him so strong and tough that he could throw off the elements with ease.

One day Adiawando received a large burnished kettle as her

share of the loot captured from a trader who had foolishly ventured out from some seaboard settlement across the trackless snows. And for the first time in months Jeffrey caught a glimpse of himself in the reflection of the gleaming metal.

His first impulse was to laugh. His sandy hair hung in thick, snarled wads almost to his shoulders. And his chin and cheeks were covered with a bristly beard. He had known he had quite a growth of beard, of course, but he had no idea it was such a fiery shade of red. At least it didn't itch in this cold weather as it had during the warmer months. Time and again he had wanted to shave it off, but Adiawando had forbidden it. Indian men were virtually whiskerless and hence looked on beards as something shameful. Thus Jeffrey's whiskers became a badge of his servitude. . . .

The Senecas enlivened the long, dull winter by holding innumerable ceremonies. At least two nights a week, and sometimes more often, the beating of a drum summoned the men and women of the community to the cavernous lodge. There ceremonial dances were held and the gods were loudly and drunkenly worshiped. With monotonous regularity, white dogs, raised especially for the purpose, were slaughtered.

Gods of the fields and forests, of the sun, moon, and stars, of the rivers and lakes, were honored by tribal chants and dances. Among the refinements of civilization which the Senecas had acquired from their French brethren was a knowledge of the art of making liquor, and while merely a sniff of the stale, rotten brew was enough to make Jeffrey's stomach leap, the savages drank the potion in great quantities.

Thus most of the rituals ended in wild debauches. Paugus and Adiawando remained amusedly aloof but usually stayed until the men had danced themselves into alcoholic exhaustion and the squaws had cavorted hysterically and collapsed. The young braves in military service, sworn by the code of the Iroquois nations to celibacy and abstinence, sat in long, silent rows watching the festivities quietly, with only the twitching of their mouths and the greedy lust shining from their black eyes giving away their desire to join the revels. But they knew they must remain apart until they had proven their manhood in battle, and not until a warrior had five scalps dangling from his waist would he be permitted to offer the gods his enthusiastic and uninhibited worship.

Jeffrey had a definite place in these ceremonies now. He squatted behind Adiawando's oak chair, and whenever she snapped her fingers it was his duty to hand her bits of pork

sweetened with wild honey, which she popped into her mouth while watching the antics of her brother's subjects. Jeffrey was such a familiar figure to the natives by now that he was permitted to remain in his uncomfortable position unmolested.

But one night a senior warrior, proud possessor of at least a dozen dried and shriveled scalps, took drunken umbrage at the presence of the white slave. One moment the man was whirling through the rhythms of a complicated war dance; the next, he had crossed the lodge with gigantic strides and had jerked Jeffrey to his feet, massive fingers tugging viciously at the offensive light hair.

Jeffrey's defense was as instinctively automatic as it was fast. Before half the howling celebrants realized what was happening, the warrior was getting a sour taste of his own medicine. Jeffrey grabbed him by the left arm and leg, lifted him high in the air, and sent him crashing across the room into a wall, which he struck with full force, and crumpled in a heap.

There was a moment of stunned silence as Jeffrey stood still, breathing easily and wondering how many braves he could kill before they overpowered him. He was sure he was in for a fight when screams of rage arose from more than a hundred throats. But to his amazement, braves and squaws alike dashed to the spot where the fallen warrior lay. The unfortunate man was soon lost to sight in the melee as his compatriots kicked and pummeled him into unconsciousness. This was the penalty for losing face. Had the white slave cowered before him, the warrior would have been a fine fellow who had contributed to the evening's entertainment. Instead, he was doomed to lifelong disgrace.

Jeffrey couldn't believe he would escape from the incident unscathed, but when he turned to look at Paugus he saw the folds of the bearskin shaking with merriment. The unpredictable ruler had found something to relieve the monotony of the evening and was highly pleased.

The following day sentence was pronounced on the unlucky warrior. Paugus announced to the now solemn-faced clans that the honio'o, who had become a permanent member of the community, should play a more useful role in the life of the Senecas. If Adiawando could spare his services when the braves took to the warpaths in the spring, the honio'o would accompany them and attend the needs of the men who fought for the great Paugus and for their right to a resting place beside their ancestors.

Therefore, the warrior who had been as weak as a woman would hereafter spend his mornings instructing the honio'o slave in the ways of the forest and trail. By spring the Honoye Adiawando's servant would know enough to keep pace with his masters when they scourged the countryside. . . .

Construction work on Adiawando's new house was necessarily slowed, but she seemed proud of all that Jeffrey was learning. In fact, anything that made him more like a Seneca pleased her. And Jeffrey acquired knowledge from his surly, unwilling tutor with remarkable rapidity. For the first time since he had been taken captive last summer he was permitted to leave the confines of the village, and each day he and his warrior teacher walked out to the snow-blanketed forests for another lesson.

Jeffrey's first idea, of course, had been to strike for freedom as soon as possible. But as his fund of knowledge grew he came to realize how ignorant he was of the ways of living in the wilds, and he knew it was wiser to wait. But his respect for the Seneca sentries grew, too, and he gradually lost hope. Eventually he became almost reconciled to spending the rest of his miserable days here. Nevertheless, he continued to learn. He was taught how to find his way through the heaviest of woods when there was no apparent landmarks. He discovered half a dozen equally effective methods of stalking prey—either human or animal. And he became versed in the art of living on hidden underground roots and bulbs when no other food was available.

Smarting under the shame of this debasing experience, the warrior was perversely stubborn. The more quickly Jeffrey learned, the more complicated and difficult were the tasks his teacher invented. Each time he showed Jeffrey how to perform a complicated feat of woodcraft his expression dared the inferior white to do the same. If the honio'o would fail but once, the warrior could go to Paugus with a tale that his student was too weak and stupid to learn, and the ordeal would be ended.

But the crestfallen brave was doomed to disappointment, for Jeffrey's mind had never functioned better, and he absorbed and remembered every detail. Once he was with a war party, he would escape, and every scrap of information he gleaned now would be insurance that once he disappeared he would never again fall into the hands of pursuers who would track him through the wilderness. . . .

The nights when the village rested for its next ceremonial celebration were the winter's worst time for Jeffrey. After supper he would build the fire as high as he dared, then throw

nimself down on his woven mat to sleep. But his brain would whirl and his pulses beat as he heard the soft, regular breathing of Adiawando only a few tantalizing feet away. Often he would sit up and stare at the reposed figure on the cot, every line of her inviting body emphasized by the flickering glare of the fire.

He had disciplined himself never to think of Leah. Indeed, it had been a different person in a different world who had been indentured to her father. The man who sat night after night staring at the lovely Indian girl was succumbing, at such moments, to his enviroment. There was no other explanation for the feelings which shook and tormented him.

Chapter Nine

It was early spring, and although the ground was still frozen hard the old men who had survived the winter of 1706-07 began to think of moving outdoors again for their daily naps. Not that they would actually sit in the open for some time to come, but their relief at finding themselves still alive was so great that their anticipation of the weather to come was keener than the changes of seasons warranted.

They would probably be out of doors again by the time the Honoye Adiawando moved into her new stone hut. By peering out the windows of their long houses they could see that the honio'o had almost finished his task. The elders were disturbed by the activities of the honio'o these days. It was rumored that he was becoming unusually adept in the ways of the warriors, and the old men were disturbed at the notion that any outsider should be taught the secrets which for generations had been so carefully guarded.

The elders had spent long winter hours arguing with their sons about the honio'o. The younger men laughed and refused to be concerned, for Paugus, they said, was always right. It would be pleasant to have the honio'o accompany them and serve them when they went out on the warpath. And if he should become difficult, they would burn the soles of his feet with live coals. That would suffice to make him remember his right place.

One fine morning the argument over the honio'o was forgotten, and the whole village stirred itself into a frenzy of excitement. Mohegan was home! Mighty warrior and leader of warriors, second only to the great Paugus himself in valor. Mohegan had accomplished what no other men within living memory had done. Accompanied by a small band of his followers, he had set out from the French capital of Port Royal in the dead of winter, and here he was, home before the first thaws. Hoy! Here was truly a man worthy of the confidence of Paugus!

Despite the bitter winds which still blasted their way across

the fields, the whole community turned out to honor Mohegan, and a triumphal procession followed him as he walked slowly across the town to the new stone house of Paugus. The King appeared with dramatic suddenness in the doorway of his home and, with his bearskin cloak whipping in the breeze, advanced to embrace his popular subject. At this sign of their monarch's favor the crowd redoubled its cheering.

The two men disappeared into the house, but the people outside still lingered. They had nothing else to do, and when Mohegan finished his audience with Paugus they might persuade him to adjourn to the tribal lodge and regale them with stories of his bravery during the past season's campaign. So they stood about waiting, and because it kept them warm and gave them something to do, they chanted:

"Hoy! Hoy! Hoy!
Hail, nephews.
Now also the cousins with you.
Now also the birds of the air.
The whole assemblage is offering thanks.
The great eagle has returned to his nest.
Gwiya! Gwiya! Gwiya!
The great eagle has won victories without end,
For the glory of our king,
And for him who created us.
Gwiya! Gwiya! Gwiya!"

Paugus appeared unexpectedly in the doorway and held up his right hand for silence. The crowd obeyed instantly, an uneasy undertone sweeping through the group at the grave expression in his eyes. In curt monotones he summoned the heads of clans into the house, and when they failed to reappear to break the midday fast everyone knew that something was amiss.

Their worry turned to dread when the Honoye Adiawando was hastily summoned. It was without precedent for a woman to sit at council table with the heads of clans, and only the gravest emergency could have prompted Paugus to admit his sister to the meeting.

Jeffrey was unaware of the events of the day. He spent the morning in the forest with his tutor, learning how to determine the path of a fleeing enemy by examining the direction in which bent twigs fall beneath the feet. It was an unusually complex

lesson, and he was only dimly aware of the distant shouting and chanting.

When he returned to Adiawando's hut he was mildly surprised to find her absent, but as she occasionally joined her brother for food at noon, he thought no more of it. However, one thing struck him as unusual: Adiawando had already prepared a meal for two, and a large kettle of meat stew was bubbling over the fire. He let it cool, ate his share, then carefully placed the kettle near enough to the fire to keep it hot for Adiawando when she returned.

Donning his leather coat, he walked quickly to the new stone house and began rolling boulders. He was proud of his work and was anxious to complete the building as soon as possible. Before long he would be leaving on the spring expedition with the warriors, and he was never coming back. So he wanted to have the house in proper shape for Adiawando, as a way of thanking her for her kindness to him. In spite of many little cruelties, he told himself, she *had* been kind. And when he was gone this house would be his gift to her. She would look at it and know he bore no rancor, no hatred.

He was precariously perched near the top of an unfinished wall, hauling up an especially heavy boulder with the aid of a sling he had devised, when Adiawando appeared, walking rapidly. She stopped almost directly below him and gestured to him with a quick, nervous motion of her hand.

"The gie-ha-no will stand before me," she called.

"Yes, Honoye." Jeffrey had become fluent in the language of the Seneca within recent weeks, for he heard no other tongue, and the desire to communicate with one's fellow humans was an influence that speeded learning.

He carefully let the boulder slide back to the ground, then scrambled after it. Adiawando's tone had been flat and revealed nothing, but one look at her face told him there was trouble. It didn't occur to him that anyone save the girl herself might be in distress.

"Mohegan has returned to his people," she said with a strange emphasis when he stood in front of her.

He wondered why she should hurry to tell him this and why she should be so upset. He knew who Mohegan was, of course, but couldn't see himself becoming excited over the presence in the village of one more greasy, evil-smelling warrior. Well, better wait—and listen. Indians didn't like questions, and eventually he would hear all that Adiawando wanted him to know.

"Adiawando last saw the mighty eagle Mohegan two times ten cycles of the moon past," Adiawando declared.

The warrior had left to fight with the French almost two years ago and now he was home. What of it?

"Before Mohegan, the eagle, made his long journey to the North, he challenged the men of the Seneca to a tournament of combat for the right to eat the ceremonial meal of corn with Adiawando."

So that was it! Mohegan had publicly declared his intention to woo and win Adiawando. Jeffrey angrily tried to conquer a stab of jealousy. It was absurd to feel this way about an ignorant savage.

"None would accept the challenge of Mohegan," Adiawando continued. "The great Honoye Paugus was pleased, for there were few fit to become the husband of the sister of the King."

Why all this long-winded explanation? She was going to marry the beast and was telling Jeffrey that she was getting rid of him. He uttered a silent wish that he would not be made the slave of Paugus himself, for he knew that after a few days with that cruel barbarian a murder would be committed. Paugus's murder.

Adiawando hesitated, then spoke more slowly. "One can admire the strength of the eagle but not admire the eagle," she said, and her eyes dropped to the ground.

She was telling him she didn't love Mohegan. And as a princess of the ruling clan, no one could force her to marry the man. Maybe his first guess had been wrong. He curbed his impatience and waited for her to continue.

"Mohegan has again spoken to the Honoye Paugus. Mohegan, the eagle, has again told of his desire to eat ceremonial grain with Adiawando." She hesitated, and when she spoke again the words tumbled out. Gone now was the stately speech of her ancestors, and in its place she substituted a sharp colloquial dialect. Adiawando was a girl and she was troubled.

"Paugus called the chiefs of clans to talk with him and with Mohegan," she cried. "Mohegan learned of your presence in my house, gie-ha-no, and he was very angry."

Jeffrey blinked in amazement. That Mohegan would be jealous of him was the last thought that would have occurred to him.

"Paugus sent for me, gie-ha-no, and I told Mohegan I would never become his woman. This made him angrier. He demanded that he be given the right to kill you. As a chief warrior, this is his privilege."

Here was a state of affairs, ideed. A man collected a belt of

scalps, and that gave him the *right* to take still another human life. In this case, Jeffrey's. He opened his mouth to speak, but Adiawando raised her hand to silence him.

"I told Mohegan that the gie-ha-no is a man of valor. I—asked him if he was afraid to meet the gie-ha-no in combat. Paugus laughed. The chiefs of clans laughed. Mohegan tried to laugh too. But he was angrier than ever. He said it made no difference to him. He would kill the gie-ha-no either in the ceremony of his ancestors or in combat."

If Mohegan was half the warrior his people declared him to be, there wasn't much doubt that he would win. But Jeffrey had the chance to regain his dignity as a man before he died—thanks to Adiawando. Her dare before the gathered council had been a stroke of genius. To preserve face before his superior and his equals, Mohegan had been forced to accept.

Overwhelmed, Jeffrey found himself thinking in English and began to utter his thanks in his own tongue before he suddenly caught himself and stopped. He tried to think of the Seneca word for gratitude, but his eyes met Adiawando's and he couldn't think at all.

He had never seen that look in her eyes before. For a fleeting instant he was reminded of Leah's expression when she had said good-by to Simon Willard. Was Adiawando silently telling him she hoped he would win the fight? He thought so but he couldn't be sure.

"Farewell, gie-ha-no." Adiawando raised her right arm straight above her head, dropped her head to her chest for a moment, then whirled on light feet and walked quickly away.

There were many question Jeffrey wanted to ask. When would this weird duel with the Seneca warrior take place? What weapons would be used?

He shrugged and turned back to the pile of boulders. He was enough Seneca himself now to know he would learn no more until the right time for learning came. And he was enough of a Seneca not to care. These savages had the right idea: never worry about what will happen tomorrow; live each day for itself.

If he died he would take Mohegan with him, he vowed grimly. He would show the Senecas a white man was the equal of the most powerful of their warriors.

He picked up his sling and was about to slip it under the big boulder when he heard the sound of many voices and saw a burly figure approaching, half the village at his heels. This

must be Mohegan. And the fight would take place sooner than Jeffrey had expected.

Drawing himself up to his full height, Jeffrey folded his arms in the Seneca gesture of contempt for an enemy and watched Mohegan draw near. Studying his adversary carefully, Jeffrey was forced to admit that the talebearers hadn't exaggerated Mohegan's appearance: he was a magnificent figure of a man. He stood six feet four inches tall, and his shoulders were the broadest Jeffrey had ever seen. Despite the cold, he had discarded all his clothing but a loincloth and had smeared liberal quantities of gold and vermilion paint over his head, face, and body.

Mohegan maintained his full stride until he was no more than two feet from Jeffrey. Then he stopped abruptly, looked at the white man for what seemed like an eternity, then spit in his face.

Jeffrey let the spittle drool down his cheek unheeded. The frustration that had grown in him for months boiled over, and he found he was enjoying himself thoroughly. Looking Mohegan squarely in the eye, he spit back and, to his delight, his aim was better than the Indian's. But he had to admit that Mohegan neither flinched nor raised a hand to wipe the saliva from his eyes.

The crowd let out a shout of rage at the insult to its hero and would have torn Jeffrey to pieces had not Mohegan waved them back. He was reserving the pleasure of annihilation for himself.

"The son of seven eagles will send the gie-ha-no to join his ancestors in sleep," Mohegan said, and his voice was as heavy as his great frame. "The son of the eagles has killed many honio'on." He tapped the scalps at his belt, the sole adornment to his costume.

"The son of the puny buzzard will kill no more honio'on," Jeffrey replied, and his voice rang out sharp and clear. "The son of the puny buzzard will die, and his lame spirit will forever walk the earth. The eagles who dwell in the sky will never take one so cowardly into their resting place," he added.

Mohegan plainly had not expected to be addressed in his own tongue by the white man. And he certainly had no idea that this wild, bearded figure would be sufficiently familiar with the ways of the Seneca to deliver the insult supreme. He gaped for a moment, then recovered.

"The honio'o makes words. The son of the eagle performs deeds," he growled as he wheeled and started off toward the open square at the end of the village.

Jeffrey strode along at the warrior's side, the mob trotting at their heels. As they approached the square a slow chill passed up and down Jeffrey's spine. He never saw this place without thinking of Simon Willard. In a curious way his chance had come to avenge Simon's death. Mohegan was the symbol of the cruelty that set the Senecas apart from all other Indian tribes.

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." Jeffrey could hear the voice of Nathaniel Hill ringing in his ears, Wave after wave of black hatred shook him as he glanced through narrowed eyes at the big, confident figure stepping jauntily onto the hard ground of the square. With a great effort he calmed himself. The next few minutes would require all his strength, all his cunning, all his effort.

The crowd retreated to the sides of the square, and Jeffrey ripped off his leather coat and threw it to the ground. Now he, too, was attired in nothing but a loincloth.

He turned toward the open end of the square, waiting for the ceremony which would inevitably take place. His patience was soon rewarded, for in a few minutes the braves bearing the thrones of Paugus and Adiawando appeared. The crowd fell to the ground and salaamed, and Jeffrey did the same. As his nose touched the hard ground he thought ironically of his refusal to bow before Paugus the day he had been taken prisoner. He wondered how many times since then he had thus degraded himself, and he reflected that his present salaam would be his last. He was as convinced that he himself would die as he was certain that Mohegan would not live.

Rising to his feet, Jeffrey looked at Adiawando. She was wearing the full ceremonial robe of her rank, a huge cloak adorned with thousands of multicolored feathers. Perhaps the rainbow hues of the robe made her seem pale, or possibly the cold was bothering her, but there was no doubt that the blood had drained from her face.

The crowd shouted, and Jeffrey tore his glance from Adiawando in time to see two big, spirited horses led onto the field. They were larger animals than the handful which the Seneca chieftains possessed, and Jeffrey was sure they had been stolen from white settlers.

Paugus arose and ordered Jeffrey and Mohegan to approach. The King's eyes glittered, and he was so anxious for the bloodletting to begin that he ignored protocol and, without waiting for them to bow a second time, began explaining how the duel was to be conducted. Mohegan and Jeffrey would mount unsaddled

horses. A brave would be waiting beside each animal, holding a pistol, six lead balls, and a bag of powder. The two adversaries would load the pistols and fire at will while mounted.

Jeffrey nodded. The instructions were clear. He bowed abruptly to Paugus and strode off, looking neither at Adiawando nor at the man who in the next few minutes would be trying to kill him.

The horses were being held at opposite ends of the field, and Jeffrey hurried to the far corner. Too late he realized his mistake at not choosing the nearer mount. He cursed himself for his stupidity and broke into a run. Senecas had no concept of fairness, and it would be considered just and right if Mohegan mounted, loaded, and fired his gun before Jeffrey was anywhere near his horse.

Covering the last few yards in a burst of speed, Jeffrey leaped to the back of the rust-colored animal and with a swooping motion reached down and took the pistol and ammunition from the extended hand of the brave who stood below grinning ironically.

Damn! One of the precious bullets fell to the ground. That left five. Jeffrey had no time to regret the loss of the pellet, for a pounding of hoofs warned him that Mohegan was thundering toward him.

His head shot up just in time to see a gray streak hurtling through space. Grabbing his horse's mane with his free hand, he dug his bare heels into the animal's side. Startled, the horse shied, and Mohegan and his steed thundered past. Trust a Seneca to try to unseat the enemy first. Had the trick succeeded, Jeffrey would have been thrown to the ground, and Mohegan could have trampled him under his beast's hoofs.

The Seneca reached the end of the square before he could stop his cantering horse. Then, riding as though horse and man were one he whirled and raised his arm. There was a flash of fire, followed by the sharp retort of a pistol. But Mohegan's aim was spoiled by an elusive target, for Jeffrey was riding at full speed to put distance between himself and the warrior.

Angry cries welled up, for the crowd thought Jeffrey was trying to avoid a fight. But he ignored the screams, and sweat poured down his face as he frantically loaded his pistol. He had never realized how difficult such a feat would be, and he marveled briefly at the warped ingenuity of the Senecas. They and no one else could have devised this method of dueling.

As Mohegan's second bullet ripped through the air high over

his head Jeffrey breathed a momentary sigh of relief. It would take the Indian several minutes to reload, and Jeffrey was almost finished. He brought his horse to an abrupt stop and carefully poured powder into the pistol. Now. He turned, faced Mohegan, who was cantering slowly toward him, and raised his pistol.

The big Seneca looked at him in contempt and continued his own efforts to load as he pressed forward. Jeffrey steadied his horse with his knees, raised his pistol and fired. The lead pellet almost found its mark and passed within a few inches of Mohegan's chest. Jeffrey grinned at the expression that crossed his adversary's face. Mohegan now knew he had an enemy who could shoot.

But Jeffrey's elation was short-lived. Before he could repeat his tactic of run, then load, Mohegan had completed the task of charging his pistol for the third time. Jeffrey spurred his animal into a headlong gallop and pressed himself close to the bewildered beast's back.

Mohegan's shot was uncomfortably close, and Jeffrey knew his enemy was finding the range. He would have to load and fire with greater care this time. There might not be another chance.

Straightening, he wiped beads of perspiration from the palm of his hand onto his loincloth and went to work. He was pleased to note that he was loading far more rapidly this time. The lead bullet slipped into place. He cocked the pistol and measured out a charge of powder, letting the sifted grains drop carefully into their slot.

Finishing as he neared the end of the square, he slowly turned his horse and started back toward Mohegan. He was in no hurry. He would come close enough to be sure of getting his man. The excited savages lining the field were a blurred mass. There was only one reality—the huge brown man who was either going to kill or be killed.

With icy deliberation Jeffrey's right arm rose. But Mohegan had gained a new respect for the honio'o and, copying Jeffrey's own maneuver, he started his horse sprinting toward the corner of the square.

Jeffrey had anticipated the move and fixed a bead on an imaginary dot in thin air. In a few seconds Mohegan and his horse would reach that spot, and when they did . . .

His finger closed on the trigger of the pistol in a slow squeeze. And the whole world erupted in an explosion.

Stupefied by the impact, Jeffrey stared blankly at his right hand. A powder burn had singed the hair, but by a miracle his

hand was still whole. The shattered butt of the pistol lay useless in his inert palm. Where the bullet had gone he would never know. That it had missed Mohegan was only too obvious. The Seneca was sitting stock-still on his horse, laughing, and was reloading his own gun with exaggerated, slow care.

As the powder drifted away Jeffrey's brain cleared too. The Senecas had purposely given him a faulty pistol. They had known it would explode, rendering him helpless. So this was their idea of a fair duel!

A terrible rage crept into his veins, worked its way through his mind and body, and finally possessed him completely. He discarded caution, and with it departed all feeling but an overwhelming lust for revenge. Yet that ultimate recess of a man's mind which preserves the balance of sanity dictated his actions.

There was but one course of battle left to him. Using the full force of his powerful leg muscles, he drove his heels into the ribs of his horse, sending the frightened animal careening headlong toward Mohegan.

Jeffrey pulled his feet up under him, until he was half standing, half squatting on the back of the plunging stallion. Mohegan, true to the warrior tradition of his people, pretended to notice nothing. Actually he was too busy pouring powder into his pistol to see clearly what Jeffrey intended.

Only a few feet now separated the two horses. Relying on his beast's instinct for self-preservation to make him veer off at the last minute, Jeffrey steadied himself and took a deep breath. His horse shifted course abruptly, and Jeffrey threw himself into space in the opposite direction.

Too late Mohegan sensed the new turn of events. Jeffrey, leaping through empty air, landed heavily on top of him, and the impact knocked both men to the ground. The force of the blow sent Mohegan's pistol skidding harmlessly across the bare earth, leaving a trail of powder as a testimonial to its impotency.

Jeffrey's arms wound tightly about Mohegan's neck. Legs flailed viciously, and the crowd pressed closer for a better view. There was no cheering now, and the heavy breathing of the combatants was plainly audible.

Jeffrey felt Mohegan's legs close in a vise about his middle, and he knew he was locked in a struggle with the strongest specimen of sheer animal strength he had ever known. He realized he would have to use cunning to defeat Mohegan. If the outcome depended on the power of brawn alone, the Seneca would surely be the victor. But the hot anger which had taken

hold of him was beyond control now, and nothing registered in his brain save the fierce joy of trying to crush Mohegan's hard head in his arms.

Unexpectedly the Indian was free. Sweat and the greasy war paint which covered him made him too slippery to hold.

Rolling like a great cat, Mohegan regained his feet and without losing momentum threw himself at Jeffrey. A shivering, sibilant sigh arose from the mob as from one throat, then was transformed into a groan. Jeffrey flipped himself over, and Mohegan hurtled through the air past him and landed on the earth with a bone-jarring crash.

Jeffrey was on top of him in an instant, fists beating through the air with all the force of almost a year of pent-up emotions. Fist fighting was an Anglo-Saxon art, Jeffrey thought. These savages neither practiced it nor enjoyed it. Good. Let Mohegan suffer a little of what Jeffrey had been forced to undergo. Each hard, driving blow was a release from the abasement of slavery, each collision of hand and savage face a partial restoration of human dignity.

With satisfaction Jeffrey saw that Mohegan's right eye had swollen shut. Two of the Seneca's front teeth were broken, and a froth of blood and saliva was bubbling from a corner of his mouth. No man, not even an unthinking, inhuman barbarian could survive much longer under this punishment.

But Jeffrey underrated his enemy, for Mohegan gathered together his remaining strength and in a mighty heave threw the white man from his chest. As he fell sprawling Jeffrey saw that the Seneca had one trick left. From some secret place in the folds of his loincloth he drew a short two-edged dagger and, gripping it firmly, he advanced with a new air of confidence.

Without waiting for Mohegan to come within striking distance Jeffrey leaped wildly at the savage, both hands reaching for the dagger. The jump was so unexpected, so ferocious, that it was successful. The weapon flew up into the air, then fell to the dirt.

The instant of crisis had come. Jeffrey knew he might not be so fortunate a second time, and before the stunned Mohegan could move he bent down and scooped up the dagger.

Until now neither man had uttered a sound. But the silence was split by a long, sobbing wail which burst from Mohegan's throat as he lowered his bullhead and drove with every remaining ounce of effort into Jeffrey's stomach. Gasping for air and trying to free himself from Mohegan's desperate grip, Jeffrey fell to the earth, with the Seneca on top of him.

They rolled over and over, and the crowd broke to give them room. A searing pain tore up and down Jeffrey's arm. Mohegan's huge fingers had closed over his wrist, and the Indian was slowly twisting and wrenching his hand behind his back. A few seconds more of the pain, and he would be forced to drop the dagger.

A recent lesson from his Seneca tutor in the fine points of hand-to-hand fighting flashed into Jeffrey's mind. In a situation like this a man should pull his arm hard and sharp in the direction of the opponent's thumb. Jeffrey jerked his arm, and it came free. Here was the final irony. The Senecas themselves were contributing to the defeat of one of their mightiest warriors.

Jeffrey fell free, the dagger still tightly clutched in his hand. Mohegan blinked stupidly. Before he had time to regain his wits Jeffrey tightened his grip on the handle, raised his arm high above his head, then brought it down with all the force he could muster. A split second later the dagger disappeared as he plunged it to the hilt into Mohegan's heart. . . .

The silence was shattering. Jeffrey stood panting above the still body of his fallen foe. As soon as the Senecas collected themselves they would tear him to pieces, but he didn't care. He had avenged himself, and he was ready to die.

A low, insistent hum arose from hundreds of throats, and Jeffrey braced himself. After the first clash of bodies he would feel nothing. . . .

To his complete astonishment he found himself lifted to the shoulders of two braves. The crowd found full voice and shouted joyfully as the men started marching down the length of the square. Virtually the whole village fell in behind, and as a dumfounded Jeffrey tried to recover his senses he caught a glimpse of Paugus, a forgotten bearskin at his feet, standing on his oaken throne and screaming as loudly as all the rest.

Could a white man ever understand the devious, subtle mental processes of these savages? Neither stoning nor slow torture was in store for Jeffrey. He had won a stirring victory in mortal combat over the bravest of Seneca warriors, hence *he* was being acclaimed a hero!

As his head stopped spinning he looked across the heads of the milling crowd for Adiawando, but she had disappeared. Then he forgot her, for his bearers left the square and strutted through the village, while men, squaws, and even the children who had once reviled him snake-danced in his honor.

Jeffrey was never sure how long that breath-taking parade lasted. But it finally came to an end as his braves deposited him at

the entrance to the tribal lodge and silently motioned him in. He walked through the archway, and the bright glare of dozens of smoking flares blinded him.

Involuntarily he shut his eyes, and when he opened them he found himself directly facing Paugus, who was seated on a high dais, flanked on either side by the chiefs of clans dressed in their finest feathered and beaded robes. Jeffrey was dimly aware that virtually all of the adult male members of the community had filed into the long dank lodge hall after him. There was absolute silence, and despite his contempt for the ceremonials of the Senecas, Jeffrey was impressed.

He wondered what was in store for him, but his mind refused to keep pace with the day's events. Unsure of what was expected of him, he took a step in the direction of Paugus, but two of the clan chiefs rose to their feet and walked slowly toward him. As they neared him they bowed, and Jeffrey, caught off guard by the first sign of civility he had ever experienced at the hands of the Senecas, gulped and hesitated before returning the salutation.

The next move was so unexpected that he gasped aloud. One of the clansmen drew an incredibly long and sharp knife from beneath his coat and slashed the blade quickly across Jeffrey's face. For a stunned moment he thought they were going to murder him in cold blood after all. Then he realized that they were shaving him, and it took considerable effort not to laugh.

Even the sharpest of razors will pull at a man's beard when a shave is waterless and the hair is long and matted. But Jeffrey didn't mind. The badge of his slavery was being taken from him, and with a lifting heart he wondered if his period of servitude was ending.

In a few minutes the ceremony of removing his beard was ended, and while Jeffrey gingerly touched his smooth chin with eager fingers, one of the clan chiefs raised the knife to his head. As chunks of snarled hair fell to the ground he smiled ironically. A few short minutes ago a similar knife would have been applied in a different fashion, and his scalp would now be hanging from the belt of Mohegan.

For a second time he repressed a chuckle as he realized his hair was being cut in the fashion approved for braves of the Senecas. A long patch three fingers wide extended from his forehead to the nape of his neck, ending in a short queue in the back. All that distinguished it from the hair of the silent, squatting men who filled the lodge was its color.

At last his barbers were finished with him. One of them whispered that he was to approach Paugus and kneel. Jeffrey did as he was bidden, though any show of homage to the savage monarch was still extraordinarily distasteful to him.

Paugus drew a small painted wooden scarab from the folds of his bearskin and fondled it lovingly in his left hand. With his free hand he gestured to Jeffrey.

"Approach the seat of the Honoye Paugus and taste of the talisman of the nation of Seneca, mightiest and bravest of all people who inhabit the earth," he intoned.

Jeffrey arose, and curiosity pulled him toward the King's throne. Never before had he seen a Seneca scarab, though he had been told the little charms were believed to have mystic powers. Paugus held it up to Jeffrey's gaze between his thumb and forefinger, and the white man stared at the carved bit of wood.

The scarab was about the size of a large walnut. One side was flat and smooth, but on the other, cut in bas-relief, was the face of a man. Gold and vermilion war paint was streaked on the forehead and cheekbones, and Jeffrey was struck by the amazing skill of the sculptor who had cut the image. The Senecas were indifferently artistic, but the man who had made the scarab had caught more than the facial characteristics of the people; the work brought out the spirit of brutality of the tribe—and the simple, childish sensualness too.

Paugus drove his arm forward suddenly and struck Jeffrey squarely between the eyes with the scarab. The sharp points of the wood cut through his skin, and drops of blood appeared simmultaneously in three or four spots. Before the stunned white man could move, Paugus was on his feet. His callused hands grasped Jeffrey's head and pulled it forward. And while Jeffrey stood dumfounded Paugus pressed his mouth to the wound and sucked in several drops of blood.

The men of the Senecas were all on their feet now, and as Paugus released Jeffrey's head and stepped back a wild whoop echoed and re-echoed across the lodge. Paugus sat down and opened his mouth to speak, and the warriors again fell silent.

"The gie-ha-no was of the race of the honio'on," he said. "Mohegan was of the clan of the eagle. The ancestors of Mohegan ruled the skies. The ancestors of Mohegan were feared by all who walked the earth. In this same way was Mohegan feared. The scalps which Mohegan won from the buzzards who stirred his wrath were without number, like the leaves of the forest. Now Mohegan is no more.-

"The gie-ha-no has lived among the people of the Seneca nation for many moons. He has learned the skill of the birds of the air. He has learned the strength of the beasts of the forests. He has become a man of the Seneca."

Realization dawned slowly on Jeffrey. He was being set free. Paugust had drunk his blood and had thus made him a kinsman. His conquest of Mohegan had changed his status in a twinkling, and he thought he understood the reason. As vain as they were superstitiously ignorant, the Senecas were unable to believe that a mere white man whom they had enslaved was capable of fighting and killing one of their finest warriors. Only if the former slave were miraculously endowed with the mystical valor of their leader could the day's events become logical to the savage mind.

The voice of Paugus droned on: "Mohegan was strong as the eagles. Mohegan was brave as the eagles. But Mohegan was not of the clan of the hawk. None but the hawk can see into the future. He who seemed to be a honio'o gie-ha-no was in secret of the clan of the hawk. But none knew this save the all-seeing Honoye Paugus."

The old fraud! He was not only claiming Jeffrey as a blood brother but was establishing the relationship as a long-standing affair.

"The hawk is stronger than the eagle. The hawk is braver than the eagle. The hawk has the wisdom of his ancestors who dwell in the sky, his ancestors who see into the veiled places which those who tread the earth would hide from their fellow men."

Jeffrey looked at Paugus in undisguised admiration. Not even Louis of the French, reputedly the cleverest man alive, was the equal of this savage, who used instinct and a little education to tremendous advantage, holding together a bloodthirsty and barbarous tribe by playing on fears and emotions as deftly as a portrait painter blended colors on a canvas. He was turning the day's duel to his own advantage, and at no cost to himself.

"The gie-ha-no who appeared to the people of the nation of Seneca as a weakling was a blood brother of the hawk from the day of ordainment of his birth. The Seneca try the spirits of those who would aspire to the high degree of warriors. The hawk who was a gie-ha-no displeased the gods who rule the sky. He displeased them before he appeared to tread the earth, and they made his skin like that of the honio'on.

"The Honoye Paugus, who is told all things by his ancestors

who dwell in the sky, knew this. The hawks who sleep in the sky told Honoye Paugus to try the spirits of the white gie-ha-no. If for many moons he served the nation of Seneca without murmur, he would triumph. If he served humbly, he would be granted a victory that all would know, a victory that all would respect. The people of the nation of Seneca would welcome the conqueror of a mighty warrior into their ranks. On this day the gie-ha-no has been given the victory. Mohegan, the eagle, has joined his ancestors who dwell in the rocky places of the sky."

Paugus stopped speaking and glared about the lodge, as if daring any man present to contradict his explanation of the unexpected turn of events. But no one moved. The braves listened in respectful, trusting silence. Satisfied, Paugus looked straight at Jeffrey for the first time.

"He who was of the honio'on is welcome to the councils of the nation of Seneca. He is given a new name. He is given an old name. The name which he bore when he dwelt with his ancestors. The name which is rightfully his. He will bear the name of Wasizo."

Jeffrey wasn't too familiar with the proper names of the Senecas, but he had heard Adiawando use the word "Wasizo." He thought long and hard without remembering and was about to give up in disgust when some far-off chain association put him on the right track. Wasizo. He knew now. Wasizo. The young hawk.

"Wasizo is the clan of the Honoye," Paugus continued, and Jeffrey pulled his attention back to his new blood relative. "Wasizo the Honoye is a brave fledgling, a wise fledgling. But the fledging hawk does not fly. The fledging hawk must first try his wings."

Paugus was trying to convey some private meaning to him, Jeffrey decided, but he had no idea what it was. They were in this little conspiracy together. Boldly he raised his eyebrows and shook his head. From the immediate gleam in Paugus's eyes he knew his gesture had been understood. The King leaned forward in his chair, and his voice became hard and uncompromising.

"Wasizo will learn more of the ways of the nation of Seneca," he said. "For many moons Wasizo will learn. When his wings are strong and true he will take to the warpath of his ancestors. At all times, while he learns, he will be honored as the brother of the Honoye Paugus."

Jeffrey understood the veiled threat which Paugus had hurled

at him. He was to remain in the Seneca village for a long time and was to make himself one with the brown-skinned natives. If he succeeded and, above all, if he behaved properly and made no attempt to escape, he would in time be received as a full-fledged warrior member of the tribe.

Paugus stopped speaking and leaned back in his chair, obviously waiting for Jeffrey to reply.

"Wasizo . . ." Jeffrey cleared his throat and started again. "Wasizo bows his head low before the mightiest of the hawks, mightier than those who dwell in the sky," he said. Flattery never hurt anyone, and Paugus loved it. "The wisdom of the Honoye Paugust is greater than that of all the noble birds who watch the nation of the Seneca from their home above the clouds."

He was afraid he had been too lavish in his praise, but the rows of silent braves didn't stir. Encouraged, he plunged on: "Wasizo accepts with a full heart the commands of the Honoye Paugus. May all who tread the earth heed the words of the great Paugus. May his slightest wish be an order which all the people of the nation of Seneca will hasten to obey."

His eyes crossed those of Paugus, and the wily chieftain was nodding, satisfied. Jeffrey had accepted his conditions. With a suddenly lightened heart Jeffrey knew that the worst days of his tribulation in this primitive, pagan land were over. And unless Paugus truly could read the secret thoughts of men, he wouldn't know that Jeffrey's promise meant nothing.

Make no attempt to escape, indeed. As a free citizen of the village, his opportunties to seek his freedom were vastly multiplied. He would wait only for the right occasion and then would sneak off into the forests some night. He grinned to himself and wondered how Paugus would explain *that* to his assembled braves.

The King stood up and, drawing his robe about him, walked quickly to a small entrance at the rear of the lodge and disappeared into the twilight. There was immediate bedlam in the lodge. Screaming and cavorting, the warriors danced around Jeffrey, shaking their flintlocks at him. Keeping his face as immobile as the custom of the tribe demanded, he was unable to repress the thought that any other man would be terrified at the ceremony. But he knew the ways of the Senecas now and was acutely aware that they never brandished weapons before those whom they hated. This was a gesture of acceptance, and after his months of loneliness even the friendship of merciless brutes was welcome.

A dozen hands reached out to grasp Jeffrey, and before he quite realized what was happening his face and body were smeared

with sticky gobs of gold and vermilion war paint. Conquering his natural distaste for the slimy stuff, he watched the long, jagged streaks dry on his body. He wondered briefly what Leah would think of him if she could see him now, then pushed the notion from his mind. Leah would be appalled and disgusted by the paint-daubed figure standing at the center of a vortex of jabbering, sweaty savages. . . .

Jeffrey walked on legs that were carrying him with unaccustomed alcoholic lightness from the Seneca lodge. For the first time in almost a year a layer of leather protected his feet from the bare ground, and ironically he found the moccasins which had been presented to him rather cumbersome. In fact, he had the impulse to kick them off but was still sober enough to know that, if he did, he would regret it in the morning.

The ceremonies at the lodge had finished with a drinking bout, and when Jeffrey hesitated at swallowing the loathsome native brew one of the clan chiefs disappeared for a moment, then came back with an impressive bottle of French brandy under his arm. It was the first liquor Jeffrey had tasted in many months, and although he had consumed very little of the stuff, there was a floating sensation in his head, and his heart pounded.

He drew the borrowed warrior cloak tighter about his naked shoulders as a question of Seneca etiquette arose in his mind. Was it right for him to go to Adiawando's house now that he was no longer her slave? He didn't know. But there wasn't much choice, at least in his own mind. The only alternative was to find a place on the bare floor of the lodge near the stinking bodies of some of the younger braves who, too drunk to seek and find the long houses of their elders, had given in to the course of least resistance and had dropped off to sleep.

As he approached the hut he saw that Adiawando had lighted one of her precious store of French candles. Its clear, odorless gleam was unmistakable through the thin sheen of oiled skin which covered the window. Without hesitation he threw aside the heavy buffalo-skin flap which concealed the doorway and walked into the hut.

Jeffrey thought he knew Adiawando's face and figure, but he was unprepared for what he saw. He caught his breath and could only stand and gape stupidly.

Her short leather skirt had been discarded, and in its place she wore a long silken sheath of some rich, shimmering French material which clung to her hips, then broke into many folds as it swept to the floor. Her breasts were encased in a single length

of a sheer, gauzy material which revealed her femininity, yet hid it at the same time.

Her long blue-black hair was combed smooth, and high on the left side she wore a latticed, carved ornament. Her bare arms and shoulders gleamed softly in the light of the single candle, and the room was filled with the bittersweet, provocative odor of the oil which she had rubbed into her glistening skin.

For uncounted moments Jeffrey stood silently staring at Adiawando. She knew of his change of status and was prepared to accept him, to greet him as an equal. More than an equal, for as he regained the power of movement and advanced into the room she sank slowly to the floor and held a large steaming bowl out to him. Before he looked at it he knew what it contained: flat cakes made of finely ground corn meal and filled with long slivers of venison steak. For centuries this dish had been the ceremonial bridal supper of Seneca men and women.

Jeffrey found his voice. "Adiawando——" he began.

Insistently she thrust the bowl before him. "What is the new name of him who was of the honio'on?" she asked. "It is right for Adiawando to call him by his name."

"Wasizo."

"Wasizo will eat of the food which Adiawando has prepared over the sacred flames," she said, her eyes falling to the ground and a new note of unmistakable shyness creeping into her voice.

Vaguely Jeffrey was aware of a pine odor rising from the fire and guessed that Adiawando had fed the flames with dried pine cones, the Seneca symbol of fertility. Before the implications struck him fully she spoke again.

"Wasizo will sit in the chair of the ruler of this house," she said firmly.

Jeffrey was so accustomed to obeying her commands that he moved to the high broad stool without thinking and sat down. Only then did he realize what was happening. True to the traditions of her sex and of her people, Adiawando was giving up her authority and was ceding it to him.

A smoking chunk of corn and venison cake was lifted to Jefrey's mouth. He bit into it, and Adiawando drew it away, then swallowed the remainder of the piece herself. Placing the bowl on the floor, she arose slowly to her feet. The ceremony was ended.

Moving with unconscious deliberation, Adiawando walked across the room and placed herself between Jeffrey and the candle. With fingers that trembled slightly she unfastened the top of her

skirt, and it slid noiselessly to the floor. A quick flick of her hand, and the gauze that covered her breasts dropped beside it.

Jeffrey stood up, and the blood pounded in his temples. For so many nights he had watched Adiawando undress, but his glances had been covered and brief. Now she was giving him the right to gaze at her.

Their eyes met and locked. A single consciousness pervaded the room. Time and place and person were forgotten. A man and a woman wanted each other.

With long sure strides Jeffrey crossed the room and lifted Adiawando into his arms. He blew out the candle, and darkness enveloped them.

Chapter Ten

THE TALL brave in the heavy embroided loincloth, fresh paint gleaming on his brown body, stood near his new house, watching the squaws move his personal property into the imposing stone structure. His own squaw stood a few paces to the rear, giving him the respect due a warrior. Only her high rank allowed her the luxury of standing idle. Were she anyone but a princess of the ruling clan, she would be struggling with the other women, carrying furniture and clothing.

If the brave was proud of the sturdy new house he showed no sign of it. A stranger looking ot the scene would have refused to believe that the man had built the place with his own hands, boulder by painful boulder. He leaned now on a long rifle, indolently supervising the straining, panting squaws in the casual manner approved for Seneca warriors. And he found the pose suprisingly easy to assume.

Indeed, Jeffrey was somewhat concerned these days over the rapidity with which he had slipped into the Seneca pattern. Living had become very pleasant in the past two months, and he recognized Paugus's cleverness in demanding that he acclimate himself to this lazy existence.

Every morning Adiawando stained his body with a secret preparation which she brewed over the fire. Jeffrey knew only that it consisted of various nut juices and herbs, but he willingly admitted, even to himself, that it was a magic potion, for as soon as the liquid touched his skin he became as bronzed as those whose Seneca ancestors had crept through the forests hundreds of years before.

A dye mixed with charcoal and fish paste was applied to his bristling light brown hair, too, and his cockscomb and queue had become as black as those of the fiercest Seneca warrior. Only his eyes gave away his Anglo-Saxon blood, for no Indian ever boasted such deep blue orbs.

Life had settled into a tranquil, mild routine. Adiawando

cooked breakfast each morning, then applied the nut-juice stain to Jeffrey's body. By the time the sun had arisen Jeffrey was in the fields beyond the village, practicing the fine art of Seneca warfare with the young braves who had not yet taken part in campaigns against an enemy. The days of his private lessons from the disgraced old warrior were ended, and though Jeffrey regretted their passing, he was powerless to force their continuance. He was sure there were many more tricks the grizzled brave could have taught him. But he was learning lessons that were equally valuable.

Usually the young braves were divided into two, sometimes three, opposing groups. A favorite pastime sent one group into hiding in either open fields or nearby forests, while the others fanned out to search for them. Any brave unfortunate enough to be caught was forced by his enthusiastic captors to run a gantlet. While no lethal weapons were used, a man could still suffer a severe beating, for the Senecas used stout sticks and knotted strands of heavy leather to belabor those who were slow or careless or clumsy. And the pitiful condition of the victims after such a session was enough to make every young man quick and wary.

Twice Jeffrey was a member of a team that caught an opposing brave, and twice he took his place in the gantlet line. Both times the memory of Simon Willard's death rose up to haunt him, and he made sure his heavy club missed the twisting, dodigng culprits.

There was a daily session in the throwing of little Seneca axes, light, cunningly devised weapons related to the tomahawks which the Indians of New England used, yet more ingeniously devastating. At first Jeffrey was unable to achieve any measure of control over the metal as he spun it across space at a tree trunk, but in time he became adept at the art, and his skill even surpassed that of some braves who had grown up with the axes never far from their hands. There were few instruments of death so well suited to silent forest warfare, and Jeffrey was not slow in seeing the advantage he would have if he were proficient in the use of the ax when he made his break for freedom.

At least every other day the young braves improved their shooting eyes with a variety of guns, from French dueling pistols to flintlocks and long frontier rifles. Some of the guns were gifts of the French, but the vast majority had been captured from English settlers, and a few were even of Swedish manufacture. Jeffrey proved himself a deadly marksman the first day he was given a

rifle to shoot, and as ammunition and powder were perennially scarce, he was always excused from the firing lessons.

His most valuable lessons were the free-for-all wrestling matches. It was every man for himself at such times, and woe to the wretch who cried out or groaned. Silence and stealth were the cornerstones on which the Senecas built their fighting units, and every warrior was taught to suffer without complaint. When a sigh or moan escaped the lips of a brave taking a beating, the whole pack would turn on him like a horde of avenging wolves, and the offender would be pounded and kicked into unconsciousness.

Jeffrey was bigger and stronger than most of the men taking part in these exercises, and after several victories he found that the savages avoided him when the time came for wrestling. One day two of them jumped on him at once, and to his great satisfaction he defeated them both by shaking off one and concentrating briefly but fiercely on the other, then reversing his attentions.

When the sun reached a point directly overhead the practice for war ceased abruptly and the future Seneca warriors hurried to their long houses for their biggest meal of the day. When Jeffrey reached the private dwelling to which his squaw's rank entitled them Adiawando was almost always waiting for him.

The late afternoons were the most boring. Each day Paugus held court and listened to the complaints which his subjects brought against each other. Serious disputes which sub-chieftains of distant Seneca communities couldn't settle were submitted to him, too, and he listened to the fiery harangues and denunciations of the suddenly talkative savages with a patience which only one of his race could achieve.

Adiawando invariably attended these dreary meetings, and Jeffrey was expected to be present too. Over his shoulders he wore a feathered, beaded leather cloak which marked him as a kinsman of Paugus, and as the June sun beat down with ever-increasing heat he perspired and cursed Seneca protocol under his breath. But through listening he learned more and more of the Seneca tongue and character.

He never understood why Paugus wanted him there or why it was so necessary for Adiawando to be present, either, for never once were their opinions asked. Jeffrey suspected that the King was simply seeking—and achieving—an impressive background for his courtroom pronouncements.

With the coming of warm weather the debauched ceremonial

meetings which had been so frequent during winter evenings became a thing of the past. Life stirred at dawn in the village, and after a light supper each night most people were ready for bed and sleep. Jeffrey and Adiawando usually sat cross-legged outside their hut and watched the sun set, and this was a difficult and painful time for the white man. He remembered so many sunsets in England. He was always glad when they strolled into the hut hand in hand and he could bury all thoughts of the past—and of the future—in Adiawando's sweet pine scent and in the yielding warmth of her soft body. . . .

The day after Jeffrey and Adiawando moved into their new stone house his hopes for an early escape received a crushing setback. He was outside the village with the young braves. throwing axes at a spot he had marked on an elm tree, when a messenger summoned him abruptly to the tribal lodge.

He dog-trotted across the village—the fastest gait which Seneca decorum would permit, even in time of emergency—and arrived to find the heads of the clans seated in a semicircle before Paugus. who was attempting to maintain an air of nonchalance as he lounged in his oak chair. Half a dozen of the senior warriors were present. too, and as Jeffrey walked into the lodge he could almost feel the tension crackle. Hurriedly he took his place among the clansmen. and although Paugus gave no indication that he had seen Jeffrey enter, he began to speak immediately.

"Our brothers to the north bring news of disaster." he said without preamble. and Jeffrey's heart leaped. So the French were in trouble at the very start of the spring campaign!

Paugus snapped his fingers. and a young warrior who attended him hurried to the door of the lodge. returning a moment later with a white man—the first white Jeffrey had seen in almost a year. The fellow was short and swarthy and in need of a shave. He wore the long. fringed buckskin pants of a frontiersman. but his coat was the full-dress jacket of a French captain of artillery. The braid and gilt buttons were tarnished,. and Jeffrey remembered a remark his father had once made. The French soldier, Father had said, invariably looked as though he had slept in his uniform for weeks.

The Frenchman glanced around the circle of impassive, savage faces and coughed nervously. Jeffrey didn't blame him. Even better than the visitor, he knew that the man's supposed Seneca allies might, if they were in the mood, tear him to pieces without a quiver of conscience.

Paugus introduced the newcomer as Captain Maurice Jouvet, who was conducting a party of English prisoners north to Canada. The captain had only recently been in Port Royal, and he brought word to Paugus of the progress of the war, news that was vastly disturbing.

Captain Jouvet began to speak in halting Seneca. "The English who would rob you of your homes and your land and your forests have committed a new atrocity," he said. "Four weeks ago a party of English colonials raided and destroyed St. John's."

Jeffrey felt like standing up and shouting, but knowing that sly glances would be cast in his direction to see how he was taking the news, he pulled in the muscles of his cheeks and hoped the men on either side of him couldn't hear the happy pounding of his heart. After four long, cruel years of defensive warfare the English at last had taken the initiative.

"No military objective was accomplished by the raid," Captain Jouvet continued. "The English, who complain like women when the Seneca raid their towns, have done worse than any Seneca band has ever——"

Realizing his mistake, he stopped short, then started over. "Unlike the Seneca raiders, who think only of military victories, the English wished to cause suffering for our women and children. Nothing else mattered to them."

A filthy lie! How startled the Frenchman would be if Jeffrey were to rise and choke the words back into his squat, ugly throat!

"Colonel Shadrack Walton of Massachusetts showed no mercy to the subjects of King Louis. He raided and looted and burned. Fortunately, there were few raiders in the party, so the damage was small."

Jeffrey didn't believe that, either. Even a few English settlers could make all of New France too hot for the schemers who lived there.

"Baron Colonel St. Castine immediately divined the purpose of the raid, and his scouts have discovered that the colonel, as always, knows more of the intention of the English than the English know themselves." He paused dramatically, then added, "Walton's raiders were trying to learn our strength. They came in advance of a great army which will attack Port Royal."

The Senecas stirred, and Jeffrey shifted, too, though for another reason. He was unable to believe his ears. In the year he had been away the tide of war must have turned heavily if Massachusetts was planning to send an army into New France. He thought the Massachusetters a dour lot, but no one had ever accused them of

lacking courage. And they had plenty of it to spare if they were considering sending an army up through the wilds of Maine into Canada. It would be risky work, for French and Indian snipers hidden along the route would cut an army to thin ribbons.

Captain Jouvet's voice rolled on, and Jeffrey forced himself to stop daydreaming about campaign tactics. "The English Queen across the sea is sending many ships. She is sending many men. The ships will carry great guns. guns that will cause flames to rise as high as the highest trees of the forest. But the French and our loyal allies will drive the English guns and men into the sea. We will make a funeral pyre of their great ships.

"If we fail, the English will swarm across the land like a great plague of ants. They will destroy all that lies before them. The homes and towns of the Senecas will be torn down. The people of the Seneca will be sent to England in slavery. And the hunting lands of the Seneca will be used by the English."

Captain Jouvet's plea for Seneca aid rolled to new oratorical heights. but Jeffrey was again lost in thought. Queen Anne and Parliament were at last aware that the Colonies needed help. He glowed at the mental picture of all those ships of the line. those proud, straight-lined regiments. He would give anything to be a part of that expedition. And maybe he *could* be a cog in the machine of war which must be forming at this very moment. Tonight he would make new escape plans. If he waited for a more opportune moment to flee he might be too late. He would have to make his own moment and would find a way to join the expedition. As a warrior he would not be watched too closely and could find a chance to slip away.

The French officer stopped speaking and sat down. Paugus looked slowly around the circle of his advisers and then began his reply.

"Who will protect the nation of the Seneca from her enemies nearby if her warriors march to New France?" he asked. "The Senecas alone protect their towns and forests!"

Captain Jouvet looked crestfallen, and Jeffrey felt a twinge of sympathetic understanding for the man. The addition of several thousand—or even several hundred—Seneca braves would be an enormous help to the French. Without such aid the difficulties of stopping a full-scale English expedition would be multiplied.

But the French officer did not give up quickly. Jumping to his feet, his fists clenched tightly, he faced Paugus. "King Louis has sent Paugus a great bag of gold," he cried. "That gift was made on one condition. If Paugus and his braves will join Baron St.

Castine, the gold belongs to the Senecas. If you will not come, I have been ordered to bring the gold back to the royal treasury at Quebec."

The man had nerve. One word from Paugus, and neither the captain nor his gold would ever see Quebec again. But he was gambling on the insatiable cupidity of the Indians. Their thirst for gold was never quenched, and if they murdered and stole money from the French now, no more cash would be forthcoming in the years ahead. Every man sitting in the lodge knew it. And Paugus knew it better than any.

For a long tense minute the Seneca chieftain appeared lost in thought. When he finally raised his voice Jeffrey knew that the councils of Europe had lost a statesman worthy of any conference table.

"The nation of the Seneca is pleased at the gift of the good friend of the Honoye Paugus, the Honoye Louis," he said slyly. "But there are many Seneca towns, many braves to be given weapons of war. If the Honoye Louis wishes the braves of the nation of Seneca to fight beside their brothers the French, there must be *more* gold."

Captain Jouvet wiped his forehead with the back of his sleeve. He was being outmaneuvered, and there was nothing he could do but agree gracefully. "I have been authorized by Baron St. Castine," he said, thinking quickly, "to offer the warriors of the Seneca another large bag of gold. It will be paid—when the warriors of the Seneca arrive at Quebec or Port Royal to take up arms with us."

Paugus grimaced openly, and Jeffrey, enjoying himself tremendously, leaned back on his haunches. None but the French could drive such a sharp bargain, he thought. Even when Paugus puts them in an impossible spot, they wriggle out.

Jeffrey's eyes turned back toward his blood brother expectantly. An absolute monarch must always maintain a bold front, and Paugus could ill afford further haggling before so many of his prominent subjects. He stood up, drew his bearskin cloak tightly about him, and answered the French officer in a tone that plainly indicated he was making his final offer.

"One half of the experienced warriors of the Seneca will join their French brothers," he said. "The Honoye Paugus will lead his warriors and will accept the gold of the Honoye Louis in New France."

No lesser sachem would dip his greedy finger into coffers filled with money. Rather than allow the gold to disappear in small

dribbles, Paugus would go off to war himself. No wonder he was so successful, Jeffrey thought. He anticipated every emergency.

The savage King's attention to detail was even greater than Jeffrey realized. This fact became abundantly clear a few minutes later, for no sooner had Captain Jouvet scribbled the terms of agreement on a dirty scrap of paper than Paugus expressed a generous afterthought.

"Half of the younger warriors who have won no scalps in battle will march with the Honoye Paugus," he exclaimed. "They will learn for themselves how the English flee from the eagles of the forest. Those of the young warriors who do *not* march to Canada will stay in the towns of the Seneca. They will hunt for food. And they will protect the children and the squaws.

"Those who remain will be unhappy. They will think the Honoye Paugus believes them cowardly. But this is not so. That all who remain will believe the Honoye Paugus has faith in them, let his words be carried to all the towns of the Seneca. The kinsmen of that Honoye Paugus, the young hawk, Wasizo, will remain to guard the towns of the nation of Seneca. All know of the valor of Wasizo. So all will know of the valor of the others who remain."

Jeffrey felt trapped. Paugus was using him as a symbol to those braves who would be forced to remain behind, missing the bloodshed and the spoils of war. Not only was the King quieting malcontents before they began to grumble, but he was insuring Jeffrey's continued presence here. The white man would have no opportunity to escape while accompanying the Seneca legions. The hidden eyes of sentries surrounding the town would continue to watch him as closely and carefully as they had watched for almost a year.

Glumly Jeffrey sat through the remainder of the meeting with the Frenchman. Never had the interminable ceremonies of the Indians been more boring. And when the clansmen and warriors at last arose and left the lodge Jeffrey drifted out with them, his mind dulled by the prospect of eternal captivity.

Before he quite realized where he was going he found he was walking with several of the warriors in the direction of the prisoners' stockades. Not more than one hundred feet ahead loomed the large prisoners' cages with their long, stout poles driven into the earth six inches apart, and bound together with leather thongs which had been soaked in salt water. Jeffrey felt squeamishly uneasy. For the first time since he had become a member of the tribe there were prisoners in the stockade. Last

year, when he so desperately wanted to see the Frenchmen who were conducting captives north, he had been forcibly stopped. Now, when he was free to gape at will at the unfortunates who had fallen into enemy hands, all desire was gone. There was nothing he could do to help the prisoners, and he was reluctant to peer at the white men who were doomed to spend years in damp underground chambers, or at best to build fortifications in Canada for their French captors.

But some force stronger than reason kept his feet moving, and as he neared the closer of the two pens he saw six miserable humans, chained to each other like wild animals, huddling together on the grassless ground. None had washed or shaved in days, and the pace which the French had maintained through the forests had cut their clothing to ribbons. Three slovenly French soldiers and a half-caste Indian wearing the tribal paint of the Tuscaroras stood guard over the Englishmen. To be more precise, the Frenchmen and their companion lounged on the hard earth in postures as weary as those of their prisoners. They were equally filthy, and their leggings and shirts were as torn and stained as the miserable linen of their captives. Only the flintlocks held carelessly in their laps distinguished the victors from the vanquished.

Jeffrey's glance passed from one of the apathetic Englishmen to the next. He knew none of them, and although he realized his sudden relief was childish, he nevertheless felt better. Half expecting a comment from one of the Seneca warriors, he decided to anticipate any remarks by being the first to say something scornful about the English. But when he turned his head he saw that he was alone.

The warriors had hurried to the farther stockade, and to Jeffrey's surprise a large crowd of the savages had gathered outside the bars. A shout filled the air, followed by cackling laughs and jeers. Jeffrey thought some poor wretch was being tormented, and although he knew there would be no complications if he kept his distance, he was unable to stop himself from walking with rapid strides toward the enclosure.

Peering over the heads of a group of tittering squaws who stood at one end of the pen, he saw a brave strutting about inside the stockade. The Seneca carried a long knife in his hand, and when he raised his arm in a threatening gesture the onlookers screamed their appreciation of his antics.

As Jeffrey drew closer he pushed the squaws aside, and they fell back to give the always superior male an unhampered view.

Absorbed though they were in the spectacle, lifelong fear made them sensitive to the slightest demand of any warrior who wore gold and vermilion paint. And they found the sight inside the bars so engrossing that they promptly forgot the tall figure beside them.

Guarded by grinning Frenchmen and several loose-lipped Tuscaroras was a badly frightened group of women. White women. They were not bound but clung to each other in twos and threes, for half a dozen Seneca warriors were now prancing about the cage, stamping, grimacing fiercely, and shaking guns, knives, and axes in their faces. Every few seconds one of the women would gasp and moan, and the redoubled laughter of the crowd spurred the warriors to more strenuous exhibitions.

But Jeffrey's eyes saw only one person in the stockade, one woman who, unlike her sisters, stood scornfully erect and unafraid. Her long golden hair streamed down her back, and despite her obvious fatigue she was alive and young and vigorous.

Her dress was grimy, and a rip in the fabric disclosed a portion of her shoulder. Although her back was turned toward him, Jeffrey would have known her anywhere.

The prisoner was Leah.

Chapter Eleven

NEVER HAD Jeffrey's senses been so alert, nor his tensed muscles so ready for action. Once the first shock of recognition passed, his thoughts reassembled with amazing speed.

Leah, in some catastrophe too great to contemplate, had become a prisoner of the French and was at this very moment standing only a few feet from him. Jeffrey's own tribulations fell from him in a twinkling; he knew with dazzling clarity that he had been forced to undergo suffering for but one reason. A power greater than man had arranged this seeming coincidence of fate so Jeffrey would be here to help Leah in this moment of need.

His own life and future, which only a few minutes ago had been of primary concern, were no longer important. Nothing mattered but Leah, and he was determined to free her if he died in the attempt. And die he would unless he proceeded with extraordinary care and caution.

Gradually his breathing became even, and only the sharp glint of his eyes indicated that this was an hour of crisis.

The bedlam inside the stockade was increasing, and Jeffrey knew he must move quickly before Captain Jouvet returned and ordered the Seneca warriors from the enclosure. Shouldering his way through the crowd, he strode swiftly to the partially opened gate of the pen and, gripping the ax at his belt, he walked into the compound. A few seconds later he stood a scant two feet from Leah.

She looked through him blankly with eyes glazed by pride and horror. Jeffrey whipped the ax from his belt and shook it menacingly in her face. Only a faint, familiar curl of her sensitive upper lip indicated an awareness of the presence of this tall, husky savage.

Jeffrey decided that drastic measures were needed to attract her attention. If she would only *look* at him, she might recognize him. He jumped high in the air, and when he came down his face

was no more than two inches from hers. "Don't mention my name," he whispered, again brandishing the Seneca ax, "but for God's sake—pretend you're afraid of me!"

No actress could have simulated the scream of fright which passed from Leah's lips. Her body trembled, and the color drained from her lovely cheeks. Jeffrey longed to take her in his arms and comfort her, but he had a role to play, and play it he must for the benefit of the Seneca mob which was yelling lusty encouragement to Wasizo, kinsman of Paugus.

"Shrink from me," he commanded, advancing a step closer to her.

Leah needed no encouragement, and her finely proportioned figure seemed to shrivel as she pulled herself back from this wild demon who spoke her own tongue in such a familiar voice.

"Jeffrey," she murmured at last, unbelieving, yet certain that this fierce apparition could be no one else.

"Keep backing away from me," he ordered. "The Senecas love it—and they're watching every move. One false step and we're finished—both of us."

He circled her now and in pantomime went through the motions of scalping. The mob was almost out of control. Wasizo was truly of the hawk clan. No other warrier inside the enclosure was providing the crowd with so much merriment.

Leah was in control of herself now, and her acting was a match for Jeffrey's. No other girl in the world, he thought, could perform such a delicate and dangerous feat so bravely.

"I—we thought you were dead," she whispered while pretending to cringe. Her long white fingers moved to her mouth in a convincing display of terror, and Jeffrey thought there were no hands like hers, the dainty hands of a true lady, yet capable and self-assured.

"Too long a story to tell now," he replied. "That can wait till later. We'll have to get you out of here."

"My prayers have been answered." Two tears fell unheeded down Leah's cheeks.

At the sight of the white woman crying the frenzy of the Seneca mob took on an ominously threatening tone, and Jeffrey knew that Captain Jouvet and his few white followers would be unable to prevent rape and torture and massacre unless he ended this show of terror quickly.

"Meet me tonight at the north end of the stockade. Over there. I'm not sure what time I'll be there, but you sit near the bars—and wait for me," he said hurriedly. "You won't see me as I

approach, and you won't hear me. But I'll come. And, Leah—forgive me for what I've got to do now. It's the only way to save you."

He stepped back and, raising his free hand, slowly brought it forward and slapped her across the mouth. Then, spitting in the dirt at her feet, he wheeled and walked rapidly from the stockade, not daring to turn his head, but silently hoping that Leah understood.

A dozen hands slapped his back, and the Senecas who crowded about him shouted their approval of his highhandedness.

"Wasizo is the true descendant of the hawks of the sky!"

"Wasizo is of the Seneca! He spits upon the women of the English!"

"Wasizo is a true follower of the Honoye Paugus!"

There was still danger that one of the warriors remaining in the stockade would rashly unleash an avalanche of passionate hatred that couldn't be halted. So although Jeffrey replied good-naturedly to the compliments of the savages, his grip on the ax never slackened. If necessary, he would kill Leah with his own hands, quickly and painlessly.

But he was counting on the Seneca love of admiration and applause to lure the other warriors from the enclosure, and to his infinite relief they came forward at last to be petted and praised. When the last of the braves had squeezed through the gate Jeffrey maneuvered himself into a position near it, then adroitly slammed it shut.

He could look at Leah again now. She had once more assumed her pose of icy scorn, but her eyes met his, and he saw that she appreciated the risks he had taken and the skill with which he had ended the incident without bloodshed. Feigning indifference, he sauntered away.

All the way back to his house the expression he had seen in Leah's eyes haunted him. She was grateful to him, but that was only natural. Any girl in her unenviable position would be grateful to a savior who appeared out of nowhere. But was there more than thankfulness in her eyes? Had she been trying to convey something more to him?

He shook his head angrily. Tonight he must tell Leah that Simon Willard, whom she loved, was dead. Even now she must be wondering if Simon, too, was not miraculously alive.

And most urgent of all, firm, immediate plans must be made for Leah's escape. This was no time to ponder the mystery behind those green eyes—or were they blue?

As he approached the hut he saw Adiawando waiting for him, sitting indolently in the sunlight weaving a small straw mat. Although the Indian girl had never looked more appealing, the very sight of her sent a chill of shame through Jeffrey.

Adiawando lifted her face to be kissed as Jeffrey drew near. Kissing was unknown to the Senecas, but he had taught her the art, and she had responded with alacrity. His self-revulsion was as strong as a physical force, but he knew that to deny Adiawando a kiss now would hurt her and, worse, would make her suspicious. So he brushed his lips lightly against hers and walked quickly into the house so she would not see his face.

He was at a loss for some simple chore that would bridge an awkward moment, and after glancing about the room he crossed hastily to the fireplace and began to lay dry sticks on the flat stones.

Adiawando stood in the doorway, her short leather skirt hanging lightly above her long legs. "The ancestor of Wasizo was a great hungry bear of the forests, not a hawk." She smiled. "Wasizo cannot want food so soon after he has eaten."

"I've had nothing to eat since daybreak," Jeffrey answered, glad to find he was telling the truth.

"There was no food at the council of the clansmen with the French officer?"

"Nothing. You know your brother, Adiawando. He won't share his venison with anyone."

She giggled and answered in halting English. "To save powder, Paugus scrapes skin on flint," she said.

There was a long pause, and Adiawando looked at Jeffrey uncertainly. Her attempts to speak English usually delighted him, and his praise was always lavish. Aware that she was staring at him and that some reply was in order, he searched his brain for something to say.

"Your English is very good, Adiawando," he managed at last. "I'm sorry if I'm—unappreciative. But I'm hungry."

Making clucking, feminine noises in the back of her throat, Adiawando knelt beside him, threw several generous chunks of meat into a pot, then added a handful of the wild sweet potatoes that grew in abundance in the nearby fields. Jeffrey busied himself kindling the fire and pretended not to notice her nearness. For the immediate present there would be no embarrassment and no revelation of his true feelings. . . .

His excitement over finding Leah and his efforts to evolve a plan of escape for her completely spoiled his desire for food,

and although Adiawando sat cross-legged on the floor, watching him with tender care, Jeffrey could no more than play with the meal.

He knew the Indian girl was as great a hazard as all of Paugus's sentries, and as he glanced at her covertly he realized that the next few hours would determine the success or failure of his attempt to rescue Leah.

"Wasizo was mistaken. He has little appetite." Adiawando's voice broke into his thoughts.

Jeffrey yawned elaborately. "Wasizo thought he was hungry, but he is not," he agreed.

"There is love in Wasizo's eyes." she said softly.

He attempted a laugh and hoped it sounded convincing. "Sleep, Adiawando. Not love."

Rising quickly to his feet, he dumped the remains of his meal into the fire and hurried to the bed. The only way to forestall discussion was to pretend an overpowering fatigue. He threw himself on the bed and closed his eyes.

He half anticipated that Adiawando would follow him to the couch, and he tensed as she arose and drew near, for though he kept his eyes shut he could feel her presence. Was she staring at him with eyes suddenly remote and expressionless? Every nerve in his body tingled.

"I'm sleepy. Very sleepy. I shall stay here until the time for our evening meal." He tried to inject a note of drowsiness into his voice.

"The young hawk needs rest," Adiawando agreed calmly, and moved away.

Jeffrey relaxed and opened one eye a fraction of an inch. Adiawando had gone to the heavy chest she kept at the far end of the room and was drawing out her great feathered cape, the symbol of her position and rank.

Without turning her head she knew he was watching her. "It has come to the ear of Adiawando that *yeon*—women—of the honio'on are locked in the yard of prisoners. Adiawando has never looked upon the faces of the white yeon. She will go now to see them."

Jeffrey made a valiant effort to sound casual. "I saw the white women, Adiawando. They appear strong. They will be good servants for their new French masters."

Adiawando smiled. "Sleep, Wasizo," she said, and glided soundlessly from the house.

Jeffrey forced himself to lie back on the bed. If he followed

Adiawando to the prisoners' compound she would surely become aware of his love for Leah. He had no choice but to stay where he was, perfecting every detail of an escape plan.

Anyone passing the hut and noting the sprawled, inert figure on the pine bough bed would have sworn that the tall brave was asleep. But Jeffrey had never been more sharply awake. A dozen ideas presented themselves and were speedily rejected as impractical, impossible, or foolish. There was but one plan of escape. No other would suffice. He would hoist Leah over the pointed barricades of the stockade and then flee with her. If he was to save her, his skill in the use of the Seneca ax would meet its ultimate test, for the guards of the village would be waiting to pounce on them. One scream from an Indian brave's lips would ruin everything, and he and Leah would surely die. Their chances were slim, but he had to take the desperate risk. There was no choice.

But if he succeeded in silencing the sentries, he and Leah would be free to race through the forests. Then all his learning of past months would be called into play to carry them eastward to an English settlement—and safety.

He pondered long and hard on the best time to put the scheme into operation. At night, in all probability, the Frenchmen and their Tuscarora allies would take turns guarding the prisoners. The best chance for flight would come immediately after a new set of guards appeared—and fell asleep.

The military mind is identical in all countries, Jeffrey reasoned. So the French, like the English, probably sent their guards out for four-hour tours of duty. And, like the English, they doubtless changed guards at ten o'clock. Shortly after ten, then, would be the best hour to make the break. If the plan succeeded it would give him precious time before daylight to get several leagues ahead of the inevitable Seneca pursuers. At best Leah would be a burden in rapid cross-country travel, and the earlier the start, the greater the likelihood for successful flight. . . .

When Adiawando returned to cook the evening meal she seemed to have forgotten her visit to the prisoners' stockade, and after she replied to several of Jeffrey's light questions in monosyllables he quickly dropped the subject. The rest of the meal passed without incident. Like her people, Adiawando was often silent for hours at a time, so Jeffrey did not consider her taciturnity either unusual or alarming. His own seeming indifference to the white women had lulled her into a state of unconcern, he decided.

One thorny problem was still unsolved. Adiawando was a rest-

less sleeper, and despite his newly acquired ability to move stealthily, he was afraid she might wake up as he was leaving the hut. He preferred to avoid drastic means, but he was determined to bind and gag her if necessary.

However, Adiawando herself solved the dilemma for him. Their meal finished, they sat together watching the sunset, as they had done so often before. As the twilight thickened, Adiawando stood up.

"Paugus has ordered Adiawando to come to his house," she said.

Jeffrey looked at her intently but made no comment. He hoped she would volunteer more information, and he cursed the fading light that made it so difficult for him to read her features.

"The captain of the French sleeps in the house of Paugus." she added. "Adiawando will tell stories of the great ancestors of the hawk. And Paugus can drink the brandy of the captain of the French in peace. It will be a long evening. Very long. Paugus will not be satisfied until he has drunk all of the brandy."

The reason for this unexpected visit to Paugus's hut was immediately clear. The Frenchman had brought the King a bottle of brandy as a gift, and, wanting to get drunk quietly, Paugus had called on his sister to entertain the visitor with old Seneca legends. Jeffrey had no intention of accompanying Adiawando but thought it wise to make the gesture. He slowly pulled himself to his feet.

"I'll go with you, Adiawando."

"No! Paugus has forbidden it."

"Why?" His tone was sharper than he intended.

"The eyes of the captain of the French are piercing. If he learns that Wasizo was once of the nation of the honio'on he will ask many questions. Adiawando will go alone."

Jeffrey sucked in air and let it out again slowly. His nerves had almost betrayed him. And his fears were groundless. Paugus's reason for wanting Jeffrey to remain in the background were as valid as they were shrewd.

Adiawando went inside, undressed and anointed her body with oil, then donned her best clothes. Jeffrey remained outside the door for as long as he dared, then joined her and tried to make small talk. Adiawando left only an hour after telling him she was going, but it seemed like many hours to Jeffrey.

He watched her as she disappeared in the direction of her brother's house, then lit a candle and busied himself with the small carved war chest which Adiawando had given him only a

few days before. He slid two light sharp axes into his belt, one at each hip, and at the small of his back he secured a long razor-thin knife.

Leah would be a dead weight for long stretches of the journey toward civilization, so it was essential that he carry as little gear as possible. He was about to step into the open air again but doubled back and hastily daubed his face and chest with fresh smears of war paint.

Satisfied at last with his arsenal and his appearance, he left the hut and walked on bold feet in the direction of the prisoners' compound. The slightest hesitation now would be fatal. If he lagged or acted even remotely suspicious, heads would pop from behind the open doorways of long houses, and a merry crew would follow him to the stockade for an evening's entertainment. So he neither slowed his pace nor looked around until he had passed the last of the long houses. Then he ducked behind a tree and peered back into the night. There was no sound, no move anywhere. He was not being followed.

As he neared the prisoners' cages he saw that his planning had been even sounder than he had realized. He had asked Leah to meet him at the north end of the compound, and there was no obstacle in that direction save the sentries lurking in the forests. If the French guards stayed away from the dark, far corners of the pen—and Jeffrey surmised that they would—he and Leah could talk without interruption. And at the right time he could help her over the palisades without interference.

The moon was hidden behind clouds, so he was careless of his shadow as he neared the wooden bars. Dropping on all fours, he looked at ground level toward the long expanse of poles. In the very spot he himself would have chosen for the meeting he saw a dark, slim shape. Trust Leah to find the best place.

He waited until he was only a few inches from her before he spoke. "Leah," he said softly.

She gasped but immediately clapped her hand over her mouth.

"I'm sorry, Leah. I didn't mean to startle you."

"I—I didn't hear you. I didn't see you. You've become—very clever, Jeffrey."

"I hope so. Our lives will depend on that cleverness."

"Let me look at you, Jeffrey. It's so dark, and I—I still can't believe it's you. Really you." She pressed her face against the rough wooden bars, and he felt her breath warm and sweet on his face.

"How long ago did the present guards appear, Leah? Think

hard. It's important." He hadn't intended to speak gruffly, but her nearness touched him, and he had yet to tell her that the man she loved was dead.

Leah answered promptly. "There are two French soldiers and two Tuscaroras watching us," she said. "Or supposed to be watching us. One man is sitting outside the gate. He's awake. But the rest of them are sound asleep. Oh, you wanted to know *when*. Let me think. These men relieved the others right after supper. If you can call some slimy corn cakes a supper."

"Mmm. If they work in four-hour shifts, the guard will be changed again in another hour." Jeffrey was thinking aloud. "We'll wait until the next shift, and then I'm taking you away from here."

Tears formed in Leah's lustrous eyes. Despite the darkness Jeffrey could see the glistening drops. And a second later Leah's soft hand reached through the bars and closed over his.

"I've prayed to God, as Papa taught me to do," she cried softly, "and he has heard me—and answered me, Jeffrey."

He had to tell the news about her beloved Simon now, before the cool touch of her skin against his deprived him of all reason, before he blurted out his love for her.

"I have bad news for you, Leah, so prepare yourself." His lips were unaccountably dry, and he moistened them with the tip of his tongue. A metallic taste spread through his mouth. "Simon Willard is dead. He was murdered by the savages here—almost a year ago."

"We were sure you were both dead." Leah's calmness jarred him.

"His last words were for you, Leah. Simon loved you very much." Although her face was an indistinct blur in the gloom, he dropped his eyes.

Again her unruffled composure bewildered him. "I know," she replied. "Simon told me many times that he loved me. I've always been sorry I couldn't return that love."

Jeffrey was so stunned he could think of no reply. Precious minutes sped by as he tried to readjust the beliefs which had guided his thinking and his conduct for so long.

Perhaps she guessed his turmoil, for she was the first to break the silence. "Don't you want to hear about Papa—and Benjie—and Matilda?" she asked.

"Yes. Please." His voice was husky.

"Papa has aged in this past year, Jeffrey. The war has been going poorly. Most of the younger men have either been killed

or have joined the army for a big campaign that's going to start this summer. So Papa has had too much to do."

"I'm sorry. I've heard about the coming campaign—from the enemy," he said, and aside from a slight tremor in his voice he was in control of himself once more.

"Papa has been doing most of the work at the sawmill. And lately he's been taking his turn on militia duty too. Every man is in the militia now, no matter how—how old he is."

"What about Benjie? Isn't he a help to Nat?"

"Benjie went almost crazy when you didn't come back. He was dying to join the army, and Papa gave his permission this spring. Benjie has been training at Fort Albany. And that's how I was taken captive. You see, he was to leave for Boston, and Matilda and I rode over to say good-by to him. On the way home a party of Tuscaroras sprang out of nowhere and chased us."

"What happened to 'Til?" Jeffrey was afraid to ask the question.

"Oh, she escaped," she answered almost cheerfully.

"She escaped—but they caught you? That's impossible. 'Til can barely stay on the back of a horse, and you're an accomplished rider."

Leah hesitated imperceptibly before she replied. "I lagged behind so she could get away. When they captured me they were satisfied and gave up the chase. I thought I'd be killed, but some Frenchmen who were in charge came along and saved me. As you can see, they took quite a few prisoners, hiding beside the Albany roads. I—I think they want a lot of hostages before our campaign starts."

"Yes, they do." Leah's reticence nagged at him. She hadn't told him the whole story, and he was suddenly determined to get to the bottom of it.

"Please, Leah," he began again. "I want to know the rest of this. *Why* did you let Matilda get away? I can't understand why you should have sacrificed yourself——"

"I keep forgetting. You wouldn't know, would you? Matilda's going to have a baby. And I—I thought I'd be a spinster—so it didn't matter about me."

A boundless love for this girl who unselfishly had allowed herself to be taken captive so her pregnant maidservant could escape filled Jeffrey, and he began to tremble again.

"I want to hear about you, Jeffrey. How do you happen to be alive—and a Seneca brave? And how do you make your hair so black and your skin so brown? I want to know everything."

Jeffrey quickly related the story of his captivity, but he didn't tell her everything. Not that there was any reason to withhold information, but he nevertheless evaded any mention of his relationship with Adiawando. There was no way to explain that he had thought Jeffrey Wyatt, bonded Englishman, was dead—and that a white gie-ha-no had arisen from stale ashes to take his place. Leah undoubtedly wouldn't understand, and although she had little personal interest in him she might resent the knowledge that he had been Adiawando's lover. Women were strange creatures, and some things were better left unsaid.

As he finished the tale of his adventures Leah murmured, "I should have known. They couldn't kill you. Nothing can kill you."

He didn't understand and was about to ask for an explanation, but she continued to speak.

"Benjie was going tell me who and what you really are, Jeffrey. When I said good-by to him at Fort Albany he promised to tell me all about you when he came home from the campaign. I pestered him with questions last autumn and winter, but all he'd admit then was that you were no ordinary convicted criminal who'd been sent to the Colonies for indentured service."

"There's plenty of time to tell you my history, Leah. If we live. And if you really want to hear it."

"Of course I do," she cried, her voice rising. "I want to know everything about you."

Jeffrey gripped her wrist. "Not so loud, in God's name," he whispered. "Do you want to bring the whole town down on us?"

She was about to murmur an apology, but he hissed her into silence, then placed his ear to the ground and listened intently. Tree leaves rustled in the faint breeze, and in the distance a dog howled mournfully. There was no other sound.

"It's all right," he said at last. "Nobody's coming."

"I'm sorry, Jeffrey." He had never heard that note of humility from Leah before, and he blinked at her in the darkness. "Papa always says I lose my head when I'm excited—and I guess he's right."

"Well, you'll lose it fast enough if you don't keep calm," he warned grimly. "Do you want to know the details of my plans?"

"Yes, Jeffrey. If you want me to know them." She was strangely complacent again, and he wished Leah weren't such a mystery.

"We'll have a rough time ahead of us," he began. "The first part will be the worst. There are sentries out there in the forests, and once I've lifted you over the fence I'll have to sneak you past them."

"What will they do if they catch us?"

"They mustn't. Trust me."

"I trust you."

"I hope no one will notice that you're missing until daybreak, Leah. But when they find that you've escaped, and when Adiawa —when I'm missed, too, they'll set out after us. And they'll surely find our trail, because you don't know how to cover your tracks and I won't have time to teach you."

"Don't risk your life for me, Jeffrey." Again he felt her breath on his cheeks.

"I'm going to save you if it's the last thing I ever do," he said flatly, and he felt rather than saw Leah's body go limp.

"I'll thank you for the rest of my days," she breathed.

"I don't want your thanks, Leah. Only your co-operation. And your obedience. When I tell you to do something I'll want you to do it immediately, without question. I'll always explain my reasons later—if there's time. But you must understand that we're not going to an outing at the picnic grounds on Front Street."

"Yes, I know."

"The Senecas are the most ruthless barbarians who've ever desecrated the earth," he said. "They'll follow us straight into Philadelphia or New York Town if they think there's any chance of catching us. They don't know the meaning of mercy or pity." He paused. then continued: "If you'd rather not risk it, say so, and I won't make the attempt. If you prefer captivity somewhere in New France to possible death, tell me now."

"You're going to take me back home to Papa, Jeffrey." There was no fear in her voice.

"One thing I haven't told you, Leah. If it appears certain that they'll capture us, I—I'll kill you with my own hands first. It will be easier for you that way."

There was a long silence, and they could almost hear the beating of each other's hearts. Jeffrey waited for Leah to speak and grew angry with himself. Maybe he shouldn't have told her his intention in the event that recapture seemed imminent. He had scared her, and she was going to tell him she preferred the humiliation and dangers of captivity. He was totally unprepared for her next remark.

"You love me very much, don't you, Jeffrey." It was a statement, not a question.

"Yes, Leah. Very much." There was suddenly no need for sham, for hiding his love. She had guessed the secret which he had denied for so long.

How she knew was unimportant. Maybe he had let a word, a phrase slip out unguarded. It didn't matter. If he brought her back to the coast settlements she would again be a young lady of consequence, while he would once more slip into the shackles of a bondsman. But that was inconsequential too. There was no longer any reason for concealment. Hadn't Leah told him that she had never loved Simon? Even the memory of his comrade no longer blocked his declaration.

He would have regretted his frankness if Leah had laughed at him, but she wasn't laughing. He was accustomed to the darkness now, and her face through the wooden bars was plainly visible. He understood at long last why Leah wasn't mocking him. The promise in her eyes told him more than words.

The barrier that had separated them for so long was gone, and the framework of oak and leather thongs that now held them apart was as nothing. Leah's lips moved, and her whisper was so light that he pressed against the bars to hear her.

"I thought you hated me, Jeffrey. I was sure you hated me. You had every right to despise me. Papa said I treated you shamefully—and I did. I'm not sure you can believe this—I'm not sure I understand it myself. But—I—I treated you as I did—because I"—her voice gained sudden strength—"I love you too. It took me a long time to see it. But I do love you, Jeffrey."

He asked the question that men and women in love have asked since time immemorial: "When did you first know?"

"From the very time I came home and met you. But I kept denying it. I knew when you fought Simon on the parade ground. I knew that day—that day at the sawmill, after Benjie's and Matilda's wedding. I knew when you and Simon left Schenectady. But I wouldn't admit it to myself until they told me you were too long overdue—and dead."

"I've loved you from the very first too," he said. "But I was your father's bondsman, and I was—proud. Since then I've learned to be humble."

Jeffrey's hand and arm slipped through the bars of the enclosure, and Leah pressed toward him. She was laughing and crying, and so great was his joy that her next words were all but lost on him.

"When we get back home Papa will cancel your bond, Jeffrey. He'll be so grateful to you for bringing me back that I'm sure we'll have no trouble. And even if he didn't, I'd marry you, anyway, and be a bondsman's wife. You see, I've learned to be humble too."

"You're very sure we'll make our way back to Schenectady, aren't you, Leah?" he asked gently.

"Yes, Jeffrey. You won't fail."

"I'll take care of you, Leah. No matter what dark days are ahead, no matter how hopeless our situation may seem, I'll take care of you," he promised.

Leah raised her soft lips for his kiss, and he bent his head, then checked himself abruptly. His Seneca-trained ears caught the distant sound of footsteps and the faint mumble of voices.

"It must be time for the guard to change," he muttered. "The hour has gone faster than I realized."

"What shall we do, Jeffrey?" Leah was unflustered and unafraid. The assurance of his love gave her renewed courage.

"Go back to the center of the stockade and pretend you're asleep," he whispered as the first lighted flare came into view near the cage of the male prisoners. "The new guards will make a quick check, and then they'll relax. As soon as they're paying no more attention to you come back to this same place. I'll go away now—it's too risky to wait here—but I'll be back as soon as the guards' backs are turned."

"All right, Jeffrey—Jeffrey darling," she murmured. "I understand."

"Take no chances, Leah. I love you."

He drew away into the darkness, and Leah hurried toward the center of the pen, where the other women were sleeping fitfully. When the silhouette of her figure merged with the night he took a deep breath. He would hide as close to the stockade as he dared, and when the new guards rested he would come back for Leah.

He moved toward the protecting shadow of the trees, then stopped. He wasn't alone; someone moved at his side. His right hand crept toward the knife nestling in his belt. A firm, soft voice cut through the night.

"Wasizo has nothing to fear," Adiawando said. "But it is late. Wasizo is tired. Adiawando is tired. We will go home," Adiawando said.

Chapter Twelve

SHADOWS HID Adiawando's face as she and Jeffrey walked silently toward their house. It was imperative to learn how much of his conversation with Leah she had overheard. He opened his mouth to speak, then clamped his jaws together again. Better let the first move come from Adiawando.

Seemingly unhurried, the long-legged Indian girl strode into the hut and pretended to be unaware of the man who followed her. As she crossed the room to the ornate chest in which she kept her personal belongings Jeffrey tossed his weapons into a corner, sat down on the low broad stool in the middle of the room, and crossed his legs under him. He smiled ironically—had he become so much of an Indian now that he indulged in their habits automatically, even in times of stress?

He looked up at Adiawando, and the slight smile froze on his lips. In her firm right hand something silver glinted: one of her brace of slim French dueling pistols. And it was pointed straight at Jeffrey.

Adiawando lowered herself gracefully to a sitting position on the bed, the pistol never wavering. Her face, her eyes showed nothing, but her usually full, rich red lips were compressed. She was silent, and Jeffrey, too, was still. A year ago he would have unleashed a torrent of words. But he knew the Indians and their ways now. There would be time for explanations eventually, provided he was to be given a chance to explain. . . .

Through the long hours of the night the two immobile figures faced each other. The muscles of Jeffrey's legs ached, and a stabbing pain tore up and down his rigid spine, but he dared not move. He knew now that he was engaged in a contest of wills, and his only hope of preventing Leah's torture and death was to outwait Adiawando. He gave no thought to his own danger; the sudden appearance of Leah and their mutual declaration of love had jolted everything into its proper perspective, and his own life didn't matter.

As the first gray streaks of dawn filtered into the room Adiawando at last spoke. Significantly she addressed Jeffrey in the formal Seneca tongue.

"Wasizo has become a brother in blood of the hawk. But when he spoke to the pale yeon of the golden hair"—Adiawando's voice grew bitter with sarcasm—"Wasizo became once again the honio'o. His face was like that of the yeon—the weak woman, not of the hawk."

So. Adiawando had seen him talking to Leah. She had been close enough to read his face, and she was jealous. But apparently she hadn't heard what he and Leah had said to each other. Or had she?

"Adiawando and Wasizo have shared a bed as man and woman. They have made *gaknowe'haat* together."

Jeffrey drew a deep breath. He looked directly at Adiawando, and a wave of compassion for this proud and lovely savage passed over him. To learn that your loved one prefers someone else is as difficult for an Indian to bear as for a white, Jeffrey thought.

"Adiawando, you have my deepest thanks—*giawe'n*—for all your kindness to me," he said carefully. "But many moons before I journeyed to the dwelling place of the Seneca I had given my love to the pale yeon."

This was the moment of decision: either Adiawando would submit to his declaration of love for Leah with grace, or she would have Leah dragged from the prisoners' pen, stripped, and lashed to a stout tree. Then . . .

Adiawando spoke suddenly, and there was a gleam of malicious amusement in her eyes. "If Wasizo prefers the pale yeon to one who is descended from the hawks, one who is Honoye, he may go." She averted her gaze and seemed to lose all interest in Jeffrey. The pistol dropped to the bed beside her in a gesture of dismissal.

Jeffrey arose, stretched his cramped muscles, and moved slowly to the doorway, walking out without a backward glance. He forced himself to saunter toward the prisoners' stockade. If he ran a score of Senecas would appear from nowhere and race with him. The hot June sun had risen, and its rays were penetrating, but Jeffrey felt a sharp chill pass through him as he remembered Adiawando's look of wicked glee.

As he approached the stockade his pace unconsciously quickened. Then he stopped abruptly. The prisoners' pens were deserted; there was no sign of life inside the latticework of stri- ling poles. For a fleeting instant he thought Leah and her companions had all been murdered, but common sense took

possession of him, and he told himself that if they had been killed he would have heard the screams of the victims.

An old Seneca drowsed in the dust, using the corner of the stockade as a support for his flabby back. Jeffrey walked over to the man and shook him. The old Indian spoke without opening his eyes.

"Who disturbs the slumber of Sedwagoneke?"

With a supreme effort Jeffrey controlled his voice. "The young braves desire to make sport with the yeon captives, O Father," he said.

The old Seneca's paunchy belly shook with silent mirth. "The Honoye Paugus knew this," he replied, "and so the captives were removed at the full of the moon."

"Where has the Honoye Paugus taken them?" Jeffrey asked, his voice shaking.

The old man opened his eyes, blinked, then settled himself more comfortably on the ground. "The captives are gone to the Great Nest of the Good Friend." The old man closed his eyes and in a moment was once more asleep.

Jeffrey digested the information. The captives had been taken at the full of the moon—at midnight. In other words, the voices which had interrupted his talk with Leah had been those of Captain Jouvet and his companions, coming to take their prisoners away before the Senecas had time to develop other ideas about them. "The Good Friend" was France, and "The Great Nest"—no. Impossible that Leah was being transported all the way across the ocean to Paris. The Great Nest . . . Jeffrey's mind cleared, and he realized that Leah was en route to the French colonial capital, Port Royal. Of course. It all fitted in with Captain Jouvet's informative speech yesterday.

And Adiawando had known it all along. While she had held him at pistol point precious hours had flown, and Leah and her captors were many miles from the Seneca village by now—so far that he would never be able to catch up with them.

Jeffrey turned abruptly and started for the hut. Adiawando had deliberately tricked him. Yes, by thunder, she had known all night that the prisoners were gone, but she had let him stew and worry and had ruined his chances of saving Leah. And he had been feeling sorry for the brown-skinned bitch!

Adiawando was still sitting on the bed when Jeffrey raced into the room. She was evidently expecting an outburst, for she sat with her face averted, her eyes fastened on the floor. Jeffrey

crossed to her side in a single bound, raised his hand, and slapped her full in the face with all his strength.

Tears sprang into the Indian girl's eyes, but she neither cried out nor flinched. She looked up slowly at Jeffrey and made no attempt now to hold back the tears or to control the heavy breathing which tightened her bright breastband.

"Adiawando deserve to die," she said simply, speaking in English.

Jeffrey was in control of himself again. "Your death wouldn't save Leah, the pale yeon, from the tortures she's going to suffer."

"Torture? French brave not torture."

"Not in your sense of the word, maybe. But they'll force her into prostitution—abuse her—God knows what!"

Adiawando timidly lifted a hand and placed it on Jeffrey's arm. The pleading look in her deep brown eyes was too much for him, and he turned his head away. But he couldn't shut out the sound of her voice begging him to understand.

"Adiawando love Wasizo. If pale yeon not here—Wasizo come back to——" Her voice broke, and she made a desperate effort to compose herself. When she spoke again she slipped into the Seneca language without realizing it. "The female hawk makes her nest soft, but the great male bird flies away," she said. "Adiawando knows now that she has made a great wrong. Wasizo has no wish to make gaknowe'haat with Adiawando again. It is written in the eyes of the young hawk for Adiawando to see. The hawk seeks a new nest."

Adiawando rose slowly to her feet and with an unconscious gesture smoothed the short leather skirt that covered her supple, straight legs. There was a new authority and a tone of decision in her voice now. "Wasizo will paint his body for the feast of the Nia'gwahe. When the gleaming sun is swallowed by the great earth Adiawando will return."

Her skirt flashing, Adiawando sped from the room, and Jeffrey stared after her, then turned and walked slowly toward the pots of war paint and jars of brown skin dye which stood in the corner.

If his guess was right, Adiawando was going to help him escape. Ironic that only through Leah's captivity could he gain his own freedom. Well, if he managed to get away from this stench-ridden town of savages he would make Port Royal too hot for the French to keep Leah there. The bizarre events of the last day and night had at least cleared his brain. He knew now—and forever—that he and Leah belonged to each other.

His Indian toilet finally completed, Jeffrey moved to the highly polished brass kettle which Adiawando used as a mirror. He looked at his image critically. How would his father react to this painted savage? He knew only too well what Nathaniel Hill and Benjie would do—they'd take a quick sight and shoot for all they were worth.

There was a light sound at the door, and Jeffrey wheeled around. Adiawando entered quickly, her arms full of bulky objects. He hurried to her side and took a heavy food pouch, a long English rifle—obviously stolen—a full horn of powder, and a new razor-sharp hatchet from her. Silently he tucked the hatchet into his belt, then slung the food bag and horn over his shoulder.

Adiawando circled him slowly. She muttered under her breath, picked up one of the paint jars, and added several dabs to his left shoulder. As she leaned forward to inspect her work her face was only a few inches from Jeffrey's, and he knew she was begging for a last gesture of consideration.

For the last time he swept her into his arms, and her soft lips clung to his. How long they stood this way, their bodies locked together, Jeffrey didn't know. He tried to step back, but Adiawando continued to clutch him to her with the frenzied desperation of ultimate parting. Then all at once her arms fell to her sides and she bowed her head.

"The great earth has taken the sun from us," she said. "Wasizo will go now."

Jeffrey hesitated for a second. "What will happen to you, Adiawando, when they discover you've helped me escape?"

The sleek black head drew back proudly. "None will harm Adiawando. Honoye."

She was right, Jeffrey reflected. Paugus's sister was of the first nobility, hence above punishment. He didn't trust himself to speak, and nodded in agreement. Adiawando's eyes were expressionless as she beckoned to Jeffrey to follow her.

Drums were pounding rhythmically in the lodge at the opposite side of the compound. Family groups and young braves in twos and threes were drifting toward the big building. Now Jeffrey understood why Adiawando had chosen this particular time for his escape. The entire community, except for the sentries, would be gathered at the lodge to hear an exhortation from Paugus. No one would miss the princess or her consort.

But there were still the sentries. How would Jeffrey be passed through their lines? He refused to speculate and knew that Adiawando must have her plans fully made. The girl inclined her

head to the east, and Jeffrey instantly moved in that direction, Adiawando falling in behind him and staying close on his heels, in the approved style for a brave and his wife. Jeffrey's fingers closed tightly on the rifle. This was a magnificent thing Adiawando was doing for him. She and her people had been trained for self-sacrifice, and this was the final, the complete gesture of sacrifice.

On silent feet they crossed the now empty square and were lost in the thickets beyond. Jeffrey made no sound as he moved through the brush, and only Adiawando's gentle breathing told him that she was still behind him.

After what seemed like many minutes they came to the boundary of the Seneca village. Jeffrey's every nerve was alert; if need be, he would kill a sentry or two. But there were no sentries to be seen. How Adiawando had managed to get rid of them, he didn't know—he would never know.

A few feet ahead, a path discernible to none but Indian-trained eyes twisted through the trees. Adiawando pointed to it, then stopped and stood motionless. She would go no farther.

Jeffrey opened his mouth to speak, but her fingers touched his lips, and he said nothing. Instead, Adiawando began to talk, addressing an imaginary point above his head.

She spoke in a lilting cadence that no white person could ever hope to reproduce. There was no strain, no sense of loss in her voice, for she had fought her battle with herself and had won.

"Gwa, gwa, gwa!
So now this is the appointed time!
Oh, listen, you who dwell in the sky!
You behold the place that once was filled but now is empty.
I am unable to change it, for you make the law.
Oh you who dwell in the sky,
Yet were born of Earth—
Though I am barren
May you continue to rule me.
So now this thing ends,
As you do listen!
Oh you who dwell in the sky!
Oh you who were born of Earth!"

Adiawando finished speaking and stood frozen. There was nothing Jeffrey could say, nothing he was expected to say. He turned and started off through the trees. He looked back once over his shoulder and saw Adiawando still standing there, her proud,

chiseled face and tall, fine body as immobile as death. He knew this picture of her would remain with him to the end of his days. . . .

As he pushed deeper into the darkening forest a realization—and an exultation—grew in Jeffrey. He was free! Free. free! Free to live again as a white man! Free to fight his way to Port Royal and Leah.

Chapter Thirteen

FOR THOSE who know how to use it, the early morning sun is an accurate compass, and Jeffrey was wise in the ways of the trail. Traveling north and east, he found the Mohawk River on the morning of his fourth day out of the Seneca village, and he greeted it like an old friend. By the next afternoon familiar landmarks took shape, and he realized he was only a few hours from the Hill farm.

Since bidding farewell to Adiawando he had moved with sure, Seneca-acquired speed and skill through the vast forests. Now for the first time he discarded caution and walked quickly along the riverbank, not caring whether Paugus had sent men to pick up his trail. Nathaniel Hill's farm was the one place in this huge land he could call home, and although he intended to stay only long enough to tell Nathaniel what had happened to Leah, his pace increased.

If the expedition against Port Royal had already left, he would catch up en route. Or if the army was being transported by sea, he was prepared to make his way north alone on his own feet. Nothing was going to stop him from finding Leah.

But Leah was not the sole cause of his determination to be a part of the ambitious expedition to the Bay of Fundy. Paugus was joining the French for the defense of the town, and Jeffrey had a rendezvous with Paugus. There had been plenty of time to think these past few days, and after reviewing his experiences of a year's captivity Jeffrey was cold-bloodedly resolved to kill Paugus. The Indian chieftain's death in itself would not satisfy him; the killing must be accomplished by no one but himself.

Only one other person had ever caused Jeffrey to thirst for such a terrible revenge. That man was in England, and in time he would meet an abrupt end too. But he could wait. Paugus came first.

Musing, Jeffrey turned a slight bend in the river and then stopped. He had been so busy thinking of the future he had

almost forgotten the present. The Hill property was straight ahead. He could see the red shingles of the sawmill roof through a break in the trees. and he breathed deeply. He had dreamed and planned for this moment so many long hours that he could scarcely believe he was actually here.

A thick curl of heavy black smoke plumed abruptly into the air, and Jeffrey broke into a run and seconds later found himself in the courtyard of the Hill property. A fire was raging in the barn, and a swift glance told him the building would soon be reduced to cinders.

There had been an Indian raid! Nothing else could cause a fire of this sort, for he saw flames rage with equal intensity at all four corners of the barn and knew at once that it was no accidental blaze. Hastily he ran back into the woods. then circled the edge of the open area cautiously. It didn't take long to find what he was seeking. and he dropped to his knees to examine fresh tracks in the tall grass. There had been three raiders here, and they had fled in the very direction from which Jeffrey had just come. If he hadn't been daydreaming of vengeance he would have seen the savages who had perpetrated the crime.

Reasonably certain that the raiders had gone. he moved back into the clearing. There was no sound but the crackling of flames as the barn burned and crumbled. The house was still standing, Jeffrey noticed. and so was the sawmill. The savages must have been frightened off before they could complete their usual job of total destruction.

In the shadow of a large elm tree near the house itself he saw a mass of crimson and black lying very quietly on the ground. and his heart became a hard lump in his throat. He hurried across the courtyard. and his fears were confirmed. Nathaniel Hill lay dead of half a dozen rifle wounds. He had been scalped, and the skin and muscles of his cheeks and jaw sagged listlessly.

Jeffrey bent down and closed Nathaniel's eyes gently. The tragedy had been so shockingly unexpected that his brain wasn't functioning, but a sudden movement behind him recalled him to his senses. In a single bound he was on his feet, and his hand reached for the Seneca ax at his belt.

He turned and found himself looking into the open end of a flintlock. Holding it was Matilda Zimmerman Brown. and although the barrel of the gun wavered slightly. she was going to shoot.

In no time at all Jeffrey found his voice. " 'Til!" he shouted. "Put down that gun!"

Matilda staggered back, and the flintlock fell to the ground.

She would have fallen in a faint, but Jeffrey leaped forward and steadied her with strong hands.

The girl was certain now that she was going to faint. Not only had the savage called her by name and spoken to her in English, but now he was holding her in his arms. He was speaking again, and she fought down the panic of her terror and forced herself to listen.

" 'Til, you know me, don't you? Surely you haven't forgotten Jeffrey Wyatt in a year."

She stared at him for a long, incredulous moment, then broke into hysterical laughter. Jeffrey stood by helplessly and let her laugh. In all his Seneca training he had been given no instructions in controlling feminine hysteria.

After a while Matilda became quiet. She wiped her eyes, then struggled successfully against a new wave of wild cackles and tears. "Jeffie," she said. "Jeffie, I thought you was one of *them*."

Questioning her gently, Jeffrey learned that Nathaniel had been caught, alone and unarmed, as he had stepped out of the house. Apparently the Indians had been lying in wait for him. Matilda had been down at the river doing the week's washing, but as her baby was due in less than two months, she had felt tired and had sat under a tree to rest.

She must have fallen asleep, for the next thing she knew, the sound of rifleshots had startled her. Jumping to her feet, she had heard Nathaniel Hill cry, "May God have mercy on your souls." Those were his last words.

Creeping toward the house, Matilda had seen one of the Indians scalp Nathaniel while his two companions set fire to the barn. Matilda had hurried to the sawmill, picked up the flintlock that was always kept there, and, racing back toward the barn, had closed her eyes and fired.

The next thing she knew, the Indians were gone. Obviously they had thought they were ambushed and had run off. Matilda had barely collected her jarred and frightened wits when she had seen still another savage appear. She had watched him run back into the forest, but when he had come forward a second time and stood over the fallen body of her master she had vowed to take his life if she had to pay for it with her own.

Jeffrey led the girl away from the body of Nathaniel and cursed himself for failing to hear the gunshots. He must have been day-dreaming, indeed. Squatting Seneca-like on the front stoop of the house, he quieted Matilda, then told her in sharp, concise

phrases of his past year's experience and of finding Leah. Matilda's pale blue eyes were the size of Dutch saucers as she listened in rapt silence. When he said he was on his way to join the army she found her voice once more.

"They prob'ly sailed by now, Jeffie. Benjie has been gone for days. And his'n was the last platoon to go."

Jeffrey's heart sank. "They're *sailing* against Port Royal, then?"

"Yes, Jeffie. There's an admiral come from London with hundreds of big ships. And a general with his whole army. They're all sailin', and Benjie says with what he knows about ships, maybe they'll let him be a sailor again. He hates marchin' around somethin' awful." She smiled shyly, still unable to reconcile this fierce, paint-daubed Seneca with the Jeffrey she knew.

He leaned forward and gripped Matilda's arm tightly, his eyes glittering so intensely that she fell back in alarm. "How soon can you be ready to leave here, 'Til? I'm taking you to Fort Albany, and you'll stay there until Benjie comes home from the war."

"But, Jeffie—I can't——"

"One thing you can't do, and that's stay here alone, now that Nat Hill is—gone." The framework of the barn crashed to the earth, and a shower of hot sparks gave emphasis to his words.

"Well, maybe you're right. But I could make do—if it wasn't for the baby comin'."

"How soon can you be ready?" He was in no mood to debate the fine points of bravery with a stubborn frontierswoman.

"Day after tomorrow, I reckon. A bit sooner—if I hurry."

Jeffrey's answering look was so intense that she shrank from him again. "I'm burying Nat Hill and closing up the house," he said. "That'll take an hour—two at the most. Be ready by then. You'll be bedded down at Fort Albany by tonight."

"Jeffie," she pleaded, "if you be in such an almighty hurry, why don't you go ahead by yourself—and I'll just mosey over to Schenectady when I'm good and ready."

He was adamant and shook his head impatiently. "Schenectady is too close to the frontier. When I see Benjie I expect to tell him I left you in safe hands. Now do as I say, 'Til! I have no time to waste."

Matilda arose with all the dignity she could muster and gathered her skirts about her. "A body'd think you was the new master here, Jeff Wyatt," she murmured. "With poor Mr. Hill dead, we're all free of our indenture anyways, so I don't have to obey nobody's orders!"

Jeffrey decided to try a different tack. You could never force

these independent people who lived on the edge of the wilderness to do anything, and the more you pushed them, the more stubborn they became.

"We are *not* free," he said succinctly. "Our bondage contracts pass to Leah as her father's heiress. Now, please—be a good girl, 'Til. Every minute we stand here is time I should be spending on the road to Boston—to help Leah."

"Whyn't you say so right off?" Matilda had found a graceful avenue of retreat but still insisted on the last word. "For *Mistress* Leah I'll do it. No other reason. And, Jeffie, it seems to me you're bein' *mighty* free, callin' her by her Christian name—right out."

Jeffrey felt himself blushing and was glad of the stain on his cheeks. As the girl stood in the doorway she burst into a fit of nervous giggling, then called out to him:

"If *you* take *my* advice, Jeff Wyatt, you'll take a bath and put on decent folks' clothes. Or you'll be shot as dead as poor Mr. Hill afore you've rode a mile down the road."

There was a quick flash of skirts, and Matilda was gone. Her suggestion was sound, Jeffrey knew. One brief, startled look at his gold and vermilion war paint would be enough to set off a murderous charge from the muzzle of any rifle in the district.

He found a spade in the sawmill and set to work at once digging a grave at the back of the house. Perspiration rolled from him as he dug, and the thought raced around and around in his mind that he was burying the man who, under different conditions, might now have been his father-in-law.

In less than thirty years of existence Jeffrey had seen death many times without blanching, but after lowering Nathaniel into the shallow hole a queasy feeling gripped him. He filled in the grave hurriedly and at the last moment took two small twigs, tied them together in the shape of a cross, and stuck them into the ground at the head of the rude resting place. He murmured the Lord's Prayer and jumped to his feet. It seemed wrong to say good-by to Nathaniel with so little ceremony, but there was so much to do. There would be plenty of time for a funeral service later, when he brought Leah back here, he thought as he raced downhill to the Mohawk.

Stripping off his loincloth as he ran, he plunged into the river and, using scrub moss as a washcloth, rubbed himself vigorously. To his pleased surprise, the Seneca dye rolled off, and he realized that as the stuff had been applied almost six days ago, it would have peeled off in another twenty-four hours, even without a bath. It was a good thing he had made such fast time getting here, he

thought. He would have been a strange-looking Indian traveling white-skinned through the forest.

His hair was more difficult to clean than his body. The fish paste, charcoal, and dye clung to his scalp with maddening obstinacy. But his hearty scraping and scouring eventually won the victory over Seneca ingenuity, and although his head tingled as though he had been scalped, his own sandy hair was visible for the first time in months.

He gave no heed to modesty as he ran up to the house, clutching his Seneca weapons and loincloth in his wet hands. Banging open the door of the room which had been his for so long, he softened as he saw his clothes hanging neatly on pegs. Leah had kept the room in order for him. But there was no time for sentiment, and he flung shirts and leggings around wildly until he found his militia uniform. He tucked Seneca axes and knife into his belt, slung the powder horn over his shoulder, packed his knapsack, picked up his rifle, and walked down the stairs that led to Fort Albany and New France, to vengeance and Leah.

Everything in the compact living room reminded him of the mistress of the house, and his longing for her became so acute that he was about to bellow for Matilda to hurry, but he paused as something sparkled in the sunlight. He turned and saw Leah's silver trinket box reposing on the mantel over the fireplace. It was her proudest possession, and Jeffrey reflected that if the house was ransacked and burned while untenanted, Leah would have no memento to remind her of her father.

Acting on impulse, he scooped up the box, unbuckled his knapsack, and packed it away carefully, placing his spare shirt and socks inside. It was a sentimental gesture and probably a foolish one, he knew, for any man wanting to stay alive on a march of hundreds of miles should travel with as little cumbersome gear as possible. Foolish or not, he was taking it, and besides, he *was* making use of the box.

He heard Matilda clambering painfully down the stairs and reached her side just in time to take several cumbersome bundles from her. 'Til was going to a strange place and would bear her child there alone. Indeed, she might never see her husband again, and in a day or a month this house itself might be reduced to gutted ashes. He shouldered the heavy load without complaint, and they stepped together into the sunlight.

Matilda remembered to lock the front door with a heavy brass key, while Jeffrey rounded up the frightened horses which had bolted when the barn burned. Jeffrey used the mare as a pack

horse and pulled Matilda up beside him on the back of the stallion. She settled herself on the animal's bare back as comfortably as she could, and they started down the familiar path toward Fort Albany, almost twenty miles away. Neither of them looked back at the house standing lonely but firm, a last outpost on the far edge of civilized man's domain.

Major Christopher Stephens was an executive who functioned best in time of emergency, and these days he was operating with extraordinary efficiency. Half his garrison had gone off to Boston to join the growing expedition against the French, and he was harried by a flood of constant demands for the services of the remaining troops. No sooner would a platoon be dispatched to one corner of the district than a report of Indian massacres would be reported from another and even more remote sector. But if he was preoccupied or worried, he failed to show it as he cheerfully assigned Matilda quarters in a barracks converted into a dormitory for women whose husbands were risking their lives against the enemy.

And the incredulous grin which had appeared on his face when he had looked from his window and beheld the ghost of Ensign Jeffrey Wyatt was still there. He sat opposite Jeffrey in the comfortable living room of a district commander, and as he ate and listened to the story of the young officer's adventures the smile never left his mouth. He watched chunk after steaming chunk of roast beef, mutton, lamb, and cold pullet disappear down Jeffrey's throat. Young Wyatt had said he was starved for white man's food, and he was proving his contention without dispute.

The meal finished at last, Jeffrey leaned back in his chair, barely remembering in time the functions of that long-forgotten luxury, a napkin.

"I've brought my tale of woe up to the present, sir," he said. "And I've done more than enough prattling. So if you'll oblige me with the latest news of the war, I'll take my leave."

Major Stephens's eyes twinkled merrily. "Not so fast, my young friend. My orderly has baked some sweet tarts, and the war news will take me half the night to tell."

"I thank you all the same, Major, but I want to leave for Boston tonight."

"You're still an officer of militia under my jurisdiction, Mr. Wyatt," was the unexpectedly stern reply. "And, by God, I'll clap you in irons, if I must, to hold you here until morning. You're

not leaving this room before dawn. And you'll sleep for several hours between now and then."

The major relaxed and stretched his long legs. "I don't think I've congratulated you on the fine work you and Captain Willard did for us with the Onondagas. I arranged for a committee from the assembly to come up here from New York Town and watch the arrival of the first companies of Wexar's braves." He chuckled reminiscently. "They were so impressed they voted an annual payment of one hundred pounds to the Onondagas without discussion or argument. First time I've ever known a parliament to be so generous."

"It's good to know, sir, that Simon's death wasn't—pointless."

"It was anything but pointless. And the things you've suffered haven't been in vain either, Mr. Wyatt. We've used your name and Captain Willard's as a rallying cry to recruit men for the campaign."

Jeffrey leaned forward anxiously. "I'd like to know everything you can tell me about the operation, Major Stephens. And most of all—will I be able to join the army in time?"

"Yes, you'll be in time. Now—relax, Wyatt! You're making me as nervous as a drummer boy facing his first battle."

"Sorry, sir."

Major Stephens's orderly entered the room carrying a large tray of freshly baked cherry tarts, and the major winked at the man behind Jeffrey's back and waved the sweet dish toward his guest. Nothing was said until the soldier departed, closing the door behind him. Jeffrey knew it was impolite to reach for food before a senior officer had tasted it, but the major was showing no interest in the tarts. Hunger won over courtesy, and Jeffrey's fingers crept toward the plate as Major Stephens began to relate his authoritative version of the course of the war.

"The Massachusetters have been hopping mad ever since the raid and massacre at Deerfield in '04," he said. "They've wanted to form a punitive expedition against either Port Royal or Quebec —or both—ever since. Their governor, Dudley, is an idiot and an ass, so every attempt to raise an army was blocked. But there's a great man up in Boston—Isaac Addington, secretary of the Royal Council.

"Addington wrote to the governors of the other Colonies, Wyatt. He begged and pleaded and threatened, until one by one they all agreed to send men and money for a joint campaign."

Jeffrey's jaw dropped. "This is an expedition *officially* sponsored by more than one colony?" he asked incredulously.

Major Stephens looked very pleased. "Massachusetts, New York, Virginia," he said. "They were the first. Pennsylvania and Rhode Island and Jersey joined a bit later. Some have sent only a few token troops, but they've sent them. And of course Massachusetts, as the originator, will keep control of operations. Trust those Bostoners not to let anyone else handle their money."

"Yes, sir." The stinginess of the men of the New England Colonies was proverbial, and Jeffrey grinned appreciatively.

"Well," Major Stephens continued, "a letter was sent to London, asking for approval. And due to blind luck or Addington's genius, it arrived there just as Parliament was debating a message from Her Majesty which urged greater speed and vigor in the war on the French. The Commons began voting huge sums for the raising of new armies. And in the midst of the excitement some friends of Addington's slipped in a bill authorizing a full-scale expedition here.

"So, to be brief, Addington's scheme was approved. We were given a fleet of warships, commanded by Admiral Sir Hovenden Walker, and an army of Regulars under General John Nicholson."

Jeffrey whistled exuberantly. "An admiral—and a general," he cried. "So London has awakened at last! They know they have lives and property to defend over here, do they?"

A quizzical expression appeared in Major Stephens's eyes as he appraised the muscular young officer. "You sound like a born colonial, Mr. Wyatt," he said, then added dryly, "But wait until you've heard the rest—and you won't feel like cheering."

"The admiral wouldn't come over? Or the general?"

"Oh, they came. But there was nothing but trouble from the moment they landed at Boston. I forgot to mention that Massachusetts had proposed the name of a certain gentleman as commander in chief of *our* army—and the other governors agreed. Colonel Benjamin Church."

Jeffrey's spine tingled and he sat bolt upright. There wasn't a man in the New World—England, French, or Indian—who didn't respond with fervor, hatred, or fear to the name of Benjamin Church, the most celebrated commander the Colonies had ever produced. He had risen from the enlisted men's ranks in Massachusetts' war against King Philip more than a quarter of a century earlier, and his exploits in the fierce struggle against the French and Indians a decade ago were already legendary.

"I remember Colonel Church very well, sir," Jeffrey said eagerly. "He came to the treaty talks here in '02, and unless I'm

mistaken, it was in this very room that he created that big scandal."

"You have an excellent memory, Mr. Wyatt." The major laughed. "This was the room. And I was as close to Colonel Church as I am to you now, when the incident took place. Church was sitting in that chair drinking a glass of water—he never touches anything stronger. Two or three of the Indian chiefs had been promised a drink of rum and came wandering in.

"Paugus of the Senecas—your friend—was the first. Colonel Church took one long look at him, jumped to his feet, and said, 'I'll not stay in the same room with a bloody torturer and murderer.' "

"Didn't he know that Paugus understands English, Major?"

"Of course he knew it. But Colonel Church isn't the kind of a man who holds back his true feelings. I suspect he said it deliberately. And if I hadn't—ah—accidentally brushed against him and knocked his water tumbler from his hand, he might have thrown it into Paugus's face as he stalked out. As it was, the conference was almost ruined."

"And you say that the admiral and general from London had difficulties with Colonel Church when they landed in Boston?" Jeffrey gently brought Major Stephens back to the present. If Jeffrey let him begin telling anecdotes about the fabulous Church, he would still be sitting there well after dawn.

"Oh yes. Yes. Sorry I digressed." The merriment left the major's face, and he scowled deeply. "Admiral Walker was senior officer. It's not my place to criticize the Admiralty's choice of flag officers, you understand, but Walker *is* an ass."

"I've met the type."

"Well, in any case, the admiral insisted on an expedition by sea. He proposed sailing to Port Royal, blasting the town with cannon, then landing troops against the fort itself—from the open sea. A maneuver of that sort is impossible, of course. No commander can land his troops from small boats against a defended place. And Church told him so."

"And General Nicholson, being a Regular from London—and the admiral's junior—agreed with every word Sir Hovenden said, I presume."

"Mmmm. You do seem to know something of the inner workings of an English command, Mr. Wyatt."

Jeffrey's eyes dropped, and he studied his tightly folded hands carefully. "I beg your pardon for the interruption, Major," he said.

"Not at all. General Nicholson did agree with Sir Hovenden," Major Stephens replied. "Well, Colonel Church refused to ship his army by sea. He said the only way to attack Port Royal was to march on foot through Maine Province into Canada—and cross the peninsula of Acadia to Port Royal. And he wouldn't consider any other approach."

"You say he *refused* to go, Major?" Jeffrey gasped.

"There's only one more cherry tart on the plate, Mr. Wyatt. Eat it," Major Stephens drawled. "Yes, through a very fortunate omission in the royal orders for the expedition, there was no mention of Colonel Church or the colonial regiments to be found anywhere. And while that meant our troops couldn't draw on Sir Hovenden for food or ammunition or clothing, they couldn't be forced to obey him, either."

There was a long pause as the major waited for the information he had imparted to sink in. He was approaching the climax of his tale and, like every storyteller, he was savoring the moment.

"The expedition from London—more than five thousand men and sixty ships—sailed without Colonel Church," he said at last.

"Then I'm too late," Jeffrey cried in dismay.

"On the contrary, Mr. Wyatt. Be patient a trifle longer. You see, Admiral Walker made the greatest blunder in our history. He piled up his ships at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River in a fog, after sailing too far north. The French knew where he was and, as luck would have it, they had a regiment and several Indian companies nearby. As the English Regulars struggled ashore they were cut down. According to intelligence I received only a week ago, more than two thousand Englishmen died. It's a terrible catastrophe, and Admiral Walker will have to answer to the Commons when he returns to London, I'm sure."

"He escaped, then?" Jeffrey asked, trying to curb the anger which welled up in him at the thought of two thousand brave men dying unnecessarily.

"Yes. The flagship with the admiral and General Nicholson aboard pulled away from the reefs in time. I understand they've led what's left of the expedition back to England." There was a gleam of battle in Major Stephens's eyes as he hitched his chair forward. "Church has had an awful struggle for money, but apparently they've given it to him now, for he's scheduled to march from Boston on Monday."

"And it's now Tuesday night." Jeffrey began to squirm nervously.

"You'll be in Boston before he goes. I want you there alive, Mr.

Wyatt. You can be of value to Colonel Church. That's why I forbade you to leave here before dawn. Too many Indian raiders creep through almost to the town gates at night."

"I can take care of myself, sir," Jeffrey said grimly. "No Indians will keep me from Port Royal."

"I'm sure Colonel Church will appreciate your spirit. Now, if you'll forgive me, I want to write you a note of introduction to the colonel."

"That's very generous of you, sir." Jeffrey's heart pounded as he reflected that in a few hours he would be riding like the wind toward Boston.

Major Stephens must have read his thoughts, for the older man looked up from the desk where he had seated himself and remarked mildly, "Take no needless risks on the road, Mr. Wyatt. I can understand your anxiety to find Miss Hill—and to settle a score with your Seneca friends. But an extra half day won't hurt you—or the horse I'm giving you."

"I'll try my best not to be too impatient, Major." Jeffrey stood and looked out the window. It was raining gently, and pools of water formed in the black mud, then rolled gently downhill toward Hudson's River below. There was no sound in the room save the scratching of Major Stephens's quill pen. At last the letter was finished, and the major carefully folded it and sealed it with a blob of wax.

"Give this to no one but Colonel Church himself—or Lieutenant Colonel John Gorham, his chief of staff. If anything should happen to you en route, destroy the letter. There are too many impostors presenting credentials these days—spies, scoundrels, thieves, opportunists."

"I understand, sir. And thank——"

"One final word of advice, Mr. Wyatt, from a man old enough to be your father." If Major Stephens noticed the slow flush that crept up Jeffrey's face at the mention of the word "father" he gave no sign of it.

"In an army, nothing matters but the results achieved by the unit as a whole. The individual is unimportant. Remember that." He paused to give emphasis to his words. "If you don't, I dare say Colonel Church will remind you of it. And, Mr. Wyatt, you don't know the meaning of discipline—until you've tasted his. Colonel Church is a most unusual man."

Chapter Fourteen

CAMPFIRES BLAZED at a hundred points on Boston Common, and the odors of food drifted across the motley collection of tents, shelters, and lean-to structures that filled the area. Men in gaudy uniforms, men in patched, worn shirts and trousers, men naked to the waist, all strolled about, conversing with friends, trading bullet molds for long knives, signaling secretively to the trollops who, forbidden to enter the Common, loitered out of gun-butt reach of stiff-jawed sentries. Occasionally a violent but brief fist fight flared up over the respective merits of Connecticut stew and Virginia ham. Colonel Church's army was preparing for lunch.

In the southwest corner of the field eight guards in brown-green uniforms paraded up and down stiffly. They stood watch over a mammoth tent, at least three times the size of any other temporary structure on the Common. From its peak a flagpole was raised, and the banner of Her Majesty's Province of Massachusetts Bay flapped quietly in the late June breeze.

On closer inspection the tent was less impressive. Worn places and tears had been repaired with patches of unmatching colors and irregular shapes, and the whole of the tent was smeared with a resinous tree gum which kept it dry in the rain but made it appear dirty and neglected.

The inside of the tent presented an even less military appearance than the exterior. Three men of early middle age slouched in various stages of dejection and gloom on hard wooden chairs. Colonel Shadrack Walton, heavy-set and bald, picked his teeth with a twig. Colonel Kent Schuyler, blond and dapper in a uniform of gray, scarlet, and white, drew a circle in the dirt underfoot with his heel, then erased it in a small cloud of dust and drew another. Colonel Samuel Tyng, black-bearded, lean, and dour, sprawled uncomfortably, jerked himself into another position, sighed lugubriously, then shifted his long bulk again.

The sentries were under orders to admit no one. Colonel Church's regimental commanders were in conference.

"Why in hell is he doing it?" Colonel Walton's deep bass voice broke the silence. "We've already got our whaleboats and guns and munitions. Why antagonize Governor Dudley now? Of all times, why now, when we're scheduled to march day after tomorrow at dawn?"

"Money." Colonel Tyng groaned and tried still another position.

Colonel Schuyler flicked an invisible dust speck from his immaculate breeches. "Money," he echoed. "Begging your pardon, gentlemen, but its like your Massachusetts governor to withhold our cash allowance at the last minute."

Colonel Tyng gave up the struggle to achieve even a modest measure of comfort and sat upright. "We can do no more without official help," he said. "All three of us have spent every last copper we can afford to equip this expedition. Our savings are gone, and we've borrowed on our securities."

"But"—Colonel Walton's round face shone earnestly—"Ben Church has done more than any of us. He's mortgaged his farms, he's sold his cattle and livestock, he's——"

"Yes, he's ruined himself—and us—unless he convinces Governor Dudley that the men of this army expect to be paid salaries in silver and gold coins issued by Queen Anne." Colonel Schuyler's New York accent was clipped and suave. "Unless there's hard money—not promises—not a man will march a single mile toward Port Royal."

"None of us came into this venture for profit, gentlemen," Colonel Shadrack Walton protested. "I doubt if I'll ever see a farthing of what I've advanced. Neither will you. Nor will Ben Church. And I'll grant that we need cash moneys—now. But *why* did Church include in his list of demands to the governor all the things he's already received? All the things that the governor gave us long ago?"

A slow smile broke the gloom of Colonel Tyng's face. "Ben is smart," he said. "Smart enough to outfox any dozen Governor Dudleys who come dancing over from London and expect us to make a leg to them. When Dudley begins counting up the things he's already given us, the request for cash will look comparatively small. It's the only item we lack."

"Mr. Addington will throw the weight of his arguments on our side," Colonel Schuyler added hopefully. "He's always with us."

"Either Addington—or somebody—is doing a heap of talking at

the governor's house," Colonel Walton grumbled, taking a heavy gold watch from a fob pocket and looking at it intently. "Ben left here near four hours ago. Kent," he added suddenly, "let me look at your copy of Ben's official letter to the governor, will you? I left mine in my room at the tavern."

Colonel Schuyler reached slowly into an inner coat pocket and withdrew a long strip of paper carefully folded. With a sudden snap of an elegant wrist he shook the document open and handed it to his fellow officer. Colonel Walton perched a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles on his chubby nose, and although he knew the contents of the letter* thoroughly, he carefully studied every word, every nuance. Shadrack Walton had not achieved a reputation as Massachusetts' shrewdest campaign planner without just cause.

His eyes moved slowly down the long list of demands. The governor had grudgingly granted each after a long argument. That is, he had agreed to all but the last and newest request, the outrageous effrontery of which amazed Church's commanders. Colonel Walton read it aloud.

"'Fifteenthly. That there be suitable quantities of negotiable coin provided in advance, that so each officer and gentleman may be paid at the rate of one pound per month for ensigns, three pounds ten shillings per month for colonels, and ten shillings per month for ratings and enlisted men.'"

Colonel Walton shook his head. It was a masterful letter, and no one could deny it. Only Ben Church had the nerve to state baldly what he wanted from Governor Dudley. Others would have chosen an indirect method of securing scarce supplies from a native-born governor who was more English than anyone who had ever come over from London. Church had already won everything listed in his original demands. By enumerating them all over again he was subtly but definitely reminding the governor that he would refuse to take the field unless money was forthcoming. This was his established technique, and item by item he had refused to budge until he had received the needed supplies. An English-born governor might be bluffed, but Dudley had lived on both sides of the Atlantic and undoubtedly knew that the expedition was too far advanced to be called off now, even if no cash was advanced.

If that happened, the colonels would be forced to bully and cajole their men into fighting, threatening laggards, and promising double pay to all at the end of the campaign. Where the money

* See Appendix for text of Colonel Church's letter.

would be found, then, Colonel Walton had no idea, and his God-fearing New England temperament shrank from promises that could not be kept.

Colonel Tyng was saying something, and Shadrack Walton tore his mind from the latter.

"If Ben doesn't get back soon, I'll have to leave. There are two floggings in Colonel March's battalion at high noon, and I promised to be there."

"What's been happening this time—more blasphemy?" Colonel Walton asked. The regiments were plagued by the commander in chief's strict order that any man heard taking the Lord's name in vain was to receive ten stripes for each offense.

"I wish to God it was only a little cussing," said Colonel Tyng gloomily, unconsciously indulging in a little name-taking himself. "This is a conspiracy to desertion."

The other regimental commanders started apprehensively. Only the possibility of extermination by the enemy was a greater threat to an army than desertion, a pernicious disease which struck unexpectedly and spread like wild fire through the ranks, decimating platoons and even whole companies when it was not promptly and firmly handled.

"Does Colonel Church know of this?" Kent Schuyler's voice was grave.

"It was Ben who decided the punishment."

"How much?"

"Fifty lashes per man."

Colonel Walton whistled softly. "Those men won't be fit to march in less than two days, Sam," he said.

"They're being transferred to the transports. By the time we rendezvous at the St. John River they'll be healthy again." Colonel Tyng was about to elaborate, but the sharp slap-slap of sentries' muskets snapping to salute was heard outside, and a moment later Colonel Church bustled into the tent. His regimental commanders rose to their feet as one man, and all conversation ceased abruptly.

Benjamin Church was short, small-boned, and of medium build, but he gave the impression of tremendous physical energy and power. His uncommonly large head was responsible for the illusion, perhaps, for the first things one noticed were his tremendous and piercing pale eyes and his massive, rocklike jaw. He had been fighting Indians or Frenchmen or both for more than thirty years, and his face, lined and hard, bore permanent reminders of his never-ending warfare. A short, ugly scar disfigured his right

temple before hiding itself in gray, close-cropped hair. There were scars on his chin and neck, too, and the colonel's orderly swore that he had counted a dozen more on the commander's body.

Even when sitting perfectly still he seemed to be in constant motion. Certainly his eyes never stopped examining, probing, dissecting. He believed in no waste of time, motion, or speech; and while he could be kind and gentle to subordinates, he was ruthlessly harsh with blunderers, self-seeking opportunists, and cowards.

It was typical that Franklin, his orderly, scurried into the tent on the colonel's heels, carrying a steaming plate of food and a large pewter mug of cold milk. As Colonel Church sat on a barrel which had been made into a chair the orderly placed the food in front of him and scurried away.

For the first time the colonel seemed to become aware of his three principal subordinates, and as his quick eyes swept over the little group his stern features relaxed into a comfortable grin. They looked so alike, all three faces tensely reflecting the same unspoken thought.

"Sit down, gentlemen," he said pleasantly. "Can I persuade you to join me for lunch?"

"No, thank you, sir!" Three voices spoke simultaneously with a vehemence that showed painful familiarity with Colonel Church's table. He might confine himself to a diet of plain boiled beef or mutton, washed down with a glass of milk, but his colonels preferred food with a little more zest to it. Not many men lived the Spartan life which Benjamin Church prescribed for himself.

Without further ado the commander picked up a battered knife and fork and began to saw at a tough chunk of beef. Not until he had chewed long and thoroughly did he speak again. Meanwhile three pairs of eyes watched him anxiously. No one asked any unnecessary questions. The colonels had all served under him before.

"Be good enough, gentleman, to have ten men from each of your regiments report to my chief of staff within the hour," he said quietly. "I suggest you select men you can trust implicitly. Put an officer of no lesser rank than captain in command of each detachment."

As a New Yorker, Colonel Schuyler was to a degree less awed by the colonel in chief than his brother officers. At any rate, he

found his voice first. "For what purpose are these men to see Colonel Gorham, sir?" he asked.

"It will take easily that number of troops to carry sacks of currency from Governor Dudley's vaults to the Common," Colonel Church replied casually, then laughed aloud at the sensation his remark created.

"You got the money, Ben? All of it?" Colonel Walton knew he was shouting, but he didn't care.

Colonel Church selected another morsel of meat with deliberate care. "Have you ever known Dudley to refuse anything—when a gun is pointed at his head?"

Colonel Tyng blanched. "You didn't threaten him openly, Ben. Not Governor Dudley."

"A stubborn, stupid man is no less stubborn or stupid because he wears the sash of the governorship of Massachusetts Bay." Colonel Church's voice suddenly rasped in the tone of contempt he ordinarily reserved for Frenchmen. "I talked. Isaac Addington pleaded. The governor picked his teeth with that confounded little gold-and-diamond pick he brought back from London. After three hours I became a trifle impatient."

Colonel Walton was unable to control a chuckle. He knew of old what happened when Benjamin Church became "a trifle impatient."

"A ship is sailing for Plymouth within the week," Colonel Church continued, ignoring the interruption. "I told His Excellency I'd be on board her and that I'd spend the entire trip across the water preparing a speech I'd present to the Commons if he didn't give us the money to pay our troops. I'm afraid I upset him."

Colonel Schuyler shook his head in wonder and admiration. "I thought Governor Cornbury was an incredibly dull-witted man," he said. "But even Cornbury knows that non-members aren't permitted to address the House of Commons."

"Oh, Governor Dudley knows it now," Colonel Church said gently. "I took pains to inform him—after he signed this." He drew a small square of parchment from a pocket of his plain, severely tailored uniform and passed it to the eager Colonel Walton, who read aloud:

"Joseph Dudley, Esquire, Captain General and Governour in Chief, in and over Her Majesty's Province of the Massachusetts Bay, in New-england, in America, and Vice Admiral of the same,

"To Benjamin Church, Esq., Greeting.

"By virtue of the power and authority, in and by Her Majesty's

royal commission, to me granted, I do by these presents, reposing special trust and confidence in your loyalty, courage and good conduct, constitute and appoint you to be Colonel-in-chief of all the forces raised for Her Majesty's service, against the French and Indian enemy and rebels.

"I do agree in sum and in all parts to the requests made by you to Her Majesty through me.

"You are carefully and diligently to perform the duty of a Colonel-in-chief, by leading, ordering and exercising the regiments in arms under your command, both inferiour officers and soldiers; and to keep them in good order and discipline.

"Hereby commanding them to obey you as their Colonel-in-chief; and with them to do and execute all acts of hostility against the said enemy and rebels.

"Given under my hand and seal at arms, at Boston, the 30th day of June, in the sixth year of Her Majesty's reign. Anno Dom. 1707.

J. DUDLEY

BY HIS EXCELLENCY'S COMMAND.

ISAAC ADDINGTON, SECRETARY."

There was a moment of silence as Colonel Walton folded the parchment and handed it back to his superior. Colonel Church stuffed it into his pocket while continuing to eat his frugal lunch.

"You'll take note, gentlemen," he said softly, "that His Excellency took occasion to establish grounds for a claim against the royal treasury."

"Oh yes," Colonel Walton replied, laughing dryly. "He agrees 'in sum and in all parts to the requests made by you to *Her Majesty*.' Governor Dudley seems to have no treasury—no funds of his own, I take it."

"It don't much matter where the money comes from. Let Dudley and the Lords of the Exchequer fight it out," Colonel Tyng said grumpily. "We have the cash to pay our troops. Thank you, Ben. And—be careful. The governor will remember this."

Colonel Schuyler had been maintaining a thoughtful silence. "If Dudley is so free with Her Majesty's purse, it's too bad he couldn't see fit to make you a general, Ben," he said. "With three regiments under your command, you deserve a commission as major general."

New Yorkers were always rank-conscious, Colonel Church thought. But Schuyler meant well, and he didn't want to hurt the fellow's feelings. "I don't care what I'm commissioned," he said. "If we drive St. Castine out of Port Royal and take the town, they can hand me a warrant as a lance corporal and I'll be happy."

There was no opportunity for further conversation, for Lieutenant Colonel John Gorham burst into the tent. He was a younger version of his commander, and there were those who spitefully claimed that Gorham spent hours before his mirror imitating the gestures and voice of the man he served with such enthusiastic loyalty. Colonel Gorham stepped smartly to a place directly before the commander and saluted.

"Forgive the intrusion, sir," he said crisply, "but there's a young officer here from New York. Wants to volunteer his services."

Colonel Church made no attempt to hide his annoyance at the interruption. "Send him to the adjutant," he snapped. "That's what he's for. I can't be bothered with every young blade who thinks he's going to be a hero. Let the adjutant swear him in. Then assign him somewhere."

Gorham bit his lower lip and waited for the colonel in chief to finish. "This man is no ordinary volunteer, sir," he replied carefully. "I have a letter of introduction to you, written by Major Stephens at Fort Albany."

"Mmm." Colonel Church took the document from his chief of staff's hand and glanced through it rapidly. "Mmm," he repeated, and read the letter a second time, more slowly.

The regimental commanders eyed each other covertly. Gorham, they knew, would never bring any young officer to the commander's personal attention unless the man was someone unusual. And Colonel Church would never spend this much time studying a letter of introduction without ample reason. He finished reading and tapped the letter thoughtfully on the rough wooden desk before him.

"Colonel Schuyler!"

The New Yorker straightened at the commander's military tone. The old man (he was ten years Schuyler's senior) was all business now. There was only one reply possible. "Yes, sir?"

"What were the names of the two young militiamen who were killed by Senecas? The ones you people used to drum out recruits."

"Captain Willard and Ensign Wyatt, sir."

"Mmm. Gentlemen, Ensign Wyatt is outside my tent. He's spent a year with the Senecas as their prisoner, and he wants revenge. I understand that he has personal reasons for wanting to see the inside of Port Royal too." He glanced briefly at the letter again and smiled. It was a strange secret little smile which died quickly as his eyes shot from one regimental commander to another. Each of them would gladly exchange three experi-

enced officers for a man who had experience with the Senecas, and he knew it. He thought rapidly and came to a decision.

"Colonel Tyng, I shall assign Mr. Wyatt to your regiment. Lieutenant Colonel Evelyn March's battalion."

'Thank you, sir. Did I hear you say he has some knowledge of military affairs?"

"You didn't hear me say. But he has. Stephens at Albany claims that this man is the best young militia officer he's ever seen."

Colonel Schuyler was about to protest. An officer from the colony of New York belonged, by rights, in his regiment. Besides, he had fewer trained officers than either of the other group leaders, for New Yorkers had seen less organized fighting in recent years than the men from Massachusetts. But he decided to keep his mouth shut. When the colonel in chief clamped his jaws together, he wasn't inviting discussion.

There was a brief silence, and Colonel Tyng cleared his throat. "If he's that good, sir, maybe we could put him with my boy. Young Sam will be a fine soldier, but he don't know too much about war yet."

The commander nodded his head in curt agreement. "Had the same idea," he said. "I'll see the officer, then assign him to you. He'll bring a written order with him if I can stir my adjutant from his lunch." He stood up briskly. "That will be all now, gentlemen. Pay-roll guards to Colonel Gorham in an hour. Thank you."

As he rose to his feet the regimental chiefs jumped up too. Theirs might be a ragged little colonial army, but full military courtesies were performed, particularly in front of Colonel Church. Colonel Gorham was already flying from the tent to escort the newcomer into the presence of the commander as the three ranking officers saluted and departed hastily.

They almost collided with the tall figure walking with quick steps toward them, and although they could see he was eagerly awaiting his coming interview, they were pleasantly surprised when he stopped short, saluted smartly, and made room for them to pass. Here was a truly unusual soldier. Colonel Tyng smiled as he watched the young man enter the tent. He was getting a fine officer, and he saw no reason why he shouldn't acknowledge the envious stares of the others. In fact, acquiring an experienced man for young Sam's company made him feel good. So good that he thought he might watch the flogging of the two would-be deserters without becoming sick to his stomach. Colonel Tyng was, despite his appearance, a tenderhearted man.

Chapter Fifteen

JEFFREY STOOD rigidly at salute, his back erect, his arm bent at the prescribed angle, the back of his straight fingers touching his forehead. He had held the position for thirty seconds or more while Colonel Church surveyed him keenly. Some colonial officers didn't bother to return a salute, Jeffrey knew, while others were too ignorant of military courtesy to understand that the junior must hold his position until the greeting was returned. But he was instinctively sure that Colonel Church was well aware of the rules set forth in the manual issued by King William and was testing him. He would wait all day if need be.

Colonel Church's hand flew to his brow sharply. Here was no token salute but a precise, well-executed movement which any drillmaster of the Highland Guards at St. James's Palace would approve. Jeffrey's hand whipped back to his side. The commander smiled at him.

"Stand at ease, Mr. Wyatt," he said, and extended his hand to the newest member of his command. "I see you've had training with the Regulars. Where, Mr. Wyatt—in London, or——"

"I am a member of the New York Militia, sir." It was bad to turn aside a friendly query when the questioner was the colonel in chief himself, but Jeffrey had never spoken of his life previous to his arrival in the New World, and he had no intention of beginning now. It was too bad, but there it was.

Fortunately Colonel Church wasn't offended. Many valuable men with pasts best forgotten poured into the Colonies every month. He waved his hand as if to brush his remark aside, and began afresh. "Sit down, Mr. Wyatt. I'm eager to learn if the things Major Stephens says about you are true."

Jeffrey sat down carefully on the edge of a hard chair. "The major didn't take me into his confidence when he wrote you, sir," he said, looking around for the first time. In spite of himself he was shocked at the plain sparseness of the tent. Even a junior lieutenant of the Coldstream Guards would furnish his

quarters more lavishly. And the colonel's green-brown uniform was of rough, stout material, suitable for field wear but hardly befitting the dignity of a man about to lead thousands of troops in a great campaign. Even his epaulets were of simple gilt, and Jeffrey smiled inwardly at the consternation which the lowest-ranking English officer would display at the mere thought of wearing anything less than pure-gold epaulets. But Colonel Church's pistols, he noted, were the finest money could buy, and his sword was no puny decoration but a tempered, businesslike blade which had doubtless seen hard service.

"You've had military training, Mr. Wyatt? I don't care where or under what circumstances." Colonel Church's eyes were like hard flints, and Jeffrey wondered if the man could read his mind.

"Yes, sir."

"Mmm. Stephens says you're fit for any command I care to give you. . . . How much do you know of Seneca methods of warfare, Mr. Wyatt?"

"Enough, sir. They can't fool me. I learned their tricks from the top masters, including Paugus himself. I know the Senecas, sir." There was quiet confidence in Jeffrey's voice, and Colonel Church's eyes began to soften. If there was anything he hated in an officer, it was the self-justifying pomposity of the semi-professional.

Church picked up Major Stephens's letter and deliberately held it before his face so Jeffrey couldn't see it. "Let's assume that the young lady you're seeking at Port Royal is going to arrive here in Boston today. Within the hour. Would you resign your commission?"

Jeffrey's answer was immediate and unhesitating. "I can imagine no circumstances that could or would dissuade me from joining this army, sir. And—if you'll permit me the liberty—I would like to volunteer my services as a private in the ranks, should you have no need for officers."

The letter was slapped to the desk, and Colonel Church bounded to his feet and grasped Jeffrey's shoulders with both hands. "You're my kind, Mr. Wyatt. Join me for lunch."

Jeffrey blinked in surprise. Colonel Church was supposedly a martinet, yet no English-born officer would ever be so friendly or free with a subordinate. After all his years in the Colonies, Jeffrey was still surprised by the open, sincere camaraderie between important men and their subordinates.

He collected his thoughts hastily. Colonel Church was waiting

for a reply. "I'm sorry, sir, but Colonel Gorham was good enough to give me something to eat while I waited for you."

"Mmm. Another time, then. You play chess, Mr. Wyatt?"

"Why, yes, sir. I do. How did you——"

"I can always tell a chess player when I see one. Well, I'll visit your position sometime when we're on the march, and we'll have a game. Colonel Gorham!"

Church leaned back and waited for his chief of staff to enter. Jeffrey's heart pounded and sang. The colonel in chief was accepting him. "I'll visit your position," he had said. Did that imply that a command of his own was in store for Jeffrey? Impossible. Even if the army were sorely in need of officers, a lowly ensign would never be given an independent command.

Lieutenant Colonel Gorham hurried into the tent, saluted as though he had not seen his commander previously that day, and quietly awaited orders. He looked only at Colonel Church, his glance never once straying toward Jeffrey.

"Gorham," said the grizzled old fighter slowly, "I want you to prepare a commission in my service for Mr. Jeffrey Wyatt. Like to serve with an Indian company, Wyatt? Indian scouts?"

"If you order me to, sir." Jeffrey's heart sank. He would be happy if he never lived near Indians again, but he could not argue with a commanding officer.

Colonel Church caught something in the younger man's tone, and a spark of humor appeared in his eyes. "Speak plainly, Mr. Wyatt. Would you *elect* to serve with an Indian company?"

"No, sir, I would not." Jeffrey guessed that was the wrong answer, but he couldn't lie politely to this man whose eyes drilled holes into one, not under any circumstances.

To his surprise Colonel Church's face broke into a mass of wrinkles that Jeffrey later learned to identify as a grin. "Gorham," he said to his still silent aide, "assign Mr. Wyatt to Colonel Tyng's regiment. Lieutenant Colonel Evelyn March's battalion. First Company of Scouts."

Colonel Gorham spoke for the first time. "In what capacity will Mr. Wyatt serve, sir? Or should that be left to the discretion of the company commander?"

"Mr. Wyatt *is* the company commander. Make out his commission in the rank of captain."

Jeffrey tried to keep his eyes and facial muscles blank and immobile, but the smiles of the two older men at his obvious, delighted surprise were too much for him, and for the first time since entering the tent he looked like a boy still in his twenties.

"Thank you very much, sir," he said with a depth of emotion that shook him. "The First Company of Scouts will not fail you."

"I'm sure of it, Mr.—Captain Wyatt." Colonel Church shook hands briefly, sat down, and was immediately immersed in a pile of papers. The interview was at an end. Jeffrey and the chief of staff saluted, and the commander responded precisely, though he was already shuffling papers with his free hand. Jeffrey wondered how the colonel in chief had seen the salutes. He would have sworn that Church's eyes were on the documents.

A quarter of an hour later Jeffrey sat in front of the modest tent which served as regimental headquarters for Colonel Tyng of the First Massachusetts. He found it difficult to concentrate on the business at hand, for a refrain swept through his head. "You're a captain. You have your own command. You're a captain. You have your own command," it sang.

But there was no time for adolescent pleasure, he reminded himself. Colonel Tyng's regiment was first in the line of battle, and Lieutenant Colonel March's battalion of five hundred trained, picked men would lead every assault. Jeffrey's company of tough scouts and experienced Indian fighters would be the eyes and ears of the battalion, of the regiment—indeed, of the whole army.

He would be flanked by two companies of Indian scouts, Colonels Tyng and March explained to him, but neither could be depended upon. In the event of an enemy attack in force, even the stanchest of Indian allies would melt away.

As Jeffrey listened carefully to the tight-lipped instructions of his immediate commanders he couldn't help wondering if all Massachusetters spoke in monosyllables by preference, or if it was a trait cultivated solely by the officer corps of Colonel Church's army. Then he was plunged into a sea of figures regarding barrels of powder, guns and shoes, salt pork and venison, and he thought no more of anything save the immediate affairs of his company. *His* company!

Colonel Tyng had given a low-spoken order to a sergeant when Jeffrey had first appeared, and he looked up now from sheets of parchment with evident relief. Squinting into the sunlight, Jeffrey followed his gaze and saw two men approach. In the weeks to come he was to become better acquainted with them than anyone he had ever known save Simon Willard and Benjie Brown.

One was without doubt the ugliest, roughest-looking man Jeffrey had ever seen. He might have been any age from thirty to fifty. Jeffrey was to learn that this was the notorious Daniel Young, convicted three times of murder, and three times

sentenced to die. He had twice escaped hanging by adroitly removing himself from the vicinity of his executioner. His third escape had been made with the connivance of Colonel Church, for Young had spent most of his life in the country through which the army was to travel, and he, more than any other single individual, bore the responsibility of guiding forty-five hundred fighting men to Port Royal. If he succeeded he would be given a pardon by the governor. Colonel Church had the official promise in writing. If Young failed—but no one had contemplated what would happen in the event of failure.

The other newcomer was youthful, roughly Jeffrey's own age, and even before introductions were made it was easy to recognize him as Colonel Tyng's son. He had the same lanky, hungry look that haunted his father's face, and he walked and moved with the same loose-jointed, ungainly grace. He wore the epaulet of a senior lieutenant on his right shoulder, and, contrary to regulations for scouting companies, his shirt was a bright blue.

Daniel Young brought one hand to his bare head in what was undoubtedly his idea of a salute. Jeffrey returned it smartly. Lieutenant Tyng apparently didn't believe in formalities and started forward, ready to shake the hand of his new commanding officer.

Jeffrey took a deep breath. The next ten seconds were going to be ticklish as the devil. The lives of thousands of men might depend on the discipline of his own company. To instill that discipline he had to begin now, despite the presence of Lieutenant Tyng's father.

"In my company we salute, Mr. Tyng," he said.

The young lieutenant stopped as though the flat of a saber had suddenly struck him across the chest. An instinctive desire to reply with a witticism died abruptly in his throat. Something he couldn't define in Captain Jeffrey Wyatt's eyes sobered him instantly. "Yes, sir," he said, standing at attention and saluting.

A change so abrupt came over Captain Wyatt that Sam Tyng, Jr., never forgot it. The captain grinned and held out his own hand. And as young Tyng grasped it he realized that here was a man who could be a friend. Only a few seconds ago he would have sworn that any friendship with such a stiff-necked disciplinarian would be impossible.

None of the men standing in front of the regimental tent was able to guess the infinity of Jeffrey's relief. Colonel Tyng smiled at the reprimand to his son, and his left eye dropped in the suggestion of a wink. Lieutenant Colonel March patted his new

scout captain on the back and thought—for the twentieth time in as many minutes—that maybe the colonel in chief wasn't a lunatic after all, placing an unknown officer in charge of the all-important scouts.

Jeffrey was ordered to report to Colonel March, in company with Dan Young, at eight the following morning for a detailed study and discussion of maps and terrain, and a few moments later he found himself moving toward the bivouac of his company with his first lieutenant. He was amused to see that the chastened officer was carefully walking on the captain's left, as military custom decreed.

"Isn't Dan Young coming with us, Sam?" In private conversation Jeffrey thought it wise to be on intimate terms with the man who would be responsible for carrying out his orders, and there was no time like the present to begin.

"Young is simply attached to the company, sir," the lieutenant explained. "He's free to go anywhere he likes—provided he doesn't leave the Common. My fath—Colonel Tyng is afraid he'll get into fresh trouble if he's allowed to roam the town. He's always around the company bivouac at mealtimes, sir."

"When we're alone, my name is Jeffrey. Jeff, if you prefer."

"Oh. Thanks—Jeff." Lieutenant Tyng looked sideways at the hardbitten man at his side, a brand-new captain's epaulet gleaming on his right shoulder. The lieutenant didn't know that his companion was trying very hard not to steal a quick glance at that epaulet himself, and the lieutenant had no notion whatsoever of how heavy it felt.

"Have the men plenty to eat? Enough variety of food?"

"Plenty. Lieutenant Dobie and I dug down into our own pockets for vittles they can cook here—before we break camp. The poor bastards will get nothing but salt meat and corn meal on the trail."

Jeffrey dug into his breeches and removed a handful of coins—half of his first month's pay, which Colonel Gorham had advanced him only thirty minutes before. "Here's a bit more. Buy as much as you can find with it, Sam."

As they strolled across the Common, Lieutenant Tyng became more talkative. He was happy beyond measure that a permanent company commander had been appointed, he said. He himself had been given the position temporarily, but when no one had appeared to take over the job he had become nervous. He didn't consider himself qualified for the post, as his experience was too limited. After all, he had served in the army only two years and

had faced enemy fire only in the disastrous foray at Casco. Of course, previous to the war, he had accompanied his father on long hunting trips into Maine for sport, but that meant little, he said. Listening, Jeffrey quietly thanked his stars. Despite the self-deprecations, he knew he had a veteran second-in-command upon whom he could rely.

Suddenly aware that he was talking too much about himself, Sam Tyng abruptly changed the subject and began speaking of lodgings for Jeffrey. Only the commander in chief and the enlisted men slept on the Common, he said. He himself had a room at the Dorsetshire Tavern, two squares distant, and he offered to conduct Jeffrey there later in the day. The temptation to sleep in a white man's bed equipped with a mattress, pillow, and sheets after a year of Indian discomforts was great, and the longing was emphasized by the pleasant jingling of silver in Jeffrey's pocket. It's for two nights only, he thought, and can't be too expensive. He succumbed without a struggle.

After they had walked almost the length of the Common, Jeffrey asked the best way to find his friend, Benjie Brown. Lieutenant Tyng scribbled the name on a dirty slip of paper and promised results within an hour, saying that by implying an interest on his father's part he could send every battalion adjutant in the army scurrying. Jeffrey laughed. It was against all regulations to use such means to secure information. but he knew it was the best way to locate Benjie. Only battalions and separate companies kept even the sketchiest records of their personnel, and at this late pre-departure hour no battalion commander could be bothered with searches for personal friends.

Lieutenant Tying slowed down and waved a bony arm. "There they be, Jeff. First Company of Scouts."

Jeffrey stared at the men grouped around two huge brass kettles, wolfing down food. He would have know they were scouts without being told. Unlike the rest of the army, they scorned shelters of any kind. The majority of the men wore fringed buckskin shirts and leggings, and Jeffrey was pleased to note that their uniforms were either butternut colored or Colonel Church's favorite shade of green-brown. No one knew the necessity for invisibility in the forests better than these men. They looked fit and rugged, and their familiarity with frontier fighting was indicated by their long rifles. The rest of the army carried cumbersome flintlocks.

Jeffrey put a detaining hand on Lieutenant Tyng's arm. "We'll

wait back here until they've eaten," he said. "No need to disturb their meal."

Sam Tyng had never heard of such consideration and was about to say so when two figures detached themselves from the group and hurried over. Both saluted, and Jeffrey met his two junior officers, Lieutenant Dobie from New Hampshire, and Ensign Morris of Pennsylvania. Each led a group of men whom he had recruited back home for this big adventure, and so each had been given a commission.

Jeffrey was slightly dismayed at Ensign Morris's youth and hoped his face didn't betray his concern. No officer that young, with such incredibly naïve eyes and ingenuous smile, could be much of an officer. Some relative must have bought his commission for him, and as the same patron had undoubtedly paid a band of frontiersmen to accompany the boy, he had been assigned to the scout company with them.

Word of the appointment of a company commander had preceded Jeffrey to the bivouac, and the fifty enlisted men lounging on the ground needed no formal invitation to meet their captain. In groups of twos and threes they abandoned their midday meal and strolled toward the spot where their officers were chatting.

Jeffrey could feel a challenge in the air. These troops were no ordinary soldiers. All of them, like himself, had lived for years near the wilderness, and without exception they were individualists. Not one sprang to attention, not one saluted. Jeffrey knew he could force their obedience. If need be, he could have every last one of them flogged; but if he did, he would have fifty sullen, resentful men serving under him, men who would hate him only a little less than they hated the enemy. Men whose usefulness to the expedition would be negligible.

There must be some way to handle this sort of situation, he thought, pretending to listen to the polite remarks of Lieutenant Dobie and Ensign Morris. Over their shoulders he saw the mén clustering, muttering slyly to each other, and grinning challengingly at him. They had put a chip on their collective shoulder and were daring him, in the approved frontier tradition, to knock it off.

One face in particular caught his attention, for it radiated a sheer hatred for the new captain and all the authority he represented. Jeffrey studied the man, a chunky, healthy specimen in his early twenties, with a cocky bearing and insolent eyes. Something familiar gleamed at his waist, and Jeffrey recognized a

Seneca ax. Good. He knew how to break the back of this incipient rebellion.

"Gentlemen," he murmured to his officers, "I'll be much obliged for the pleasure of your company at the Dorsetshire Tavern at noon tomorrow for dinner. Now, I believe there's work to be done."

The enlisted men, led by the surly frontiersman, were inching closer. Jeffrey stepped past Lieutenant Dobie and faced the men. They stopped and planted their feet firmly. They weren't going to budge, and Jeffrey saw that the next few minutes would tell whether he could handle the company or whether he would be forced to return to Colonel Church in disgrace and request a different command for the good of the army.

"Is there something you want?" he asked in a loud voice, looking directly at the fellow he had marked as the chief malcontent.

"Ye look purty with that gold a-hangin' from your shoulder. But what makes ye think you're a cap'n fit t' lead this comp'ny?" The surly one's voice rang with the scorn of a bully who feels the weight of popular opinion behind him.

Jeffrey walked slowly toward the scout and stopped directly in front of the man. "*Doges,*" he said in the Seneca tongue, "*gagisashono ganowages go'diodiase—wadigusawea Honoye dako* [Truly, the false, fetid words of the liar are unworthy of the noble's reply]."

The man stared at Jeffrey in sheer amazement. His companions could see that the bully understood the rapid Indian talk and that he was revising his opinion of the new captain. But his change of heart wasn't quite fast enough, for Jeffrey's fist whipped through the air, catching the scout on the point of his chin. He dropped heavily to the ground.

Jeffrey surveyed the rest of his command with all the wooden-faced calm he could muster. "Anyone else?" he asked. There was a deathly silence, punctuated by a moan from the fallen scout.

The men fell back a step and looked at their new captain with admiration. He was one of them, he was fit to lead them, and they were satisfied. He had passed their test, and now they must pass his in the weeks and months to come.

Without turning around Jeffrey called out a flat order: "Lieutenant Tyng! I will inspect my company in precisely three minutes. Gentlemen, you may form your platoons!"

Never before had the First Company of Church's Scouts

jumped into line with such alacrity. Even the man with the sore chin clambered to his feet, ran unsteadily for his rifle, and moved to his proper place in the company formation before the surprised lieutenants had time to bark a single order.

Lieutenant Sam Tyng gazed at his commanding officer with undisguised respect. "Sir," he said, "the company is ready for the captain's inspection. Present—arms!"

Five hours later Jeffrey sat on a cane-bottomed chair in his room at the Dorsetshire Tavern. His work for the day was finished, and he was hypnotized by the most wonderful sight he had seen in a year. Directly before him stood a huge bed, double mattresses filled with down, a tremendous pillow nestling invitingly at the head. Soft white linen sheets beckoned enticingly to a man who had not slept in one of these delectable creations of civilization for many months. Tonight and tomorrow night he would slumber in bed. When he would have the chance again he didn't know, and he refused to speculate. He opened his mouth and began to unlimber a prodigious yawn, but the door burst open without warning, and he stiffened, at the same time reaching instinctively for the Seneca knife on the table.

Then he relaxed and shouted for joy as Benjie Brown almost fell over himself racing into the room, grinning idiotically. In the manner of men who are fond of each other they pounded and slapped each other on the back, chest, and shoulders for five minutes before either was capable of coherent speech. Then, with Benjie asking eager questions, Jeffrey once again related the story of his experience of the past ewelve months.

He was still talking as they went downstairs to dinner. Neither had mentioned the need for food, but as they were blessed with the enormous appetites of healthy young men, they moved with one accord to the taproom, where, despite the heat, they took a table not far from the fire that crackled and roared in the hearth.

As Jeffrey told of finding Matilda and taking her to Fort Albany—a part of his tale that was interrupted by repeated inquiries from the worried husband and father-to-be—he watched the barmaid in some distrust. The girl poured a great handful of some little pinkish-gray chunks of meat into a bowl, filled the bowl with milk, then plunged a red-hot poker from the fire into the bowl. A moment later the steaming concoction was placed before Jeffrey.

Benjie looked at his friend's face and laughed. "Eat it, Jeff.

Them are clams. The wench likes your looks and fixed you some Boston chowder. It's good."

Jeffrey's story finished, he asked for his friend's news. But there was little Benjie had to tell that he didn't already know. Jeffrey offered him a place in the First Scouts, but Benjie demurred.

"No, thank you, sir. They made me a coxswain—"

"A *what?*"

"I thought you'd be s'prised. Remember, Jeff, I served a four-year navy hitch afore I came home to Cornwall. Well, Colonel Church is a right smart fellow. He b'lieves in placin' men where they c'n do good. So—I'm t' ride up t' New France in a ship, snug as you please. There's t' be whaleboats aboard, and I'm t' be in charge of three of 'em—once you soljers catch up with us."

Jeffrey's eyes clouded thoughtfully. "I see. We're to meet supply ships—and whaleboats—somewhere along the way, is that it?"

"Well, sir, the colonels ain't took me into their confidence," Benjie drawled, "but there's a rumor goin' round that the army is t' march part o' the way up the bay o'—I can't r'member the name o' the damn Frog place—"

"The Bay of Fundy."

"That's it. You'll march part ways and then cross the bay in whaleboats if the Frogs and their general put up too much of a fight on land."

"General? I didn't know they had a general."

"Oh, they got one all right." Benjie was full of self-importance. It wasn't often that he could tell Jeffrey anything. "His name is Dee Castywine."

"You mean Colonel de St. Castine." Jeffrey marveled at the lowerclass Englishman's ability to mangle the French language beyond the point of reasonable recognition.

"Whoever he is is. It don't matter." Benjie was properly deflated. "Anyways, we sail t'morrow mornin'. I'm glad you got in today, Jeff. I'm glad Colonel Church made you a cap'n, and —I'm glad o' everythin'. Yes, sir. And I aim t' be at your side when you get Mistress Leah out o' prison."

A thundercloud passed over Jeffrey's face at the mention of Leah's suffering, and Benjie tried desperately to think of a new topic of conversation.

"Ever expect to set eyes on the *Seraph* again, Jeff?" Benjie leaned back in his chair innocently and began spooning in

clam chowder. The inevitable explosion wasn't long in coming.

"The *Seraph?* May she be at the bottom of the sea by now! May a French frigate have blasted her ugly hull full of holes!" The *Seraph* was the ship on which Jeffrey and Benjie had crossed the Atlantic from Plymouth to the New World, and the very mention of her name brought back to Jeffrey's nostrils the memory of the fetid, dank hold in which he and sixty others bound for servitude in the Colonies had been crammed.

He glared indignantly at Benjie. "Why in God's name do you mention that evil ship now?"

"She ain't so bad—any more, Jeff. No sir. Cap'n Riddle's ship is goin' t' be part o' our expedition agin the Froggies."

"Explain yourself, Benjie." There was no compromise in Jeffrey's gruff voice.

"Sure, Jeff. Sure. Don't get yourself all in a fash. A fleet o' supply ships is comin' over straight from England. The way I heard it, Colonel Church and his top officers paid for a pile o' food and things out o' their own pockets. Well, the ships from Plymouth will sail direct to the mouth o' the St. John. And they'll be sittin' waitin' outside the pearly gates o' the province o' Acadia, so t' speak, for the army t' come marchin' up. And Cap'n Riddle and his *Seraph* will look mighty good t' you when you see 'em through the trees."

"I'll be happy to pay my respects to Captain Riddle. Strange, but I don't mind him nearly as much as I do the memory of his ship." Jeffrey's face relaxed a bit, and he resumed eating his steaming chowder.

"No reason for *you* t' hate the cap'n, Jeff. He was mighty good and decent t' you—once he found out who you—"

Benjie's statement remained unfinished, for at that second a great commotion was heard outside the room. A male voice bellowed, feminine laughter filled the air, and the landlord could be heard remonstrating feebly. Jeffrey and Benjie looked up and were rewarded by a most unusual sight. Lieutenant Samuel Tyng, Jr., hove unsteadily into view, an uncommonly pretty girl hanging onto each arm. As they caught sight of Jeffrey they burst into song and started immediately toward the table from which Jeffrey and Benjie had hastily risen.

"The highway mud has caked on our boots,
But what care we, say I?
In London Town we'll live and die,
So what care we, say I?

The chorus ended as the three revelers reached the table. Lieutenant Tyng removed his broad-brimmed plumed hat and bowed deeply, knocking a water tumbler and two plates to the floor. "Ladies," he cried, alcohol thickening his usually somber voice, "like to present—good frien'—comman'in' off'cer—Cap'n Wyatt. And—and—'nother gent'man. Get a girl f'r you too," he added to the startled Benjie in an undertone.

Jeffrey had never been comfortable in the presence of strange members of the opposite sex, least of all those whose virtue was suspect. And these two gaudily dressed wenches were certainly trollops, a higher type than the women who prowled the boundaries of Boston Common, perhaps, but trollops nonetheless. He bowed awkwardly, not sure what was expected of him or what he was supposed to say.

"This is—Mis'ress Betsy," Lieutenant Tyng continued. "And this is—Mis'ress Claudia. She's yours."

Mistress Claudia giggled, and Jeffrey's eyes were drawn to her. She was tall and handsomely dressed in a brightly striped taffeta dress with the most daring neckline Jeffrey had ever seen. Her figure was slightly overripe, and two black sleepy eyes peered unblinkingly at him from their frame of heavily fringed lashes. She wore her heavy brunette hair long, with a row of curls on one side in the latest London style, and she aped her well-to-do sisters of the English capital in her choice of cosmetics too. Few women in the Colonies wore any make-up of any kind, but Mistress Claudia's face was thick with powder and rouge, and a black beauty patch had been affixed with care to her left cheek, emphasizing the dimple that appeared as she smiled invitingly at Jeffrey.

He bowed low. "Your servant, ma'am," he mumbled.

Unaccustomed to such deference, the girl giggled, and her companion, Mistress Betsy, laughed aloud. A completely different sort with watery, vapid eyes and brown hair, Mistress Betsy nevertheless bore a remarkable resemblance to her friend. Her dress was equally gaudy and low-cut, her cosmetics as generously and expertly applied, and her figure, too, gave ample proof that she was no novice in the realm of romantic adventure.

Benjie began to sidle away from the table, but a glance from Jeffrey stopped him. "Sit down, Benjie. Ladies—Mr. Tyng—I regret I'll be unable to join you this evening." He was polite but very firm.

The rum in Lieutenant Tyng protested. "Only two more

nights—Boston," he said thickly. "May be killed. Bleed to death —woods. Li'l fun before we go, huh?"

"I wish you and your ladies a very pleasant evening, Sam." Jeffrey placed a hand at the small of the lieutenant's back and guided him toward the door, the two bewildered prostitutes mincing rapidly in their wake. "Thank you, but I have other ways of spending my evening."

Before a befuddled Lieutenant Tyng knew what was happening he was in the street, the trollops clinging to his arms and chattering madly. Jeffrey could hear them as they moved away, and in a few seconds it was clear that the rebuff hadn't dampened Sam Tyng's feelings.

"The highway mud has caked on our boots,
But what care we, say I?"

The song trailed away in the distance. Jeffrey rejoined Benjie at the table. But the spell of comradeship was broken, and after eating in near silence they promised to meet briefly the following day before Benjie sailed. Full of clam chowder, roast beef, baked goose, and a rich pudding, Jeffrey walked slowly up to his room.

A new moon was rising over the Common, and as he stood looking out at the fires of Colonel Church's army Jeffrey drew a deep breath. For the first time since he had been cast into Newgate Prison almost six years ago he was his own master.

Or was he? He had a duty to perform for Colonel Church and for the Queen. He had an obligation to a company of fifty men whose lives depended on his decisions, perhaps his whims. And he had a vow to fulfill. Never would his future be his own until Leah was safe.

He sighed and, catching sight of the luxurious bed, stretched and yawned. A great weariness stole over him, and as he tore off his clothes he let them fall to the floor. Like one who has dreamed the same dream so many times that he cannot believe its reality even when it is fulfilled, he walked to the bed and threw himself on it. He was asleep before his head touched the pillow, and that one night, at least, he dreamed no dreams.

Chapter Sixteen

THE TOWN of Dover, Province of Maine, Massachusetts Bay Colony. July 8th, 1707. To His Excellency, Benjamin Church, Colonel-in-chief commanding.

May it please your excellency, this report will be dispatched by trustworthy messenger from my bivouac this night, and should reach your hand within a short time, it being my understanding that your excellency is making your Headquarters with Colonel March's battalion, only ten miles distant.

Pursuant to your orders, the First Company of Scouts arrived in Dover shortly before sundown today, and was greeted with wildly enthusiastick cheers by the populace. The men are camped for the night on the town square, where they have eaten well, being supplied with many tasty Victuals by the aforesaid populace. I have found it necessary to post a guard of Trustworthy Soldiers, for the joy of the people at the appearance of Our Army is so great that quantities of rum and other strong spirits have been offered to the troops.

Our reception here has been very similar to that which has honored your excellency in all other towns through which we have passed. People have cheered and stood with Tears in their Eyes, for they are in full knowledge that their homes will no more be raided and burned, nor their Loved Ones brutally murdered by the Hated Enemy.

There has been no sign of the Enemy in this town for many Weeks past, nor can the good Reverend nor members of the town council give me any information that will speed the apprehension of these Criminals and bring them under the range of our guns.

I am your excellency's most humble and obedient servant, who signs himself,

JEFFREY WYATT
First Company of Scouts,
Captain Commanding.

The town of Saco, Province of Maine, Massachusetts Bay

Colony, July 13th, 1707. To His Excellency, Benjamin Church, Colonel-in-chief commanding.

I am most humbly grateful to your excellency for conferring upon my humble Person the rank of Brevet-Major-for-Administration of all scout companies under your excellency's command.

I am informed by local Residents that two Indian rebels in the employ of the French Enemy were caught while skulking in the brush north of the town five days past. It is the belief of these Residents, a belief in which I humbly concur, that the Devil's disciple, Colonel Baron de St. Castine, had learned of your excellency's approach, and sent his dark-skinned Brothers to Spy upon your excellency's forces.

It is greatly to be pitied that the publick of Saco, muchly abused and maltreated by Savages for long years, did not question their captives. These wretches were given no opportunity to speak out, but were given a Taste of the same flames in which so many brave men, women and Children of Saco have persished.

My men are thirsting for action as we draw closer to the border which separates us from the Enemy, and indeed, I myself have grown Weary of the joyous Reception we have received in every town and village. I fear my company will be ill fitted for battle if we do not encounter Opposition soon.

I am your excellency's most humble and obedient servant, who signs himself,

JEFFREY WYATT
First Company of Scouts,
Captain Commanding.

On the night of July eighteenth the main body of the army camped on the western bank of the Kennebec River. Jeffrey's scouts had already crossed and were spending the night in the sleepy fishing village of Pemaquid, the last town of any consequence on the English side of the border. Jeffrey sat with his officers, relishing one of the last hot meals he expected to eat, for in another day he knew he would be forced to give the reluctant order to build no more fires.

Sounds carry great distances on a quiet night, and Jeffrey heard the approach of horses long before he saw them. He was on his feet, waiting, when an ensign in the brown-green of Colonel Church's personal guard rode up, leading a saddled, riderless horse behind him.

"What is it, mister? What's happened?" Jeffrey didn't wait for the officer to pull abreast.

The ensign drew to a stop, and his horse pawed the air. "Captain Wyatt?"

"Yes."

"Colonel Church's compliments, sir. You're wanted at headquarters immediately. Colonel Church sent you this horse."

"Very kind of him," Jeffrey's meal was forgotten as he buckled on his sword and stuck his pistols in his belt. Horses were scarce in the army, and if the colonel in chief sent a special officer-messenger with two animals to fetch him, something important must be brewing.

Jeffrey swung himself into the saddle, and with a wave of his hand he cantered off down the road, the ensign at his heels. There was no need to tell Lieutenant Tyng that he was temporarily in command, nor to issue any other unnecessary order. In two weeks the company had been welded into a trained, smoothly functioning force.

As they rode Jeffrey made no attempt to question the ensign about his summons. He knew that no member of Colonel Church's personal entourage would say anything pertaining to military affairs beyond what he had been directed to repeat. So Jeffrey thought it better to save his breath and devoted all his attention to the narrow path. There was no moon, and more than once he had to duck hastily to avoid a blow in the face from an overhanging tree branch.

After a hard twenty-minute ride he saw the dull gleam of the river looming ahead and slowed his horse to a walk. Two hazy figures stepped out from behind trees near the water's edge and pointed flintlocks at the approaching horsemen.

"Halt, or we'll fire."

Jeffrey almost laughed aloud. It was typical of Colonel Church to post sentries across the river from his encampment, even though the area had already been crossed and pronounced safe by the scouts.

"Captain Wyatt, First Scouts," he called.

"And Ensign Linden, headquarters detachment," said the breathless young officer at his side.

"What's the password?"

The password? He thought hard for a split second. There was a different password for each day of the week, and this was Tuesday. At least he hoped it was Tuesday. The young ensign leaned forward and opened his mouth to speak, but Jeffrey silenced him with a look. Now, let's see . . .

"The password is 'Our Queen forever!' "

The sentries' guns were lowered. "We've got a boat waitin'

for you, Captain. You can leave your horse here and pick him up on the way back after the meetin'."

So. There was to be a meeting tonight. Jeffrey tossed the reins to the sentry and raced for the riverbank. "Thanks, Sergeant," he called over his shoulder. "Water the horse for me, will you? He's had a hard ride."

Two soldiers were waiting with one of the long birch canoes which Colonel Church always carried with him. Jeffrey and the ensign stepped in carefully, and the fragile craft shot away from the riverbank. As they glided across the river Jeffrey balanced himself carefully. He felt uncommonly clumsy in a canoe and he hoped no one would ask him to shift his position. He was tired of explaining that he had had no experience with small boats during his year of captivity with the Senecas. The scouts had all assumed that anyone who had lived with Indians would know how to handle and navigate a canoe, and Jeffrey couldn't rid himself of a feeling he knew was ridiculous—a conviction that his education at the hands of Paugus had been incomplete.

Halfway across the river he could see a huge campfire burning near the shore, and he counted fifty figures before he decided he must be mistaken and counted again. There was Colonel Church, brightly visible as he paced up and down, greeting late arrivals. Jeffrey did some quick arithmetic. There were forty-three companies, and if all company commanders, plus regimental and battalion heads and their staffs, were present. there would be a good many more than fifty men here. He wondered what emergency could have caused the colonel to summon all his commanders.

The canoe bottom ground on rocks, and Jeffrey was ashore before the soldiers stopped paddling. He started to run. then checked himself. It would never do to appear before all the senior officers of the army flustered and out of breath. As he neared the fire he saw several familiar faces and knew his hunch had been right. This *was* a meeting of commanders. Satisfied, he looked neither to the right nor left as he walked up to Colonel Church.

"Captain Wyatt, First Scouts, reporting as ordered, sir."

"Evening, Wyatt. Colonel Gorham, you may mark the scouts as present."

Colonel Church returned Jeffrey's salute, then spoke again in an undertone to his chief of staff. Jeffrey didn't know where he was expected to go, but as he took his first uncertain step away from the colonel in chief a voice called to him from the shadows.

"Over here, Wyatt."

Following the sound of the voice, Jeffrey soon saw Lieutenant Colonel March sitting comfortably on a rising slope, a group of officers sprawled around him.

"Good evening, sir."

"I've saved a seat for you, Wyatt. Next to me." Colonel March patted the ground at his side.

"Thank you, sir." As Jeffrey sat down he saw Major Hilton, Colonel March's executive officer and adjutant, on the other side of the battalion commander and added a belated "Good evening, Major."

He was answered by a curt nod, and the reason for the Major's silence dawned on him gradually. Major Hilton was jealous, for until recently he had been the only major in the battalion. Now Jeffrey, as a brevet major charged with over-all administrative responsibility for the three scout companies, ranked as his equal.

Colonel March was saying something, and Jeffrey forgot the pettiness of Major Hilton. "You made good time getting here, Wyatt. Colonel Tyng and I win twelve shillings from old Schuyler." Colonel March chuckled. "He'll squeal like a lanced pig. We bet him all our officers would be here before his. He thought he had a sure bet—with your company so far away."

Jeffrey was about to reply when the sturdy voice of Lieutenant Colonel Gorham cut through the night. "Gentlemen, stand to attention!"

The officers climbed to their feet and stood rigidly until Colonel Church himself said quietly, "You may sit down again."

There were some who grumbled at this rigid preliminary to all military meetings, but Jeffrey recognized its wisdom. The simple ceremony was a reminder that this was no ordinary get-together of gentlemen for business purposes; it was a military conclave in which all were sworn to obey the man whom they honored by standing until given permission to sit.

Throats were cleared; swords clanked and jangled as they were placed on the ground. Colonel Church held up his hand for silence. The meeting was about to begin.

"Gentlemen," said the colonel in chief, "in another week's time we'll be in enemy territory. For all we may know, the enemy is already in ours. Our expedition is no secret to the French. They've been quaking for weeks."

He paused for the laugh which rumbled forth from more than fifty throats, then continued: "Therefore, it is possible

that we will meet St. Castine's columns in battle at any time."

"The sooner the better, sir!" a young voice cried from the rear of the assemblage. "Then we'll have us a gentle stroll the rest of the way up to Port Royal."

Colonel Church made no attempt to identify the speaker. "I didn't realize there were any ensigns among us tonight," he said dryly. "It was my impression that only senior officers were present." This time no one laughed.

"Gentlemen, we will march in battle formation, beginning tomorrow morning." Colonel Church's voice was deceptively soft now, but Jeffrey recognized a certain grimness in it, something akin to the colonel's attitude before he made a final and decisive move in a chess game. "Keep your flanks protected. Keep in touch with your sister battalions and regiments at all times. Colonel Tyng!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Your regiment will take first place in the line of battle. Colonel March's battalion is our strongest, so put him in the center. Use your other battalions to flank him. Colonel Schuyler!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Keep your battalions on Sam Tyng's heels. Never lose sight of him. I've fought St. Castine before and I know his tactics. He believes in throwing his full weight at a lesser force, crushing it, and then going on to wipe out the next small unit. We can't allow that to happen to us—again."

"I was at Casco, Colonel." Kent Schuyler's voice sounded assured and easy as it floated up to Jeffrey. "I remember St. Castine's tactics. He'll not repeat them."

"Good. Colonel Walton, I have bad news for you. Your regiment will remain in reserve for the time being." There was regret but no apology in the colonel in chief's voice.

"My regiment will obey, sir." Shadrack Walton's voice was wooden, and every officer present knew what an inner struggle he must be undergoing not to protest.

"Thank you, Colonel. Now, gentlemen, I have something unusual to propose. If you think the plan won't work—say so now. I propose that each company commander issue his men sufficient food rations to last one week. All remaining food supplies will be carried at the rear of each regiment by a small detail consisting of a few men for each company. When supplies drop low the company runners can bring up more food to their respective companies in a short time.

"I'm not mad, gentlemen. I have several reasons for mak-

ing this suggestion. First, if the enemy attacks and cuts off any part of our force, St. Castine will capture precious little food. And from all I hear, his men are hungry. In the second place, our troops will be less inclined to build fires if they don't see their kettles and big piles of vittles lying about. I know no better way to impress the imminence of war on a soldier than to apply a little gentle pressure on his stomach. By the way, you've built your last fires. Well, gentlemen, any objections to my plan? Speak up!"

In the silence that followed Jeffrey congratulated himself. Having already decided to start feeding his scouts cold food tomorrow, he was vastly pleased that Colonel Church should have had the same idea for the entire army at the same time.

"There being no objections, my plan will go into operation at once, gentlemen," Colonel Church said. "I'll leave it to the regimental commanders to work out final details with you before you disperse tonight."

He paused significantly, and his tone was menacingly flat when he spoke again. "It has come to my ears that certain ladies of Boston and other communities through which we've passed have—ah—joined our expedition. I also am given to understand that certain company commanders have looked the other way. There will be no more looseness of morals in this army, gentlemen. I expect every one of those women to be sent away. Tonight. I'll personally bring any officer who tolerates these conditions before a court-martial. We're asking the Lord God Almighty to guide us, gentlemen. And we can hardly expect His aid unless we co-operate with Him."

Satisfied that his officers would tolerate no more debauches, Colonel Church nodded his head, then looked through the crowd as if searching for someone. "Captain Wyatt!" he barked, and Jeffrey started violently. He was the first company officer to be addressed by name.

"Yes, sir?" He hoped his voice was as firm and calm as those of the regimental commanders had been.

"You'll meet with the officers of your Indian scout companies before you go to sleep tonight and tell them of the decisions made at this meeting. And, Captain Wyatt, if there are any difficulties, any problems, come directly to me."

"I understand, sir." Jeffrey didn't understand in the least. It wasn't like the colonel in chief to direct the by-passing of Jeffrey's battalion and regimental commanders, and he was afraid they'd be angry. He stirred uncomfortably.

Once again Jeffrey thought Colonel Church was reading his mind, for the colonel's next statement was a direct answer to his thoughts. "You'll be happy to hear, Captain Wyatt, that Colonel Tyng and Colonel March suggested this change to me themselves before our meeting began this evening. You'll be under my direct orders henceforth. Of course you'll keep in close touch with Colonel March's battalion at all times."

"Yes, sir." Jeffrey couldn't hide the elation in his voice. For all practical purposes he was now responsible for a battalion of his own and undoubtedly commanded the largest single independent unit in the army.

He felt a friendly pressure beside him, and Colonel March's hand was extended. "My best wishes to you, Wyatt," Evelyn March whispered. "I told Sam Tyng your unit was too big for me to run along with my own, and he went straight to Colonel Church. Now everybody is happy—except Hilton here." He inclined his head toward his adjutant, and his white teeth flashed as his face broke into a wide grin. For the first time Jeffrey realized why Major Hilton had been so cold.

In the field, at bivouac on the Penobscot River, Province of Maine, Massachusetts Bay Colony, July 24th, 1707. To His Excellency, Benjamin Church, Colonel-in-chief-commanding.

May it please your excellency, the scout companies under my command have arrived this Night at the Penobscot River, the last natural barrier before reaching the territory of the French Enemy.

The first bullets of this campaign were spent at about four o'clock this afternoon. The circumstances were as follows. Our guide, Dan'l Young, was cutting his way through the woods at a distance which I approximate as one hundred yards ahead of me. I was in the lead of the First Company of Scouts, the Second and Third Companies flanking us on either side at a distance of a half mile.

Our progress was slow, as the forest was thick. Young stopped very quickly and stood with his head high in the air, sniffing and smelling. Had I not witnessed the Extraordinary Event of the next few seconds, I would not give them Credence. Young raised his rifle and fired at one of the trees. At that Same Time, a flash of fire spurted from the tree. Young's shot was Superior to that of his opponent, for a Tuscarora brave fell to the ground, bleeding most profusely. He was dead in a few seconds.

Young, who seems to lead a Magic Life, was untouched. He shouted to me that another Tuscarora Rebel was hiding in the branches. As I wished to capture said Indian alive in order to

question him, I deployed a force of ten men around the tree, all taking care not to show themselves lest they fall victims to the Murderous Intent of the savage.

Our problem was like that of Flushing a mallard Duck from a marsh blind, but Young proved equal to the Occasion. Begging all to maintain discreet silence, he watched the tree with Diligence, and when convinced of the location of the Foe, threw an Indian axe with such marvelous dexterity that the blunt end struck the savage upon the brow, and he fell to the Ground, stunned but unharmed.

When the savage recovered his Wits, I spoke to him at length, ably assisted by Dan'l Young, for whom my respectful regard grows by great leaps with each passing day.

The Tuscarora admitted that he and his Deceased Confederate were engaged in Spying Out your excellency's forces. But with the Obdurate Stupidity typical of the arrogant Rebels, he refused to divulge the location of Baron de St. Castine's main Body of troops. Nor would he reveal the size or composition of the French and Indian army.

Dan'l Young indicated a Willingness to loosen the stiff Tongue of the Heathen, and I withdrew the Company to a distance and awaited results. But your excellency is painfully cognizant of the Pitiful Ignorance which leads the savages to believe they are Most Courageous when Silent. I regret to inform your excellency that the Tuscarora brave died without giving the Necessary Information. My only Objection to Dan'l Young is that he is too Enthusiastick in the performance of his duties.

I am your excellency's most humble and obedient servant, who signs himself,

JEFFREY WYATT
First Company of Scouts,
(Brevet-Major)
Captain Commanding.

Chapter Seventeen

THE AUGUST sun dropped behind the towering trees of the Canadian forest, but it was still hot. Jeffrey sat on a boulder at the bottom of a gully and wiped his face with a large cotton handkerchief. He looked at it and grinned. It was incredibly dirty. He had intended to wash it in the St. Croix River yesterday, but there hadn't been time. He could hear his father's voice insisting that an officer must maintain personal cleanliness regardless of circumstances. But Father had never fought in this kind of war. No, and neither had anyone else. Trust Ben Church to be the first to move a whole army through territory the world had always considered impenetrable.

A mosquito whined and attached itself to Jeffrey's leg. He slapped angrily, and when he drew his hand away there was a drop of blood on it. He relaxed and wriggled his shoulders into a more comfortable position against the crevice of the boulder. The leaves of the great trees threw an irregular pattern of shadows on the grass. Jeffrey glanced up and saw one—no, two more mosquitoes—and a swarm of flies buzzing about in the beam of sunlight that drifted down between two trees.

This was the devil of a place to stop for a meal. He should have had more sense. But it was too late now to move elsewhere, for the members of his company were gliding silently toward him.

Jeffrey grinned as the tall, dark figure of Lieutenant Sam Tyng burst through the shelter of trees. He could be silent when he wished, but there was an air of the dramatic about Sam. He certainly looked like a ruffian now. His thin legs were encased in the loose, long leather breeches of the scouts, and a pair of Indian moccasins adorned his feet. Instead of the short leather jacket which Jeffrey and the others wore, Sam gloried in a silk shirt. It was dyed a brownish-green to conform with Colonel Church's strict instructions, but it was silk nevertheless. He scorned headgear of any sort, and his long black hair

was snarled and matted. On his cheeks and chin was a six-day growth of beard. He would be given a wide berth at one of his mother's teas in Boston, that was sure!

"Where's young Morris?" Jeffrey asked.

Sam Tyng wiped a tired, dirty hand across his sweat-streaked brow. "Haven't seen him. Or heard him. He had the cordon next to mine, but he's been invisible all afternoon." Sam sprawled on the ground and stretched his muscles. After a man had been on his feet for six hours, crawling and dodging and snaking through enemy country, he deserved a bit of rest. Let the platoon come to him. "Boston platoon over here," he bawled.

Jeffrey stood up and watched the men drifting in. This was always a tense time for him. Twice in the past week men had failed to appear and had never been seen again. Jeffrey didn't know if they had deserted or if they had been taken by the enemy. Better to die fast than become a prisoner of the French —or the Senecas. He wasn't sure which treated a man worse, but he reflected for a moment on what the Senecas would do to *him* if they ever caught him. There would be no Adiawando to intercede for him this time.

Ensign Morris bounced into the clearing without warning. The boy's cheeks were ruddy, and his uniform was clean—well, almost as clean as though he had been lined up for review before Colonel Church in the Boston Common. He hurried to Jeffrey and stood rigidly at salute.

"Ensign Morris at report, sir."

The lines around Jeffrey's mouth softened. Morris was trying so hard to be a proper officer. Jeffrey returned the salute.

"Find anything, Jack? What have you seen?" Jeffrey's tone was edged with anxiety and was sharper than he had intended.

"About an hour ago," young Morris replied, "Lowden came to me—with this." He held out his hand, and in the palm was a small Indian scarab.

Jeffrey seized it and examined it carefully. A Seneca scarab, no doubt about it. The vermilion and gold paint on the piece of wood sparkled in the sunset. Jeffrey raised his voice. "Lowden!"

"Want me, Cap'n?"

Jeffrey held out his hand. "Tell me about this."

"Ain't much to tell. I was easin' along when I come on what looked like an old Indian path. I stopped for a minute—and this here scarab caught my eye." He chuckled.

The look in Jeffrey's eyes cut short his merriment. "Do you think it was dropped recently?"

Lowden shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other. "I can't rightly allow as how I could tell, Cap'n."

"All right, then. Go back to your supper." Jeffrey couldn't control the angry thoughts that surged through him. Lowden was brave but stupid.

Dan Young, naked to the waist and perspiring freely, made his way into the gully clearing. When he saw Jeffrey his lips parted in a crooked smile.

"I need a word with you—alone, Cap." Young's voice was harsh.

His heavy murderer's fingers wrapped themselves about Jeffrey's arm, and they moved to a more secluded spot. Several members of the company watched them apprehensively, for they knew the old guide didn't scare easily, and a private conference with the captain could mean anything.

"We're in for it, Cap," Young said, lowering his voice.

"You've seen an enemy force, Dan?" Jeffrey felt his spirits soar. After endless days of stalking, Church's rifles would have their chance to speak.

"I see nothin'. I heard 'em. A big mess. A hull reg'ment, mebbe."

"Where?"

"A mile ahead, mebbe. They was stopped for their supper. I didn't know if they'd put out sentries, so I took me no chances. I come back."

Jeffrey held out the vermilion and gold scarab, and Young looked at it intently for a second, then whistled. "Unholy fires o' Satan! Where—"

"One of Morris's men found it. Is it new, Dan?"

The old scout's reply was prompt and firm. "New this season. That means there's more'n Frenchies in the party. Must be Senecas too. Abso-goddamn-lootly!"

Jeffrey whirled about and called out in a quiet, decisive tone: "Peters!"

The scout hurried to him. When the captain used that voice you didn't loiter. "Yes, sir?"

"You're to go back to the main body. My compliments to Colonel March, and tell him we've located a strong enemy force. Young thinks it may be a whole regiment. Ask Colonel March to notify the colonel in chief at once. I'll send further reports as we learn more."

The tough scout spat a stream of tobacco juice at a rock. His face was impassive. "Think I'll get back in time t' get in a swipe at the bastards, Cap'n?"

"If they have as large a force as Young believes, there'll be plenty left for you."

Satisfied, the scout ambled off toward the south, casually picking up his long flintlock and pouch on the way. Jeffrey stood at the base of the gully and called sharply to his officers. "Gentlemen—present your platoons!"

Members of the company looked at each other. Something was definitely in the air. Grumbling a bit, they rose to their feet. Sam Tyng was the first to reach Jeffrey's side, and there was nothing sloppy about his manner now.

"Boston platoon all counted and present, sir!"

"New Hamsphire platoon all counted and present, sir!" That was Luietenant Dobie, his flat nasal Yankee twang as calm and unflurried as ever.

"Pennsylvania platoon all counted and present, sir!" Ensign Morris's voice sounded rather high and breathless.

Jeffrey placed one foot on a rock and absently flicked some dust from it with the chamois bag containing his bullet mold and ammunition. As the men gathered about him he motioned them closer. His air was matter-of-fact, but even before he spoke Sam Tyng knew the captain was excited.

"Dan Young has spotted an enemy force—in strength," Jeffrey said. "They're a mile to the north, you say, Dan?"

"North-northeast."

The men shuffled their feet and cleared their throats. Those with personal scores to settle took tighter grips of their fire-arms. A voice in the rear called out:

"How many o' the varmints be there, Dan'l?"

Young shook his head. "Can't rightly figger. Mebbe a reg'-ment, mebbe more."

Sam Tyng spoke up: "Frenchmen, Dan?"

"Yup, Froggies, Leftenant. But they got some savages with 'em." Dan Young lifted a huge hairy hand to wipe away an insect that had settled on the bridge of his nose. The brand on the back of his hand—the letter *M*, for murderer—stood out plainly.

Jeffrey waited patiently for the company to absorb the news. The frontiersman was an independent cuss. You let him take his own lead, and you allowed plenty of time for him to get

affairs straight in his own mind. Then, and then only, you gave orders.

"Reckon we c'n tackle 'em ourselves—and make Cunnel Church a present o' some skelps?" The new voice was that of Lowden.

Jeffrey smiled, but the men all knew his answer before he spoke. "We're not here to perform heroics," he said. "Colonel Church has several thousand men—all as anxious as you to deal with the enemy—"

"One scout is wuth ten sodjers!" Jeffrey couldn't see the speaker, but the company laughed raucously.

"Our job is to learn how large a force the enemy has and what type his troops are." Jeffrey ignored the laughter as best he could—these independent ruffians would rather tackle the enemy alone than chance missing some of the fun when the main body of troops moved up. "Get it through your woolly heads—this may be St. Castine's main army. Fifty of us wouldn't do them much damage."

"The Pennsylvany boys c'n handle a hull army o' Froggies by theirselves." A member of Ensign Morris's platoon raised his voice in scornful protest.

Jeffrey's features grew sharp, and his eyes blazed. "Blast you varmint-ridden carrion!" he said. "We're not fighting some puny little battle in the Silent Country. This is a full-scale war—and you're sworn members of an army. Now, then—Dan. Pick ten men—any ten you want—and go as far forward as you can. See how much information you can bring back."

The men began crowding around old Young, and a buzz of voices arose. Jeffrey silenced them with a vigorous wave of his hand.

"Sam, you take another ten and explore the left flank. Zeb Dobie will do the same on the right flank. I want to send a complete report back to headquarters as soon as possible."

Young and the two lieutenants had selected their men before Jeffrey finished speaking. Several of the old-timers were already moving out of the gully when Jeffrey hailed them back.

"Hold on. I want no gunfire—understand? The French may not know we're so close to them, and I don't want them scared off before Colonel Church can plow into them. Use your knives if you must. You know how. But no firing!"

Ensign Morris stood at Jeffrey's elbow. "Please, sir—where do you want me to lead my platoon?"

"You'll stay here." Jeffrey saw the disappointment well up

in Morris's face and his voice softened. "You'll stay with me, Jack—as acting second-in-command to the main body. We—"

Jeffrey's words froze on his lips. The sharp retort of a flintlock reverberated through the woods. The shot had come from the southwest. Peters, the scout Jeffrey had sent to Colonel March's battalion, had traveled in a southwesterly direction.

The men who had started off moved back to the clearing without being told. Young glided off alone through the trees. Jeffrey wet his suddenly dry lips with the tip of his tongue. Ensign Morris opened his mouth to ask a question and thought better of it. It was plain even to him that no scouting parties would go out on reconnaissance now.

Lieutenant Tyng glanced about casually, then opened the pan of his rifle and poured in a measure of powder from the horn slung over his shoulder. The men were quick to follow his example, and twenty guns clicked open at the same instant. Jeffrey primed his own long rifle, then carefully examined the two pistols he wore at his belt.

The shot could mean everything—or nothing. Well, next to nothing. Had the enemy discovered Peters and shot him? Or had he himself fired on an advance party of the French force? No, it couldn't be that. Peters was too wise in the ways of the woods to use a gun. Better not speculate. Dan would be back soon.

Jeffrey beckoned to Sam Tyng and placed his lips close to the other's ear. "If it's an ambush, we'd better be ready," he whispered.

Tyng nodded his head slowly, and his black eyes snapped. He pointed to a dozen men and led them to the left flank of the gully. Comprehension dawned quickly on Lieutenant Dobie's face, and he took another dozen to the right flank.

Jeffrey surveyed the ground coolly. If there was to be a fight of any consequence, it should be on higher ground. He walked slowly to a slight ridge halfway back up the gully, the eyes of the men following him. Yes, this was a likely spot. If the enemy tried a frontal attack, the Frenchmen would be forced to work down to the base of the ravine, then fight up the near slope. A jagged collection of rough, high boulders stood at the right. Good! Zebediah Dobie needed no instructions but was already striding up the slope, placing his men at strategic points behind the big rocks.

Lieutenant Tyng stood at the bottom of the gully, off to the left, and watched Jeffrey, one hand shading his eyes. Jeffrey

nodded, and Sam immediately motioned his men up the slope too. That left flank was dangerously exposed. The ground was more level, and the forest was thick there. If the French intended to attack the company, their most likely approach would be through the trees. Jeffrey knew that was how he would attack if he were the French commander. Yes, better reinforce the flank.

Jeffrey looked back down the hill to the place where Ensign Morris and about half the company stood waiting. He pointed to six of the men and waved them toward Lieutenant Tyng. Sam, busy spreading his men in twos behind the trees, grinned his thanks.

No word was spoken by anyone. These tough frontiersmen knew better than to talk when their scalps were in danger. A voice carried far in the woods. Jeffrey cursed himself; he had been so proud of his wisdom, letting the men argue. The French had probably heard every word. Well, no time now to think of his mistakes.

He beckoned to Jack Morris, and the boy raced up the hill, the men straggling along more slowly behind him. Jeffrey grabbed him by the shoulder and pulled Morris's ear close to his lips. "Two lines," he growled. "Form a perimeter, with the other platoons flanking you. Put your lines there—and there. Face one north and the other south. Spread them thin. And hurry. It's growing dark."

Morris had barely started to place the men in position, some facing downhill, others toward the rear, when the whole group, almost as one man, caught Jeffrey's intent. In a few moments the entire company was in position, waiting for battle. But something was still wrong. What was it? Ah! Jeffrey waved in his officers, and the three of them moved toward him.

"Gentlemen, I'm reassigning your positions," Jeffrey said. "Jack, you take the right wing, and let no one through those rocks! Zeb, you take the left flank, and keep your eyes open! If they attack, it'll be through your avenue."

Lieutenant Dobie strode off to his new post, and young Morris, after a moment's hesitation, turned and headed for the boulders, walking carefully. Sam Tyng looked at Jeffrey with an ironic smile. "What happens to me, Jeff?"

Jeffrey started at his friend and tried to hide his amusement. "You'll have your belly full of fighting, Sam—never fear. You'll hold the center here—both front and rear."

A frown of recognition creased Sam's brow. "I see. And that

leaves you free to roam about. Very wise, but why put young Morris on the right flank? He doesn't know enough to—"

"That's our strong spot. He'll do less damage there than anywhere. What's more, we've two good sergeants to back him up."

"Mmm. Where in hell is Dan'l Young?"

"Wondering the same thing. If he's not back soon, I'll send someone out to look for him. Damnation! I could lose my whole company that way. Be just like the Senecas to pick us off one at a time."

"This will be my first brush with them. I—"

"Make sure it isn't your last, Sam." Jeffrey took a long knife from his belt, and after squinting down the razor-sharp edge of the blade put it in a new position at the small of his back.

Lieutenant Tyng gazed curiously at the handle of the knife. It was made of carved bone, and though the paint on it was faded, streaks of vermilion and gold still showed. "Indian knife, Jeff?"

"Yes."

A pause. "I'd heard you were a prisoner of the Senecas for a year and more."

"Yes."

"And this blade was—"

"One of theirs. I intend to—return the gift."

The chirp of a thrush suddenly filled the air. One of the scouts covering the rear area had whistled. Jeffrey and Sam peered into the blackness of the forests. Rifles were lifted into position as the scouts, lying full length now on the soft turf, made ready for any emergency. Jeffrey and Sam threw themselves hastily to the ground. Let regular troops await an attack on their two feet, erect. Here was one company that would fight Indian-fashion, hugging the ground.

Twenty trigger fingers tightened as the men waited. Then out of nowhere a figure slid into view. Twenty triggers fingers relaxed. Even in the gathering twilight the scouts recognized Dan Young. He stood for a second, took in the scene, and grinned crookedly, his eyes seeking Jeffrey. One of the men jerked a thumb toward the inside of the perimeter, and Young crossed quickly to his commanding officer. Jeffrey and Sam sat up and looked at each other in consternation. Young's long rifle was slung across his back, and under one arm he carried three more guns. At his belt hung two scalps, still dripping blood.

Those two scalps and three weapons told the story. Young's face was a mass of fury as he dropped to the grass beside Jeffrey.

His harsh whisper carried across the entire area. "They got Peters, Cap. Two o' the biggest, ugliest Senecas this side o' the River Styx. But I took both of 'em."

"So I notice."

"I couldn't give poor Peters a burial. He's still lyin' out there in the woods, with the two redskins near him." He took a deep breath. "I did some moseyin' around, Cap—that's why it took me a spell t' git back here. The Froggies and their red pals have seen us. There's a whole goddamn army headin' this way."

"A whole army?" Sam Tyng's voice shook.

"Wa'al, Leftenant, mebbe it's no more'n a reg'ment—but with only a few men here, it don't make much diff'rence, huh?"

Jeffrey's reaction was immediate. He jumped to his feet, crossed to one of the more experienced Pennsylvania scouts, and talked to him earnestly for a minute or more. The man, without a backward glance, darted off through the trees. Jeffrey returned to the spot where Tyng and Young knelt, watching him.

"I sent another messenger off to Colonel March. He's got to be notified. And if anyone can get through, Medders is the man."

"He'd better. How long do you think we can hold out here without aid, Jeff?"

"As long as necessary." Jeffrey's reply was flat, without compromise. "We'll stay until we know Ben Church has heard the enemy's in the vicinity."

"And how will we know?" Tyng was unconsciously sardonic.

Dan Young's yellow teeth appeared. "That's easy, Leftenant. Colonel Church will send a thousand men here t' relieve us—and when they get here, we'll kind o' figger our messenger has got through. But we got a long spell o' waitin' ahead. Goddamn if we ain't." Young was inspecting all four of the rifles in his possession, carefully loading each, and laying them out in a row to his right.

Sam Tyng bit his lip. "What makes you think it'll be a while before—"

"Simple arithmetic," Jeffrey cut in. "Colonel March's battalion is the lead unit of our main force. He's at least seven miles to our south. You'll remember we were told to cover extra ground today. Well, we've done it. In fact, we seem to have followed orders so precisely that we're in trouble. It takes a man some little time to cover seven miles—especially when he's forced to crawl part way on his hands and knees."

"Not t' mention the time it'll take for Cunnel March and his dandies t' get all the ways up here," Young drawled. "Them sodjers don't travel fast like us'ns."

"Right. Then I reckon we'll have to hold out." Sam Tyng was no coward. He took eight musket balls from his pouch, pushed several into his mouth, and held them in his cheek. The others he placed between his fingers, frontier-fashion. If there was going to be a scrap, it would be a hot one—he'd see to that.

Young watched him for a second, then nodded in approval to Jeffrey. All three men were straining their ears, waiting for the sound of a shot. If it didn't come in another few minutes they'd know Medders had escaped the ring of Senecas that was undoubtedly closing in on the company.

"Cap?"

"Yes, Dan."

"Don't take it wrongly of me, but ye might pull in them last two men on the left flank up frontwards. I seen 'em ten yards away when I was a-comin' in. There's a moon t'night."

"Thanks for the suggestion. Pull them in, will you, Sam?"

"Yes, sir." Lieutenant Tyng walked carefully off to the left.

"Goddamn good fightin' man," Young said. "I knew a feller oncet down in Virginny just like him."

"What were you doing in Virginia, Dan?"

"I spent me a season in a little jail they got down there, Cap. That is, till me and this feller I was tellin' ye 'bout decided t' head back North. So we burned down the dump." Dan Young seemed lost in the memories of his experiences.

"Eeee—yaoooooo!"

A chill traced its way up Jeffrey's spine at the sound of a marrow-curdling shriek from the forest, and a cold sweat broke out all over his body. Slowly his eyes met those of Dan Young.

"Medders didn't git through." Young's sharp rasp proclaimed an unemotional fact.

"I'll have to send someone else. Doesn't matter if we lose the whole company—but Church must get word." Jeffrey suppressed a shudder. Being a commander was no joy. He wondered how his father had felt when he had sent men to certain death.

"Let me go, Cap. I'll git through."

Jeffrey shook his head. "Sorry, Dan, but you're too handy with a rifle. I need you here. And you're the only man in the army who knows the Port Royal trails. You'll stay."

"But——"

"That's an order."

Young picked up a rifle and fondled it. He was cursing softly under his breath.

"Ho, there! Hear me, men," Jeffrey called out softly. "I want a volunteer who'll go to Colonel March."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Ensign Morris start forward and impatiently he waved the boy back to his position. Jack wouldn't live a hundred yards in that forest.

"Sure ye won't change your mind, Cap?" Young's voice was wheedling.

"Very sure. I'm sorry, Dan—you know that. But the entire expedition, from Colonel Church down, is depending on your services. I can't take a chance," Jeffrey explained.

A stocky, swarthy man had risen from his place halfway down the gully. He made his way slowly up to Jeffrey. This is one of the new Boston Irish, Jeffrey thought. Tough little devil—what's his name?—Kenny. A stream of tobacco juice oozed out of the man's mouth and dribbled down his chin. His faded leather breeches clung to him as he moved with a weaving gate, and his butternut deerskin cap stuck tightly to his perspiring head.

"I'm yer man, sir." Kenny stood at what he thought was the correct pose of attention directly in front of Jeffrey.

"All right, Kenny. Tell Colonel March the enemy force is a big one. We'll hold out here"—he licked his lips—"as long as we can. And—be careful, man. That wood is full of Senecas, and we've lost two already."

Kenny's chin came up fast. "Don't go frettin' yer head about me, sir," he crowed. "No Frenchies and no Senecas is goin' t' take my scalp. I've got me a girl waitin' fer me in Boston, and she likes me head o' hair fine like it is. Yes, sir, Cap'n, I'm aimin' to get back to the lass lookin' like I am. I'll get past 'em. All I've got t' do is think about that wench——"

"Shove along, Kenny. And Godspeed to you." Jeffrey wrung the man's hand and started him on his way with a quiet push. A vague wave of uneasiness swept through Jeffrey. Here he was, falling right into the Senecas' trap, allowing his men to go off to their deaths one by one. And Kenny was such—such an Irishman! Like all the rest of them, he boasted of his deeds before he performed them. But blast—the Irish *did* live up to their promises. They might brag their tongues off, but they accomplished what they set out to do.

A cool breeze suddenly sprang up, and Jeffrey, surprised, looked up to see the night sky filling with clouds. It was growing chilly too. Strange, but he hadn't realized there would be a storm.

Without an order Dan Young had joined the scouts who were holding the line on the left flank. Jeffrey sat very still. A pang in his stomach warned him that he was hungry, and he knew he'd better eat while there was still time. He pulled a chunk of dried beef from his sack and chewed on it slowly. A thought in the back of his mind kept crowding to the fore. It concerned Leah; he was conscious of a gnawing fear that the next few hours might be his last and that his chances of seeing his beloved once again were very, very slim.

Sam Tyng, looking more disreputable than ever, appeared at Jeffrey's side. "When are the bastards going to attack, Jeff?" Sam's voice was hoarse.

"They'll hold back for a while, hoping to worry us—if I know the Senecas, Sam. You'd better eat now while you can."

"I reckon."

Sam slung his kit around in front of him and drew out several long thin slices of smoked meat. The men had started eating too. If they realized that at least some of them were tasting their last meal, they gave no evidence of it. Huge quantities of meat, ground corn, and cold boiled potatoes slipped down hungry throats.

Sam was thoughtful. "We'll need to send the supply sergeant back to the main force tomorrow, Jeff. We're running low on vittles."

"Let tomorrow take care of itself." Jeffrey's voice was surprisingly cheerful.

"Thunderation, what I wouldn't give for a big slab of fresh ham fried with onions. And a mass of steaming hot grits. And a slab of blueberry pie."

"What's blueberry pie?" In spite of his resolutions not to think of real food, Jeffrey was curious.

"Ma makes it. She puts a pile of blueberries in the oven, and they come out hot and juicy, with a crust around."

Jeffrey's mouth watered, and he bit off a chunk of the dried beef viciously.

A volley of shots rang out off to the southwest, at least half a mile away. Some of the men were on their feet, listening intently. Had the enemy stalked Kenny and killed him? Jeffrey could hear Sam Tyng's hard breathing. Sam was staring off toward the trees, trying to use will power to enable him to see through to the distant spot from which the sounds had come.

"It was more than one shot, Jeff, so maybe Kenny was fighting back," Sam said. He frowned, then shook his head. "How in hell do we know *what's* happened out there?"

"We don't know a blasted thing," Jeffrey replied, "And I can't send a man out to find out, either."

Three more shots rang out through the blackening night. Someone had deliberately fired three times in succession, as rapidly as possible. Was it Kenny trying to signal that he had escaped a French and Indian trap? Or was it a Seneca volley fired in celebration at winning another easy scalp? Jeffrey couldn't be sure, and only time would give him the answer. If a relief force arrived in a few hours, then Kenny had successfully run this most dangerous of all gantlets. If not, the company might well never know the meaning of those three shots.

Lieutenant Tyng laid an impulsive hand on Jeffrey's arm. "Jeff, let me go out there. I'll find out whether the bastards got Kenny or not."

"Impossible, Sam," Jeffrey said. "You'd wander around in the dark until your throat was slit."

"But this—this waiting——"

"We haven't much longer to wait. Better inspect the positions while there's still time." Jeffrey strode off toward the tense, silent line of scouts on the left flank.

He stopped for a quiet word with each man, and to each his counsel was the same: "Save your shot. Make every ball count. They'll try to tease us into blasting away all our round shot—and then take us with their hatchets. Don't let 'em. Fire at nothing but a sure target."

He walked quickly to the other flank, then inspected the forward and rear positions on the slope. Lieutenant Tyng carefully counted each man's ammunition, and to those who were short he handed a fresh supply. Once the fighting started, it wouldn't be so easy to move around like this.

The wind increased. Damnation! A dark night favored the enemy. And it would certainly rain soon. It was going to be a rough night.

"Keep your powder dry," Jeffrey bawled. No need for quiet now. The enemy might be no more than a few yards off in the forest.

As though answering Jeffrey's unspoken thought, there was a sharp c-cra-ack in the trees off the left flank. A spurt of flame lighted up a small patch of forest for an instant, then all was black again.

"Hold your fire, men! Don't let them panic you!" Jeffrey shouted at the top of his lungs. There was a surprising elation in his tone—the long nerve-shattering hours of waiting were over.

Two more shots rang out, and a rifle ball whistled past, uncomfortably close to Jeffrey's head. In his sudden exultation he had forgotten what a good target he made for night-trained Seneca riflemen, standing upright here in the middle of the clearing. He dropped to the ground and crawled behind the shelter of a nearby rock.

The night air was suddenly rent by the tremendous racket made by dozens—perhaps hundreds—of flintlocks firing at once. The enemy must be attacking in great strength. Jeffrey listened carefully and then laughed aloud at his own stupidity. Was he such a dolt he couldn't recognize a clap of thunder?

The rain held off, but the enemy was less considerate, and a lively stream of fire poured into the defense position. But so far not one shot had been discharged by the little defending company. The men were holding steady. Jeffrey thanked God for the veterans in his command and prayed that the recruits who had never fought in battle would not be stampeded.

He felt Sam Tyng beside him and blinked involuntarily, for Sam was almost unrecognizable. What he could see of him was covered with dirt, yet his long rifle was miraculously clean. He must have carried it on his back, Oneida-fashion, as he crawled across the ground.

Sam was panting, and his voice sounded thin and parched. "That young idiot Morris goddamn near let loose a volley, Jeff. I heard him give the order and stopped him just in time."

"Good," Jeffrey grunted. "There hasn't been a sound from the right flank. I don't believe the enemy has moved over that way yet. When they do, I'll take over the center, and you take command over Morris, Sam. The protection of those boulders is wellnigh perfect, and you ought to drop a few of the French. But wait until they start."

"Yes, sir."

"How's the left flank holding?"

"Couldn't be better, Jeff." Sam had to shout to make himself heard over the renewed volley of enemy cannonading. "Nobody hit, and they're holding firm. Damned weird battle, if you ask me —with all the firing from one side."

Jeffrey's eyes were becoming more accustomed to the dark, and he saw a vague silhouette creeping toward the outposts. Before he had time to raise his gun to his shoulder a New Hampshire rifle spoke, and the silhouette crumpled. There was a shriek of pain and then a moment of absolute silence. Jeffrey's company had drawn the first blood!

Long-drawn howls of rage split the air, and Jeffrey surmised that some of the enemy's Indians were out of hand. The man who had been shot must have been one of their braves. Suddenly a stream of men poured down the opposite side of the gully. The fools were going to storm the dead center of Jeffrey's line.

"Hold your fire, scouts!" he shouted. "Let 'em come closer!"

These must be some of the unreliable Canadian Micmacs, of whom the Senecas had spoken with contempt. Never catch a brave of the Six Nations deliberately risking his neck in anger. Well, *these* savages hadn't long to live. When the first wave hit the bottom, just as it started up the near slope, he would give the order.

"Marksmen, ready. . . . Let fire!"

The Indians dropped in a heap. It was as though a giant scythe had passed over them. Out of the corners of his eyes Jeffrey had seen spurts of flame from the two flanks too. Good for Zeb and Sam! No man could race into that murderous cross fire and live.

"Reload!"

A second wave of Indians started down the far slope. Jeffrey could hear a faraway voice shouting angrily. From the cadence of the speech he could tell the speaker was French. Probably an officer, trying desperately and in vain to call back his hotheaded Indian bucks. Here came the second wave. . . .

"Marksmen, ready! Let fire!"

A second volley rang out, and the new line of braves sprawled one top of the first. There was a sharp silence, and in that instant Jeffrey guessed that the French were tricking him. Perhaps they had deliberately allowed a platoon and more of Micmacs to go to their deaths while their own sharpshooters had been watching for flashes from Jeffrey's guns. Whether that had been the French intention or not, the result was going to be the same. In a moment his company would be wiped out.

"Change your positions, scouts! They've drawn beads on you!" Jeffrey shouted at the top of his lungs, and the instant rustling in the leaves that greeted his command left no doubt that his order was obeyed. The scouts acted none too soon, for a second later there was a concentrated burst of fire from the enemy sector.

A scout cursed softly in the blackness. Then there was silence, broken only by the distant heavy rumble of thunder. But there was no rain here. The stillness was uncanny, with death so close at hand.

"Anybody hurt?" Jeffrey's voice rang out.

"I got me a scratch, Cap'n. But it takes more'n a Froggie bullet t' put a Massachusetter out o' action!" a scout called from somewhere in the lines, and followed his words with a throaty noise, half growl, half chuckle.

The company responded instantly, and ribald shouts were heard from all sides of the perimeter. Jeffrey's heart rose. His men didn't realize it, but the babel they were making must sound like a hundred or more voices. The breeze was from the direction of the French positions, and this was in Jeffrey's favor, for not even a sharp Seneca ear could estimate accurately against the wind.

Sporadic firing broke out again on the left flank. "We got two more o' the vultures, Cap'n! Reckon we'll have t' wait till mornin' t' go git our skelps, though!"

Every few minutes there was a fresh volley of shots, and triumphant yells indicated that the company was taking its toll of the enemy. So far not one scout had been badly hurt.

The right flank had been ominously quiet for a long time. Jeffrey started to shout a warning to Sam Tyng, then stopped. Better *go* over and tell Sam to be on his guard. He crawled laboriously toward the boulders. Suddenly he stopped. There was the sound of a brief struggle just ahead and then a moan. Jeffrey reached behind, and his fingers closed on the handle of his Seneca knife.

He heard someone crawling toward him. The knife was out of his belt in an instant, and he lifted his arm in the air.

"Jeff! In God's name, where are you?"

Jeffrey recognized the voice and dropped his arm. "What happened, Sam?"

"One of the savages sneaked through and knifed poor Morris."

"Is he—"

"Yes. He'd been dozing, I'm afraid. Well, he'll sleep for a long time now." A pause. "I got the varmint, though. And there'll be no more Senecas coming through, Jeff. The boys are ready for 'em."

A picture of Jack Morris filled Jeffrey's mind. The lad had been so eager, so willing to learn.

"Go back to the platoon and put Sergeant Peattie in charge. Then join me in the center of the perimeter." Jeffrey's voice shook, and he knew Sam was peering apprehensively at him through the darkness.

As he crawled back toward the middle of the perimeter Jef-

frey's mind worked fast and hard. He waited until a new volley of fire subsided, then called out softly:

"Young! Dan Young! Join me, will you? You know where."

There was no answer, and for a moment Jeffrey thought his valued guide might have been killed. No, not Dan. It would take more than a regiment of French and Senecas to put him away. Jeffrey listened carefully, his ear pressed against the ground. He took in a lungful of air and was about to call out a second time, when the grizzled old warrior suddenly appeared soundlessly. His jagged-tooth grin flashed only a few inches from Jeffrey's face.

"Ye want me, Cap?" The rasp in Young's voice was sharper than ever.

"Yes, Dan. I—I suppose I should have sent *you* to Colonel March hours ago. We don't know if Kenny worked his way clear, and I can't wait any longer. These buzzards will have us all killed by morning, and the main force will be caught unprepared unless we can sneak a warning to them."

"Ye want me t' go now, eh?" Young's tone was, for him, gently and casually conversational.

"If you think you can navigate safely."

"I been in worse scrapes'n this'n, Cap. I'll make out fine, mebbe pick up a scalp or two. Abso-goddamn-lootly!"

Jeffrey felt the guide's confidence, and his own spirits revived. Possibly he should have sent Dan earlier, but there had always been the chance Kenny would pull it off. But he was surely dead now, and Dan was the last hope. Jeffrey held out a grimy hand and felt it grasped by that huge paw. Then, without another word, Young vanished back into the night. . . .

How long had it been since Young crawled away—five minutes? Ten? Jeffrey found he had lost all sense of time. His heart leaped as a single enemy rifle sounded. No, that was all right. It was from the northwest, and Young had gone south. He would make it if any living being could. Any living being . . .

Jeffrey heard Sam Tyng move slowly toward him. Why, Sam made more noise with one arm or leg than Dan Young made with his whole body. Why had he wanted Sam to join him here? He couldn't recall. His mind must be growing fuzzy, and that was strange, because he had never been less sleepy in his life.

"Don't reckon there are any more savages around the boulders, Jeff. Anyway, none has showed his face—and the men are still waiting for 'em," Sam said as he drew near.

"There's a smell like a fish market hereabouts, and I'm not

fond of it, Sam. The enemy is growing too quiet. He's up to something."

"What?"

"Blast if I know—and blast if I can think of a way to find out."

What was it his father had told him of an incident during a campaign in the East? Blast! He cursed the boy of fourteen who had paid insufficient heed to the old man's lectures. Remember, Jeffrey. Remember!

He chuckled suddenly in the darkness, and Sam Tyng wondered if his superior officer was breaking under the strain.

"Sam," Jeffrey whispered, "I want you to crawl round the company area and collect a little gunpowder from every man. Don't take too much from anyone, but when you return, see that this deerskin bag is full to the brim."

Sam Tyng gasped. "Jeff, are you sure you know what you're——"

"I'm sure. Now hurry! We've no time to waste, man. Oh yes —and tell the men to open their eyes wide when they see daylight!"

Jeffrey chuckled again, and Sam crawled off into the night, muttering unhappily to himself. Jeffrey worked his neck and shoulders, for the strain on his muscles was beginning to tell. He decided to sit up for a minute or two, but he had no sooner settled himself on his rump when an enemy flintlock ball sang through the air a few inches to his left. He flopped back into the dust again. The Senecas were clever at knee-high shooting, and it was better to be uncomfortable—and alive.

It seemed like hours before Jeffrey heard Sam Tyng's labored breathing. A man would be winded for fair after that long a crawl, and Sam didn't know how to suck in his gut and breathe through his mouth Indian-style. Someday Jeffrey would have to teach him the trick.

"Got the powder, Sam?"

"Yes, Captain. It's here—as you've ordered." Sam was being carefully and politely correct, and Jeffrey suddenly realized that his lieutenant thought him mad.

"Give it to me. . . . Ahhh. That's what we need." Jeffrey opened his knapsack and carefully removed Leah's silver trinket box. He had carried it with him since the day he had left the Hill house in Schenectady. Matilda had called him a romantic idiot for lugging the cumbersome thing with him, but Jeffrey had refused to part with it.

He wondered fleetingly if Leah would ever forgive him for what he intended to do with the box now. "Wish me luck, Sam. And if I don't come back, the command is yours."

Jeffrey smeared the outside of the box with a mixture of dirt and saliva, but he took pains to keep the shining silver lining of the box clean. Then he moved off rapidly on his belly, the pouch of powder and the box fastened to his back. He headed straight for the center of the front line and paused briefly as he reached the scouts crouched there.

"If I draw fire, shoot at the enemy powder flashes. And shoot straight." Jeffrey was past his own outpost now and crawling toward the base of the incline.

This was one job he had to perform himself: no commander would request volunteers for something this risky. Besides, with the exception of Dan Young, no man in the company could move with Jeffrey's stealth.

He paused for breath at the bottom of the ravine. So far, all was well. Though the enemy must be no more than thirty yards away now, his presence here was undetected. With suddenly sure, firm hands Jeffrey hauled the silver box from his back, then took from his pocket the length of twine he had used on occasion as a fishing line.

He placed a generous length of the twine at the bottom of the box, then poured the bag of gunpowder on top of it. He grinned quietly as he saw the powder almost fill the whole of the handsome box.

A drop of rain fell on the bridge of his nose, and Jeffrey hurried his preparations. Damnation! This was no time for the rain to start!

His weird work completed, he began the slow, painful climb back up the slope, carefully paying out the length of cord as he crawled over the uneven turf. Every inch of the climb was a torture for his weary muscles, and his blood rang in his ears. He whistled the thrush call that told his marksmen he was coming back.

At last the dim outlines of his nearest outpost became visible in the gloom. As he drew near he saw that the scout was staring at him peculiarly. So the men thought he was crazy too. They would soon learn better. Well, he *hoped* they would. There was precious little gunpowder to spare.

Jeffrey was breathless when he reached the comparative safety of his own lines. Drawing his flint from his pocket, and huddling over the little mechanism so the enemy wouldn't see the sparks,

he carefully set fire to the end of the twine he still kept. Thank God it wasn't raining yet. He saw the spark begin to travel down the length of cord toward the base of the gully. It would take a truly sharp Seneca eye to see the feeble glow of the fuse.

The spark stopped and seemed in danger of going out. Damnation! Had a drop of rain fallen on the yarn? Jeffrey held his breath, then exhaled as he saw the moving spark burn on. It was only a few inches from the open silver box now. Now!

Jeffrey shouted at the top of his lungs. "Keep under cover, men, but open your eyes. We're to have a bit of daylight!"

A second later the spark reached the box, and with a dull, whooshing boom the gunpowder flared. The silver served as an excellent reflector, and for a few precious moments the entire area was illuminated.

The sector to the right was deserted; the enemy in the center was some distance away. But on the tender left flank a large group of Senecas had crept within a few yards of the outposts. Jeffrey caught a glimpse of their vermilion and gold war paint in the glare of the burning powder.

The light flickered out, and both sides seemed frozen, undecided. Jeffrey's voice rang sharp and clear in the night air. "What are you waiting for, you gutter vermin! Take them!"

The scouts needed no further bidding. Forty-five rifles spoke almost as one. Men refired as fast as they could prime and reload their smoking weapons. The left flank erupted in a constant blaze, and in a few minutes the Indians were driven back. Jeffrey knew there would be no more sneak attacks on the flank tonight.

Wearily he accepted Sam Tyng's murmured congratulations. Sam was almost beside himself with joy. The bastards had been beaten off! One company was standing firm against an enemy regiment, perhaps the whole French Army itself!

But the sky was beginning to turn gray far off to the east. In another hour or so it would be daylight, and then the French would know what a pitifully small force opposed them. Unless help arrived soon, the scouts were finished.

The rain began to fall heavily.

Chapter Eighteen

THERE WAS a beautiful sunrise, complete with a rainbow, on the morning of August fourth, but Church's First Scouts didn't notice it. They were too busy awaiting death and grimly preparing to take as many of the French with them as they could. From the frequency of fire, Jeffrey estimated the enemy strength at about four hundred men, and even the First Scouts couldn't expect to win against such odds.

Then Sam Tyng's news confirmed the company's worst fears. While wearily inspecting the still steady line at the rear of the perimeter, he heard a large body of men crashing through the south forest toward the sleepless little band's position. The company would soon be surrounded.

When Jeffrey heard that an attack in force was developing at the rear, his first instinct was to send reinforcements to bolster the thin defenses there. But he had no men to spare, and he knew that any shift in the disposition of his strength would weaken the remaining sectors of his frail front. Most of the scouts would be plainly visible in daylight, despite their artful attempts at concealment, and Jeffrey was afraid that when the French commander saw the pitiful size of his opposing force a quick attack would snuff out the command.

The thud of heavy boots was audible to every member of the company now, and as the sun rose higher Jeffrey watched his hollow-eyed men pull in their belts and count their remaining ammunition. There was no need for giving orders now. Every man knew his fate if he fell into the hands of Seneca warriors. And every man was determined to kill before being killed.

For the twentieth time Jeffrey examined his pistols. Both were loaded. He started to check his rifle, but his hand froze on the powder pan as a wild shout rose up through the trees to the south.

"Yaa-heeoo! Long live the Queen!"

The release from tension was so strong that it could be felt as a positive physical force. The scouts relaxed and grinned. The

men at the rear of the perimeter lowered their rifles and peered with bleary but happy eyes through the thick woods. A moment later the first of Lieutenant Colonel March's battalion appeared. Behind them, three hundred and fifty strong, ranged the soldiers of March's three companies.

The first two men to step into the clearing were Dan Young and Kenny, and directly behind them stepped Colonel March, a pistol in his left hand, a wicked, glittering cutlass in his right. Jeffrey saluted, and as March waved his cutlass in return, the First Scouts broke into hoarse cheers. There was an answering shout from March's companies. Fresh men poured into the clearing, then disappeared again into the woods as they were led to fighting positions by their iron-lunged sergeants. There was nothing quiet about this relief force as it advertised its arrival to the French.

"Glad to see you, Colonel," Jeffrey sad.

"Glad to be here, Wyatt," was the equally laconic response. "How many men have you lost—besides the two who couldn't get through to me?"

"Only one. Jack Morris. Have any trouble finding us, Colonel?"

"None. Dan Young brought us straight to you. Kenny had reached us an hour before, and the battalion was ready to move when Young arrived. He hasn't been off his feet all night."

Jeffrey saw familiar faces among Colonel March's officers as they dashed madly about, directing new arrivals to the same lines which Jeffrey had set up the day before.

"How big an enemy concentration out there, Wyatt?" Colonel March kept a sharp eye on the disposition of his soldiers."

"Can't say for certain, sir. I estimated them at four hundred a while ago. But they're awfully quiet now. You may have scared them. Maybe they pulled out when they heard you coming. You sounded like a full regiment at the very least."

Colonel March smiled. "So I hoped. Our noise wasn't accidental. And if the enemy is running, we'd better catch him, eh?"

"Yes, sir! With your permission, may the scouts lead this attack?"

Jeffrey's tense question was so sincere that Colonel March laughed aloud. "Haven't your boys had a bellyful of fighting already?"

By way of answer Jeffrey raised his gravelly voice. "First Scouts over here," he called. "Double time! Hurry along, men!"

At the sound of their captain's shout the scouts decided they weren't so tired, after all, and quickly pushed and squirmed their

way through the ever-increasing masses of soldiers to the center of the perimeter. They made no attempt to form into ranks, for the captain wasn't wasting time on formalities.

"The Senecas are running away, and their French friends are going with them," he yelled. "I'm curious to see what they look like in daylight. Want to come with me—and find out?"

The intensity of the scouts' answering roar would have shaken the very soul of Baron de St. Castine had he heard it. Jeffrey plunged down the slope of the gully, the company at his heels. Dan Young, showing the strain of his bone-wearying hours of walking, panted along at Jeffrey's side. From the rear came the shouts of Colonel March's officers as they hastily re-formed their companies and took up the chase. They would have to move fast to keep up with his scouts, Jeffrey thought.

There was no attempt to maintain any semblance of quiet as the scouts and soldiers trotted through the thick forest. After they had gone a quarter of a mile Dan Young tapped Jeffrey on the shoulder. "Froggies are makin' as much noise as we'ns, Cap. Listen."

Jeffrey could hear the splintering of dry sticks in the distance as the French rear guard beat its hasty retreat. He increased his pace, and Dan Young soon dropped behind. In a few moments Jeffrey saw a dark shape moving away through the trees ahead and, raising his rifle as he ran, he fired.

After a day and night of husbanding ammunition and powder, the scouts needed no further invitation to carnage, and Jeffrey dropped to his stomach as a heavy burst of fire crackled overhead, and twenty bullets sped after the retreating enemy.

Unfortunately for his men, the leader of the French force chose to stop and fight. Herding his scattered troops together, he turned and charged. But the scouts were waiting for him, and so was the first company of Colonel March's battalion. The blue and white uniforms of the Frenchmen made magnificent targets, for they could be plainly seen through the trees.

Jeffrey was unconscious of enemy fire, and only when someone near him cried out or moaned was he aware that the French were putting up a stiff fight. He kept shooting until his ammunition was exhausted, then snatched a pouch of bullets from the dead body of a square-jawed militiaman and resumed action. The scouts poured an unending stream of hot lead into the constantly replenished wave of blue and white, and Jeffrey rapidly revised his opinion of the French Army. They might throw their lives away carelessly, but they were no cowards.

A sudden heavy volley broke out on the left flank, and Jeffrey saw out of the corner of his eye that Colonel March, while allowing one of his companies to remain with the scouts, had moved his remaining two companies to the right and rear of the French.

Instinct told Jeffrey that the battle had reached its climactic pitch. Scarcely realizing what he was doing, he screamed, "Death to the French!" and started forward at a dead run, the scouts and militiamen picking up his cry and dashing after him.

No one who took part in that grim struggle in the forest was ever clear in his mind about the events of the next quarter of an hour. Death distributed her favors with an impartial hand, and scouts, militiamen, and French soldiers watered the thick tree roots liberally with their blood. When it was all over, one hundred and ten Frenchmen had lost their lives, and sixty English colonials would never rise again. Most of the English dead were Colonel March's militiamen, for the scouts, more accustomed to the hazardous business of fighting from tree to tree, were better prepared for this kind of warfare.

A young Gascon lieutenant was the senior surviving officer of what had once been a proud French battalion from Quebec and Montreal. Weeping in humiliation, he told Colonel March and Jeffrey the story of his ill-fated unit.

The battalion had been raised for the defense of Port Royal and had marched from Montreal, accompanied by forty Micmacs and a large number of Senecas. En route east, they had lost their way, and when they had stumbled across Jeffrey's scouts they first thought they had made contact with a friendly force. A Seneca runner had convinced them otherwise, and they had laid siege to the scout company. Colonel de Rochefort, commanding the battalion, had pictured a triumphal entry for himself into Port Royal. Knowing that his troops vastly outnumbered the scouts, he had spent the earlier part of the night planning a parade down the Rue St. Denis, with himself at the head, followed by his victorious soldiers, while a miserable band of English prisoners guarded by Indians would have brought up the rear. Colonel March and Jeffrey knew the rest.

The young lieutenant, with eighty able-bodied survivors of the battalion, was marched off to the rear, the first leg of a long journey to Boston—and a captivity that would not end until the conclusion of the war.

Ten scouts were dead and another twelve were wounded. The latter were carried or helped back to the oncoming main body of the army. Their prospects were dismal, for the surgeons would

further maim them with searing irons and sicken them with drugs compounded of herbs and ignorance.

The scouts who were still healthy threw themselves to the ground and promptly fell asleep. Colonel March's men, less weary, were ordered to form a line of defense in case of attack by the missing Senecas. The colonel himself, accompanied by a numb, uncommunicative Jeffrey, began the half-mile walk back to the gully where the first major encounter of the campaign had taken place. As they went the battalion commander explained that they would have to find army headquarters immediately. Colonel Church was hurrying north with the first regiment and would deal severely with them if they failed to report as soon as possible.

It is doubtful that Jeffrey heard one word that was said to him. His thoughts had reverted to the moment when Leah's silver box had served to light up the ravine, and his one object now was to recover that box. As he and Colonel March arrived at the gully a group of officers sat on the near side, sufficiently far from the bodies of the slain Micmacs to be undisturbed by the odors of death. Church himself was holding an emergency meeting of his commanders in the field, and his expression clearly indicated that someone had reported the results of the battle to him already.

Jeffrey failed to see Colonel Church, however. It took concentration to keep his rubbery, spongy legs in motion, and walking as though in a trance, he stumbled to the bottom of the gully. The eyes of his superiors were on him as he fell to his knees beside a charred silver box. Colonel Church, who had already heard the part it had played in the all-night vigil, silenced the murmur of his officers with a sharp gesture. No one said anything as Jeffrey rose to his feet and, hugging the box, saw the colonel in chief for the first time.

Walking slowly and painfully, he started back up the slope. He knew Colonel Church and the others were watching him, but he was too exhausted to stand straight. He had a desire to sit down—no, to lie down—and go to sleep immediately, and he would have fallen had not Colonel Schuyler and an unfamiliar lieutenant colonel raced to his side. They half carried him to the group that spread out in front of Colonel Church. Not until the next day did he remember that they had all stood up at his approach, and still later he recognized it as a spontaneous gesture honoring a man who had fought and won a battle against great odds.

"Well done, Wyatt," the colonel said. "You've justified my trust in you."

"Thank you, sir," Jeffrey croaked, and sat down. Too late he remembered he hadn't saluted, and when he belatedly brought up his hand he was surprised at the laughter he caused.

Colonel Church waved his hands for silence. "Captain Wyatt," he said, "I've been waiting for you before making definite plans. From what Colonel March has told me in the last few minutes, it's clear that we have *not* stumbled across St. Castine's army, as I'd hoped.

"No, then the French know we're on the move and that we're close to them. So I feel there's a need to step up our rate of advance. What's your view, Captain?"

Jeffrey tried to speak clearly and cursed himself for his thick tongue. "I think, sir," he said slowly, "I think we have no time to waste. The battalion we fought last night—and this morning, with Colonel March's fine help—was probably only one of many marching to Port Royal from every part of New France. The longer it takes us to go there, the stronger they'll be."

Colonel Church's eyes swept around the semicircle of officers triumphantly. "Those are my own sentiments, Captain. Possibly you'll agree with me, then, rather than with those among us who have urged a cautious course. By ordinary march the St. John River—our rendezvous with our supply ships and cannon—is six days away. I've proposed that we cut the time to three days."

"We can do it in three days, sir." Jeffrey was having trouble keeping his eyes open.

"Excellent. We'll resume our march at two o'clock this afternoon, gentlemen." Colonel Church's voice was matter-of-fact, but the pulse at the base of his throat beat noticeably. "That's four and one half hours from now. Colonel Tyng, you'll be good enough to assign men from your headquarters detachment to bury our dead—and the French dead. Take particular care that Colonel —uh—what was his name, March?"

"Lieutenant Colonel de Rochefort, sir."

"Yes. De Rochefort. Take care that his grave is well marked. He was a brave man." The colonel in chief paused, thought a moment, then added, "Oh, Colonel Schuyler. Be good enough to send twenty men from your regiment to the First Scouts. They need replacements. Captain Wyatt!"

Jeffrey was dozing and pulled his eyes open with an effort. "Yes, sir?" he mumbled.

"Do you want Colonel Schuyler to supply you with a junior officer? I've been told you lost your ensign last night."

"If you give me a choice, Colonel, there's a man I'd like to promote from the ranks."

"Mmm." Benjamin Church pulled off his cap and scratched his close-cropped head. "The men always respond to one of their own. Who is this fellow?"

Jeffrey drew in his breath. "Sergeant Peattie, sir. One of the Pennsylvanians. He commanded his platoon after Jack Morris was killed. And there's no ensign in the army who could have done a better job. Nor a lieutenant."

There was a tense silence. Almost every officer present knew Sergeant Peattie's background. A decade before he and his family had lived in Salem, Massachusetts, and during the hysterical witch hunts Peattie's mother and sister had been accused of witchcraft. The two women, accompanied by the nineteen-year-old boy, had fled for their lives, seeking refuge in Pennsylvania, where a calmer, more tolerant atmosphere prevailed. Peattie's womenfolk had both died in an Indian raid on the frontier, yet when recruiting agents for Colonel Church's expedition had appeared, some deeply hidden loyalty to Massachusetts had been aroused in Peattie and he had volunteered for action. Many of the Massachusetts men regarded him with suspicion tinged with fear, and Jeffrey knew there would be opposition to his suggestion. But Peattie deserved a commission, and as his advice had been asked by Colonel Church, Peattie was the man he recommended.

"Surely there are others better qualified for the post, sir." For the first time Jeffrey became aware of the presence of Major Hilton, executive officer and adjutant to Colonel March. Hilton's thin chest was pushed forward, and he nibbled nervously at the thin wisp of brownish mustache.

A cold rage filled Jeffrey, and despite the presence of four full colonels, he felt a burning desire to put Major Hilton in his place. "Good morning, Major," he said with elaborate politeness. "I missed you at breakfast this morning. I presume you were delayed by your—duties—when Colonel March joined the battle."

Major Hilton stared at Jeffrey. "I fear Captain Wyatt is overwrought, sir," he said. "If you wish, I'd be glad to command the scout companies, and Captain Wyatt might be given time to recover."

Jeffrey wanted to hit that simpering face, but the officer seated beside him guessed his intent and held his arm in a firm grip.

He struggled to break free, but he was too tired. Then Colonel Church raised his dry, clipped voice, and Jeffrey relaxed.

"As you're anxious to assume extra duties, Hilton, you may go forward and secure a written report from the commanders of the Second and Third Scouts. I want to know why they failed to support Captain Wyatt's action last night. I'll expect the report before we march this afternoon." The colonel in chief rose to his feet and appeared to be much taller than he actually was. "Captain Wyatt will remain in command of the scout companies so long as my word is final in this army," he stated flatly. "Wyatt, Colonel Gorham will have a commission prepared for your Sergeant Peattie. You may present it to the sergeant when you wake up. I assume you'll want to nap for a few hours, so we'll disturb you no more. Dismissed, gentlemen."

The regimental and battalion commanders grinned as they stood up and moved off to their respective commands. Trust Ben Church to be as fair as he was brutal. Jeffrey would have appreciated those friendly smiles had he seen them, but he was already snoring hard.

On the following day four thousand men swore under their breaths as they marched at a near trot along the rocky coast. In the next forty-eight hours their curses would become louder and bolder, for they were traveling with unprecedented speed toward the St. John River—and their eventual appointment with the enemy. Yet despite their suffering they looked up to Colonel Benjamin Church with a grudging admiration bordering on awe.

The colonel was everywhere. At dawn he marched with the scouts. Late morning found him inspecting a supply platoon at the rear and lashing stragglers back into line with cheerful invectives. When the army stopped briefly for breath and food he conferred with his colonels, then ruthlessly ordered the immediate death of three men who had attempted to desert. By midafternoon he had rejoined the scouts at the head of the long column for the third time in a day.

Constantly on the move up and down the lines, he marched half again as far as anyone else, yet he was tireless. When men many years his junior stumbled and wanted to stop, his own enormous will to go on was imparted to them through some magic personal magnetism which he alone possessed.

In the late afternoon one of Colonel Schuyler's companies was near open revolt. The men grumbled incessantly, and their officers had given up trying to silence the insults hurled at the com-

mander, whom they held responsible for their misery. Yet when he appeared suddenly on the trail, looking fresh and fit, the company fell silent. The colonel waved and shouted a few words of encouragement. That was all. It was enough. As he was swallowed up by the dust of the next company the grumbling was resumed. But now it was directed against the French and Senecas.

The march was continued until darkness made further movement impossible. But the weary men who munched salt pork and cold potatoes were disappointed if they thought they could stay off their feet until morning. A bright moon came up, and the colonel in chief set the columns in motion once again. They marched for three hours by moonlight that night, and while some of the officers were alarmed at the colonel's reckless expenditure of human energy, they were forced to admit that they were three hours closer to the St. John River.

Junior officers and sergeants shook off their own weariness in the hour before dawn, stamped about to restore circulation to their stiff and battered legs, then bullied and cajoled the army into wakefulness. As the first streaks of daylight appeared on the eastern horizon the colonials were breaking camp and again preparing to advance.

There were times during those unbelievable seventy-two hours when Jeffrey was certain he couldn't walk another step. At such moments he thought of Leah. This method of keeping himself aroused was successful for the first two days, but by the third he was incapable of thinking of anything save the agony of putting one foot ahead of the other. How his men managed to maintain the power of locomotion, he didn't know. But he suspected that the tonic of Colonel Church's presence was responsible.

The scouts always knew when the colonel in chief was approaching, for they could hear the cheers becoming louder and louder each time he made his way toward the front. Even before they saw him, scouts who were floundering found some new source of energy that lightened their steps. Yesterday—or was it the day before?—the colonel had loudly remarked to Jeffrey, "I belong up here with you lads." From then on the scouts considered him one of the company.

Jeffrey wondered if the commander used the same set words for every individual unit in the army. Certainly they were all inspired. There was something almost superhuman about Ben Church's never slackening drive. And no detail was too small to catch his eye. In response to his explicit orders the scouts marched

less than half a mile ahead of Colonel March's battalion now. And the two companies of Indian scouts which had remained invisible during the battle of the gully were constantly within Jeffrey's range of vision on either flank as he and Dan Young set the pace for the regiments.

An hour after sundown on the third night Jeffrey was forced to admit he could go no farther. His men were battered into such a state of exhaustion that he doubted if they could fight should the enemy burst upon them now. When they stopped to rest in a bare field that had once been the farm of a prosperous citizen of New France, Jeffrey was for the first time unable to fulfill his duties as a commanding officer. Some of the scouts were asleep as soon as their backsides hit the ground, and although Jeffrey knew they should eat before dropping off, he couldn't find the energy to make his way from man to man. He compromised by sending his junior officer, Ensign Peattie, around the company area. Peattie, grateful to Jeffrey for the new epaulet on his shoulder, seemed willing to forgo his own food and rest for another thirty minutes, and his strong voice was the only sound in the encampment.

Jeffrey opened his knapsack and pulled out a strip of venison and a handful of ground corn. He realized the need for food, but the unvarying diet was distasteful. He couldn't rid himself of the notion that the corn tasted of the trail dust which filled his nostrils all day. Sam Tyng, sprawled nearby, was having an equally difficult time with his unappetizing supper, and his bobbing Adam's apple registered a silent protest.

"Sam, have you checked the Second and Third Companies?" As executive and adjutant for the First Scouts, Sam had been saddled with the most unwelcome administrative chores of the other two companies.

"Yes, Jeff. They're bedded down. Between you and me"—his voice dropped to a hoarse whisper—"I don't think those damned Indians will march again tomorrow. If we make 'em, they'll disappear into the forests. You should have heard those Algonquins tonight. If they ever catch Colonel Church alone they'll scalp him."

Jeffrey dumped the corn back into his knapsack and sighed. "We'd better tell the colonel there may be trouble."

Sam Tyng laughed without mirth. "Know what he'll say? 'I expect *all* scout companies to be ready to march at dawn. See to it, Captain Wyatt. See to it, Lieutenant Tyng.' So—we will. Got any ideas on how we'll do it?"

"No. . . I wonder where the colonel is. He was around here somewhere a few minutes ago." Jeffrey raised himself on one elbow and looked around.

"He and Dan Young went off for a little stroll. Reckon they wanted exercise." Sam always spoke in a slow drawl when he was sarcastic. "I saw them walking off together—that way." He inclined his head toward the north.

Jeffrey yawned and made no reply. If Colonel Church and Dan Young, both grandfathers, were foolish enough to walk during these precious hours of rest, it was their own affair. Jeffrey dismissed them from his mind and devoted himself to an immediate problem. Should he dig himself a sleeping trough? If he did, he would enjoy the night in greater comfort. But did he have sufficient energy to scoop out a place in the dirt?

Half a dozen figures approached the group from the north, and Jeffrey jumped to his feet, fatigue and sleep quickly forgotten. He recognized Colonel Church at once, but who were the men with him? And, most important, who was the impressive figure in the white naval uniform?

Sam Tyng pulled himself together, and he and Jeffrey stood openmouthed as they watched Colonel Church and his companions approach. The man in white was laughing and talking animatedly. The colonel in chief saw the two disreputable-looking scouts and called to them.

"Gentlemen, come over here, please! Commodore Newton, I'm pleased to present my scout commanders—who failed miserably tonight. Captain Wyatt. Lieutenant Tyng."

Mystified, Jeffrey and Sam saluted mechanically. How in blazes had a commodore in spotless uniform appeared out of nowhere in this Godforsaken land?

Colonel Church's eyes danced. "The army should have marched another two hundred and fifty yards, gentlemen. What seems to be a new stretch of forest ahead there is nothing but a small clump of trees. Beyond it is the St. John. Our supply ships are riding at anchor only a few yards from us."

Colonel Church's voice carried across the field, and the scouts who were still awake forgot their aching bones and raced off to see the ships. The colonel asked Jeffrey to notify the regiments that the river had been reached, but it was unnecessary to send men to the rear with the welcome news. By a form of necromancy unique to armies in the field, the tidings spread rapidly, and within less than thirty minutes half the army and more had

gathered on the banks of the river to see the frigates riding at anchor.

No one who had endured the three-day march would ever forget that night. Colonel Church ordered barrels and crates of food brought ashore; and, assured by the heavy-set, cautious Commodore Newton that no enemy was in the vicinity, he permitted fires to be lighted. For the first time in many days the army ate a hot meal. And there was even greater rejoicing when casks of rum were hauled from the holds of the vessels and every man was issued a generous tot.

Colonel Church and a select group of officers dined on the deck of Commodore Newton's flagship, the *Mermaid,* and were served by stewards who passed back and forth from the galley in an unending procession. Jeffrey was the lowest-ranking officer present, and he said little as he wolfed down an enormous meal. He was unable to rid himself of the feeling that the solid oak deck, the brightly polished metal of the fixtures, and, above all, the snow-white tablecloth and the chinaware heaped with delicacies were all part of a dream. Strange, but an hour ago he gagged at the mere thought of food. Now he couldn't eat enough.

Those who claimed that Benjamin Church didn't know how to relax were right. Even as he gnawed on breast of partridge he discussed battle strategy, for the waves which cradled the *Mermaid* were the waters of the Bay of Fundy, which Baron St. Castine were said to regard as his personal sea. The army was now entering Acadia, or, as the English preferred to call it, Nova Scotia. If the regiments boarded Commodore Newton's ships they could be sailed directly across the bay to Port Royal in a few hours. But the town's famous Citadel, which faced the sea, was equipped with guns capable of smashing the flotilla to splinters. Church's plan from the beginning had been to march all the way around the peninsula in the hope of luring Baron St. Castine's army from its fortress. And despite the temptation of an easy sea journey, he was going to adhere to that plan. English colonial hopes had been shattered too often by the Citadel's cannon.

The army wou' rest tomorrow, but the crews of the ships would learn what it meant to serve Benjamin Church. Food and ammunition would be unloaded, beginning promptly at dawn. And even more important, the army's artillery would be rolled and lifted and hauled to dry land. Jeffrey thought it might be preferable to sail the flotilla along the shore line and unload the cannon when .the army met St. Castine's forces, thus enabling

the regiments to begin their final march sooner. He was about to say something to that effect when Colonel Church explained his reasons for bringing the big guns ashore now. Jeffrey sank deeper into the padded chair and was glad he had kept his mouth shut. When the two armies clashed, Colonel Church said, he wanted the cannon ready for instant action. Carrying the guns and their heavy iron ball shot to shore was a long and ticklish operation, and if they waited until they met the French, the battle might be over before one heated lump of metal could be fired.

The bulk of supplies would be carried by water, however, in the shore-hugging whaleboats which had been brought specifically for this purpose. The boats would be lowered from the decks of the frigates at dawn too. And the ships of the line would sail across the bay to Port Royal, taking care to stay out of range of the Citadel's guns until Commodore Newton saw the fleur-de-lis hauled down and the Queen's banner rise in its place.

One of the commodore's aides, who had been making copious notes, lifted his head. "Sir," he said, "I beg leave to ask a question. In the event that the French—er—defeat us, do we cruise around the bay to pick up the—er—survivors?"

The army men looked at the naval officer with stony eyes. For an uncomfortable moment no one said anything. Then Colonel Church spoke, and, considering the provocation, his tone was exceptionally mild. "We're making no plans based on the contingency of defeat, mister. We don't anticipate defeat." He looked around the table slowly, his eyes resting briefly on each of his unit commanders. Then he lifted his glass of water, the only non-alcoholic beverage at the table. "To victory, gentlemen!"

Jeffrey woke up slowly. His tongue felt dry and there was a slight buzzing in his head, but otherwise he felt fine. His strongest desire was to take a bath—his first in two weeks—and when he arrived at the riverbank he was surprised to see that hundreds of his comrades had the same idea. He plunged into the icy water of the St. John and swam about until his head cleared. Then he cleaned his teeth with a soft twig and a bit of salt, a habit he had formed while living among the Senecas, and finally he dragged all his clothes into the river and pounded them clean between small flat rocks.

Considerably refreshed, he picked up his clothes and strolled back to the company area slowly. As he neared the scouts' encampment another odor struck his nostrils, and his mouth watered. Some culinary genius was frying bacon. In practically

no time at all Jeffrey stood warming his still damp and naked body at the fire, chewing happily on dripping chunks of thick bacon and fried corn cakes which had been cooked in bacon fat.

The sun rose higher, and although Jeffrey's clothes were dry now, he was in no hurry to put them on. The cool breeze and warm sun felt good on his relaxed body. Finally he reached for his socks and shoes, then his breeches.

He was buttoning his shirt when Ensign Peattie strode rapidly into the clearing, calling, "Where's the captain? Any of you men seen the captain?"

"I'm over here Peattie." Some instinct prompted Jeffrey to buckle on his sword.

Peattie hurried to him. "Colonel wants you right away, sir. He's on the beach."

Jeffrey started to run, and Ensign Peattie jogged along at his side. "Something brewing, Peattie?"

"Yes, *sir*. A couple of Micmacs were attracted by our fires, and sentries picked them up. They smelled our food, I reckon. They were hungry. Anyway, sir—it seems they were members of one of Castywine's scout companies. Until they deserted, that is."

"Are they telling what they know?"

"They've said plenty, sir. But Colonel Church wants *you* to speak to 'em. He says you'll know if they're telling the truth."

Jeffrey felt uncomfortable. "I know the Senecas," he said, "but the Micmacs are new to me. Never heard a word of their language."

Ensign Peattie was the most newly commissioned officer in the army, but he knew how to steer clear of embroilment in his superiors' disagreements. "Yes, sir," he said.

They were still running as they came through the clump of trees near the riverbank, and Jeffrey forgot Ensign Peattie's presence. The crews of the frigates were swarming over ships and beach, and great mounds of supplies were being piled in high heaps by green-coated marines. All were sweating profusely, and apparently none had the time or inclination to watch the drama being enacted only a few yards away down the beach.

Two stakes had been driven into the muddy sand, and brush was carefully placed at the base of each. Nearby, bound hand and foot, stood two squat, swarthy Micmacs. They were surrounded by a group of officers, and every few seconds one of these worthies would brandish a sword in the direction of the captives. Jeffrey saw that both Indians were bleeding from several small sword wounds.

Colonel Church, his head lowered, his hands clasping and unclasping behind his back, was pacing up and down. It was the only time Jeffrey ever saw him flustered.

"Captain Wyatt at report, sir," he said, standing directly in the colonel's path.

"Want to know what you think of these savages' story, Wyatt," the colonel barked without preamble. "They say St. Castine has moved out of Port Royal with an army of three thousand men. He's rounding the peninsula now—according to the Micmacs. Thinks we're going to sail across the bay and wants to catch us before we can embark. Started as soon as he heard about our frigates. Some Indians spotted the ships three days ago and crossed the bay in a canoe to tell St. Castine."

The colonel in chief was still pacing, and Jeffrey fell in beside him. It was the only way to carry on a conversation. "In other words, Colonel," he said carefully, "Baron de St. Castine has guessed wrong. And we'll have the advantage of surprise when we meet him halfway up the peninsula and attack him."

"Yes. Provided these heathens are telling us the truth. If they were decent Christians I'd make them take an oath on James's Bible. But—I don't know what to believe. Wouldn't put it past St. Castine to trick us. He's got to fight *outside* Port Royal, of course. His army is useless if it's cooped up in that cramped Citadel. Three thousand men. Ha! They'd stumble all over each other. But he may be luring us into a trap. Be just like him. Never trusted a Frenchman. Don't trust any now. Want you to talk to 'em first."

Jeffrey took a deep breath. "May I conduct the questioning any way I deem proper, sir?"

Colonel Church threw him a hard, curious glance. "Do what you please. But do it now."

"Yes, sir." Jeffrey saluted and wheeled toward the two captives. There were several lieutenant colonels and majors in the crowd surrounding them, but Jeffrey wasted no time. "Gentlemen," he called, "I'll thank you to retire. I want a few moments alone with these Micmacs."

Startled at Jeffrey's rudeness to superiors, the offcers nevertheless complied, for they were aware of Colonel Church's presence in the background and rightly assumed that he had agreed to the procedure. What they did not realize was that Jeffrey's brusqueness was caused by his intense dislike of

unnecessary abuse, a feeling which stemmed from the memory of his own sufferings.

Jeffrey ignored them and concentrated on the Indians. The Micmacs spoke French fairly well and had acquired a smattering of Seneca and English. Using the three languages, Jeffrey was able to converse with them without too much difficulty. In substance, they repeated to him what they had previously told Colonel Church under duress. Satisfied, Jeffrey returned to the commander's side.

"It's my belief the Micmacs are telling the truth, sir," he said. "Baron de St. Castine left Port Royal two and a half or three days ago and is rounding the peninsula in this direction." He took a deep breath. "From my knowledge of Indians, Colonel, these men won't change their story under torture. So—I've made a bargain with them."

Colonel Church's bushy gray eyebrows shot up. "What sort of bargain, Captain Wyatt?"

"The Micmacs are to remain with us. If we find they've been truthful, we'll give them their freedom. If not—well, they know what will happen to them."

"You've already given them your word?"

"Yes, sir." Jeffrey's chin shot forward. "You left me free to deal with these men in my own way, sir. So—I did."

"So you did." A gleam of wry amusement appeared in Colonel Church's eyes. "If this expedition fails because we've acted on misinformation, Governor Dudley, Governor Cornbury, and the rest will hold me responsible. Not you. However, your judgment regarding these heathens is no doubt as sound as my own." He paused and stared out into space. "We'll march at dawn tomorrow, thus assuming that the Micmacs' intelligence is correct. If it is not, I'll see that you're given a reserved seat at my court-martial, Wyatt."

Late in the afternoon Jeffrey was inspecting the rifles and ammunition of all three scout companies. Once the men had been told they would soon meet St. Castine's full army, there had been a wild flurry of activity, and every available bullet mold had been worked feverishly. Now nothing remained but to make sure the scouts' rifles were in good order.

Jeffrey and Sam Tyng made their way up and down the long lines of fighting men, examining each rifle minutely. Privately Sam thought the inspection was a waste of time, for neither the colonials nor their Indian allies wanted to die, and every scout,

white or brown, recognized the absolute necessity of going into battle with a clean, well-primed gun. But Jeffrey, as usual, was leaving nothing to chance.

The two Indian companies had been dismissed, and Jeffrey was slowly going over the equipment of the New Hampshiremen when Ensign Peattie interrupted him.

"There's a sailor here to see you, Captain. Says he's a friend of yours."

Benjie! In the excitement and last-minute preparations for battle Jeffrey had neglected to look for his old companion.

"My compliments, Mr. Peattie, and ask him if he can wait until the inspection is finished. And tell him I'd appreciate his company at dinner this evening."

Ten minutes later Jeffrey clasped the hand of an awed and silent Benjie. The knowledge that Jeffrey commanded an important unit of the army was one thing, but actually seeing him in the field with his three companies of scouts was another. When dinner was served Benjie was even more uncomfortable, for despite the attempts of Lieutenants Tyng and Dobie and of Ensign Peattie to put him at his ease, he was shy in the presence of officers. Long years of viewing anyone who wore epaulets as a natural enemy made it impossible for him to unbend. So he ate silently, answering in short monosyllables the friendly questions about the flotilla's voyage north and about his own whaleboat command.

At last the supper was finished. Jeffrey wiped his mouth on a rag that had recently lined a powder keg and passed it politely to the officer on his right. Benjie, who had been waiting for this moment, tugged at his sleeve.

"Jeff," he mumbled, "can we go somewheres to talk private for a minute?"

Jeffrey led the way to a deserted corner of the field. "You're not in trouble, Benjie?"

"No, sir. I—well—Jeff, have you noticed the *Seraph* at anchor out there?"

"Yes, I saw her. She's as ugly as she was the day we were tossed aboard her at Plymouth." The old bitterness crept back into Jeffrey's voice.

"Well, you might be wantin' to lay on me with a cat-o'-nine for this, Jeff, but while we were settin' around waitin' for the army t' show up, I rowed over t' the *Seraph* and asked t' see Cap'n Riddle."

"What happened?" Try as he might, Jeffrey could not prevent a tightening in his vocal cords.

"He didn't r'member me. He's brought a lot o' bond servants over t' the Colonies in his day."

"In his slave ship."

Benjie ignored the interruption and continued eagerly: "He r'membered *you*, Jeff. He got all red in the face when I mentioned your name. Yes, sir. Cap'n Riddle said he'd been aimin' t' search for you when he goes t' New York Town t' pick up a cargo after the campaign. He—he wants t' see you, Jeff."

Jeffrey bent down, neatly plucked a tall weed, and chewed on its white stem. He gave no sign that he had heard his friend's remark.

"He wants t' see you, Jeff," Benjie insisted. "He's only five minutes' walk down the beach. We can hail the *Seraph*, and they'll send a boat ashore for you."

With a violent gesture Jeffrey threw the weed away. He hoped the twilight was deep enough so Benjie couldn't see the distress in his eyes.

"No, Benjie," he said in a low voice. "I can't. Not right now. Maybe—later. If I live through the battle. After we've taken Port Royal. Then maybe I—— Damnation, Benjie. No! That part of my life is dead. And I won't open my own grave."

Chapter Nineteen

For two days, as Bejamin Church's army plowed its way up the Acadian peninsula, there was no sign of life anywhere. Neat French farmhouses were boarded up, and fields were bare. The woods were still, and the scouts saw no wild life. Even the birds seemed to know that disaster and death were waiting for men, and the army awoke each morning in a land as silent as it was hostile.

Nerves grew taut, and there was little conversation as the regiments marched toward their appointment with the enemy. Rifles and flintlocks were loaded at all times, and when the troops fell asleep at night, sergeants made their rounds carefully to see that no soldier had removed his shoes.

Colonel Church traveled constantly with the scouts now, and the columns were wedged together so compactly that the first platoon of Colonel March's battalion was within sight of the scouts' rear guard at all times. Jeffrey's companies were strung out across a single uninterrupted front, the whites in the middle, the Algonquins on the left, the Mohawks on the right.

Although knapsacks were jammed with food from the supply ships, no one ate much. Men who ordinarily wolfed down huge quantities of meat at every sitting found their appetites disappearing. Men who drank only occasionally were dry-mouthed and craved rum as desperately as the worst sots of the Boston and New York water fronts. Those who used snuff couldn't get enough of it. And there was scarcely a man in the army who didn't think constantly of women.

The third morning dawned insignificantly. Jeffrey ate a silent breakfast with Colonel Church and the colonel's aides. The scouts rubbed sleep from their dusty eyes, tightened their belts a notch, and picked up their rifles with stiff fingers. A runner from Colonel Tyng appeared and informed the colonel in chief that the artillery, which was now placed directly behind the first regiment (in defiance of long-established custom which decreed

that artillery must always come last), was ready to march. A runner from Colonel Walton appeared and informed the colonel in chief that the troops at the rear of the column were ready to march. Colonel Church nodded to Jeffrey, who gave a low-pitched command. The scouts formed in two lines, the second ten yards behind the first, and moved off. The day had started. . . .

A member of the First Company of Church's Scouts, a sincere, earnest, and slow-witted New Hampshireman named Abel Flander, aged twenty-two years, achieved a brief moment of glory in the woods of Acadia at nine o'clock in the morning on that sunny day.

Separated from his companions on either side by four yards of black Acadian earth, Abel Flander planted one foot sturdily before the other as he marched, and thought of the fence back home that needed mending. He was wondering whether Pa could mend that fence alone when the line of scouts reached the summit of a long, rolling hill which dipped sharply into a little valley, then reappeared as another hill. Abel Flander had no way of knowing that the area between, once a portion of a farmer's proud acres, would soon become a living hell.

The hill ahead, like its twin, was thickly wooded, and as Abel gazed toward it with half-losed eyes he saw something move. Thinking it was a deer, he was about to call to his closest companion, for deer, like other game, had disappeared of late. Then the dark shadow moved again, and Abel knew it was a man. Like a true frontiersman, he shot first and spoke afterward. His rifle sounded the alarm as a figure in blue and white pitched forward grotesquely and rolled part way down the hill.

"I seen the Frenchies, Cap'n Wyatt!" Abel Flander shouted, but his words were lost as the scouts froze, dropped to their stomachs, and opened fire. The first men of Colonel March's battalion raced forward and kneeled in a second line behind the scouts, while the next arrivals, firing from a standing position, formed a third row.

Within a matter of seconds the peaceful little valley was a bedlam. The sharp dry odor of burning powder killed the scent of pines, and the shrieks of men dying for their English Queen or French King filled the air. Colonel Church's artillery was rushed froward and placed carefully behind the bulwark of the hill. The gunners were so anxious for action that their first shots were fired as soon as the cold iron balls could be loaded into the muzzles of the big guns. It was at least an hour before

the first heated ammunition was sent speeding to its destructive mission.

Colonel Church set up his post of command a few feet behind the crest of the hill and, blithely disregarding pleas that he direct the battle from a safer spot, he ordered Colonel Schuyler's men to take up a position to the left of the first regiment. The colonel in chief's experienced eye told him that the level ground and high stalks of wheat on the left flank would make ideal terrain for an enemy advance, so he wanted his troops to be there first. They were.

No one, least of all Colonel Church, underestimated the skill and courage of Colonel Baron André Francis Etienne Charles de St. Castine. From the moment he marched out of Port Royal this fabulous Frenchman who had once commanded regiments of regular troops in Europe was prepared for instant action. Without question the oldest man on the field, he was also the shrewdest, and his first tactic was one of surprise—coupled with the shock of strength. He threw a full regiment against the point where Church's line was weakest, the junction of Tyng's and Schuyler's regiments. The men from Massachusetts and New York, from New Hampshire and Maine and Connecticut and Virginia, gaped as wave after wave of Frenchmen in shining blue and white rolled toward them.

Despite the carnage in their ranks, the Englishmen—and their comrades whose fathers had come from Holland and Germany and Sweden and Ireland—held their fire as long as they could. Church's army watched that magnificent sea of white and blue advance without firing a shot. Then a company of Seneca warriors swept from behind the crest of the opposite hill, and the spell was broken. Even disciplined troops could no longer control their desperate desire to shoot.

Uniforms of white and blue were mowed down by a solid scythe of bullets, and those who lived were forced to beat a retreat to the comparative safety of their own lines. But Colonel Baron André de St. Castine's strategy had been as effective as it was costly. Samuel Tyng and Kent Schuyler estimated their losses and sent frantic runners to the colonel in chief. Shadrack Walton's third regiment moved up to the front line just in time to take the brunt of the punishment from St. Castine's newly arrived artillery.

Twice more the French charged, and twice more they were driven back. Then Church's forces tried a sally, and a hundred wives and mothers of New England were bereaved. The English

withdrew from the valley. There was a lull for a short time while both armies regrouped, then the sound of rifle and artillery fire once more made coherent thought impossible.

A little later hundreds of Senecas broke from the French lines, screaming and brandishing axes; it seemed inevitable that they would overrun the English right. But Colonel Church's son Constant, a quiet, modest captain who commanded a company of equally unassuming farmer-volunteers from western Massachusetts, became a man inspired. Waving his sword fiercely, he ignored the Seneca lead and axes that whizzed impartially past his head. " 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,' " he shouted, completely unaware, as he related afterward, of what he was saying. And his men, refusing to be stampeded, fired round after methodical round at the advancing savages, and the tide was turned.

Then there was a nameless young French ensign who aroused the admiration of both sides. The only remaining officer of a company that attempted a charge against the English center, he refused to stop, though riddled by bullets. Firing a silver-handled dueling pistol, he shouted encouragement to his men in a chanting, singsong challenge as he advanced without hesitation into a barrage which no man could survive. His will to live and his determination to conquer carried him to within a few feet of Church's scouts. The men at the top of the ridge could hear his dying coughs and gurgles as clearly as they could those of their own comrades. At Colonel Church's personal order a flag of truce was raised, and two scouts carried the dead Frenchman back to his own people. King Louis's valiant ensign was no more than seventeen years of age.

When afternoon came the scout companies were still holding the center of the long line, though casualties had made gaps which had since been filled by men of Colonel March's battalion. The heaviest enemy fire was directed toward this sector, and once the initial fear of death had been subsided somewhat, there was nothing to do but wait for the next French sally.

For a time Jeffrey felt a pang whenever he caught a French soldier in the sights of his rifle and watched the enemy fall. But eventually even death became commonplace. He had no compunctions at any time about shooting at Senecas and fired with a free conscience every time he caught a glimpse of their too familiar war paint. As the long, bloody hours spun themselves out he hoped again and again that Colonel Church would call on him

to lead a sally, but the colonel was using the center of his line as a pivot, and all forward rushes developed on the flanks. More than once he was on the verge of asking for the privilege, but now that the battle raged again with such intensity, Benjamin Church didn't stay in one place long enough for anyone to ask him anything.

No one who saw the grizzled, elderly commander in action that day ever forgot the sight. Coolly indifferent to personal danger, he walked from one regimental position to another, ordering a strengthening of defenses here, the removal of wounded to the rear there. Often he was in plain sight of the enemy, and either the French were overcome by his presence or they were poor shots, for he led a charmed life. Toward midafternoon, when a sortie from Colonel Schuyler's post of command had failed, a dozen wounded were caught in the open area between the two armies. One soldier begged for water, a second groaned without ceasing, and a third screamed piercingly for his mother. Nerve-shattering though the sounds of suffering were, no one attempted to bring the wounded back to the comparative comfort of the lines.

But Bejamin Church had his own ideas. Sheathing his sword, he walked calmly from behind the protecting crest to the side of one of the wounded men, lifted the fellow to his shoulder, and started back without casting a single glance in the direction of the opposite hill bristling with French flintlocks. In a twinkling twenty volunteers followed the colonel, and all of the wounded as well as three men already dead were carried in. Always gallant, the French held their fire, though their Seneca, Tuscarora, and Micmac allies sent a hail of lead after the rescuers. Fortunately for Colonel Church, the Indians were notoriously poor marksmen.

Virtually no food was consumed that day. Both armies were too busy to eat, and the few who might have had appetites soon lost them, for the stench was almost unbearable and became worse by the hour. Never before had so many brave fighters died in a single day on the shores of the New World.

By four in the afternoon both armies were apathetic. Losses had been great, and the battle showed no sign of breaking in favor of either contender. An unnatural quiet gripped the field. Even the heavy cannon were momentarily still.

Jeffrey took advantage of the lull to inspect his scouts' positions. All of the officers were still alive, though Zeb Dobie wore a clumsy bandage, black with dirt and brown with dried blood, on his left hand. But he didn't complain, as he could fire a pistol with his right. Sam Tyng was all but unrecognizable.

He was naked to the waist and incredibly dirty. In fact, his face was so covered with grime and powder burns that Jeffrey knew him only by his sardonically smiling eyes. But Ensign Peattie, who seemed as one born for war, was unruffled. When Jeffrey aproached him Peattie was counting out a new supply of bullets for his platoon.

The senior lieutenant of the Third Scouts was gravely wounded, though trying to remain in action by directing his company from a prone position. Jeffrey ordered him carried to the rear and sent for Sam Tyng to take over the command. Two ensigns of the Second Scouts were missing (one later was found dead, and the other simply disappeared), so Jeffrey gave brevet commissions on the spot to two of the most trustworthy Indian sergeants.

When he returned to his own place in the line he saw Colonel Church a few feet away, crouching in earnest debate with his chief of staff, Colonel Gorham, and with Colonels Tyng and Schuyler. Jeffrey hoped they weren't planning an all-out advance. From what he had seen of his own men, he was afraid the army was too tired, too listless. Besides, he felt certain that Baron St. Castine was waiting for the English to charge in strength. With an army inferior in size, St. Castine's best chance was to wear down the enemy.

"The situation is as simple as it is unfortunate, gentlemen," Jeffrey heard Colonel Church say. "There's a stalemate, and unless we break it, the French will be the winners today."

"But you've got to be reasonable, Ben," Colonel Schuyler muttered, and Jeffrey could see that he was deeply disturbed. "What you're proposing——"

"I propose to accomplish the purpose of this campaign—to take Port Royal." Church's voice was grim, then he laughed unexpectedly, and the sound of that laugh was strange in Jeffrey's ears. "As a loyal subject of King Louis, Baron de St. Castine unquestionably believes in the code of chivalry. He should find my offer very—tempting."

Jeffrey was totally unprepared for what happened next. Colonel Church rose to his feet, shook hands with his three friends, and picked up a scout's rifle, murmuring a quick apology as he did so. Then, before anyone could stop him, he walked out from behind the top of the hill and advanced part way down the slope. His epaulets sparkled in the late afternoon sun, and he was visible to hundreds of French and Indian eyes, yet no one fired at him. Perhaps the enemy was lethargic too. Or perhaps

the sight of a lone officer of middle years strolling down the hill confused even the fiercest Frenchman and gave him pause.

Jeffrey caught his breath and took a firm grip on his rifle. His men looked to him for orders, but he could give none. He was as bewildered as they were, as paralyzed as the French.

Looking straight toward the enemy lines, Colonel Church walked on. Two thirds of the way down the hill he stopped and, holding the rifle under his arm, cupped his hands and shouted. His words had an eerie quality as they floated back up to his own men.

"Baron de St. Castine!" the colonel called. "I challenge you to personal combat. There's been enough slaughter of good men today. Unless we stop, there'll be no farmers or fishermen or trappers to build this land we both want." He laughed, and the sound of that harsh, humorless cackle haunted those who heard it to the end of their days. "You and I are old men. If we kill each other, little will be lost. Are you there, St. Castine? I challenge you to fight alone!"

Jeffrey wanted to race down the hill and drag the colonel back. Colonel Church was worth a hundred and more men. He—and only he—could have proposed this bizarre climax to a day of mass carnage.

There was no movement, no sound from the French lines. The silence became oppressive. Surely the enemy wouldn't cut down a lone man? Jeffrey passed an order to his scouts, and without realizing he was doing so, he whispered. "Load and be ready to fire. The French may be up to something. But don't shoot until I give the word. If they think we're tricking them, Colonel Church won't live ten seconds."

After a seemingly endless wait a French major stepped from behind the trees of the far hill and, imitating Colonel Church's slow saunter, walked to a position directly opposite the English commander. The major saluted. Church returned the salute.

"His Excellency Monsieur le Baron de St. Castine has retired from the field, milord," he called. "His Excellency had the misfortune to suffer a minor wound."

"My condolences to the baron." Colonel Church waited expectantly. The French hadn't gone to the trouble of sending out an officer merely to inform the English that their commander in chief had been incapacitated.

The French officer hesitated and tugged at his sweat- and dirt-streaked stock. "There is another who has expressed a

desire to meet Your Excellency in personal combat. Will Your Excellency accept the substitute?"

"I'll fight him."

There was an uneasy stirring in the English lines. Had Colonel Church lost his senses? Couldn't he see that this was a French trick—that Baron St. Castine was sending out some marksman to kill the English commander? There was probably no word of truth in the French major's story. His chief was surely sitting in safety at this very second, chuckling at the gullibility of his opponent.

Jeffrey raised his rifle to his shoulder as the enemy aide saluted again and trotted back to his lines. If any officer of a rank less than full colonel appeared to accept Colonel Church's challenge, Jeffrey would know the whole preposterous business was a ruse. He'd kill the fellow—and pray that Colonel Church had enough common sense to flatten himself against the ground before half the guns in the French army took aim at him.

After another long wait a new figure appeared, wrapped in an ancient bearskin, and walked with majestic scorn down the hill. A single streak of vermilion paint was smeared on each cheek, and from his heavy, gnarled right hand hung a rifle. Paugus, King of the Senecas, supremely confident that his gods would deliver him from all harm, was going to duel with Colonel Church.

Paugus pretended not to notice Colonel Church until the two men stood directly opposite each other. Then he raised his hand in formal greeting. Church replied by shifting his rifle to a better position. He was familiar with Paugus's ways, for they had first fought each other in 1675, and their paths had crossed innumerable times since.

"Honoye Paugus will fight white man. Honoye Paugus will send white man to join his ancestors." Paugus's well-remembered voice carried across the clearing to Jeffrey.

Colonel Church's response was clear and contemptuous. "Very well, Paugus," he said calmly. "It is either you—or I."

The time for talk had ended, and both men knew it. With the assurance of veterans whose cold eyes and quick trigger fingers had saved their skins many times, they raised their rifles and fired. The two shots sounded as one as the metal sped sixty paces to their marks.

Paugus uttered no sound as he collapsed to the ground. Spellbound, Jeffrey saw the hole directly between Paugus's eyes as the Indian chieftain slumped. Then, and then only, he looked at Colonel Church. The colonel, too, had been hit, but he was still

alive, for he was resting his weight on one elbow while waving the other arm and shouting loudly.

It was difficult to hear him, for no sooner did the Seneca braves realize that their King was dead than they began shooting wildly.

"Attack! Attack!" Colonel Church's cry was clearer now.

Jeffrey's numbed indecision vanished, and with it his terrible fatigue disappeared too. Jumping to his feet, he shouted at the top of his lungs:

"Scouts forward for Colonel Church! God save the Queen!"

"God save the Queen!" Hundreds of voices picked up the cry, and as Jeffrey sprinted forward, men up and down the entire length of the English line jumped to their feet and dashed toward the enemy. The enthusiasm was infectious, and within a few seconds virtually every able soldier in Church's army was joining the advance. An avalanche of men and still more men poured down the hill and swept up the opposite slope.

Had the French acted at once, they could have won the day. A heavy blanket of fire would have ripped the English regiments to shreds. But St. Castine's followers were startled by the speed with which the attack developed, and the few remaining veterans in the front ranks were unable to stem the contagion of panic that swept through the army as the English, tasting victory, swept closer, raking the French lines as they ran. The first to break was a reserve company of recruits from Quebec. These simple tradesmen and farmers had heard marrow-chilling stories for years about the devilry of the English, and as they saw the wildly gesticulating, tattered demons drawing near they believed all their padres had ever told them. And so the recruits ran.

The panic that gripped the outmanned French Army was like a disease. Even the experienced fighters who had survived a score of battles dropped their guns and fled when they saw men all around them take to their heels. Reason and wisdom vanished, and St. Castine's proud regiments scattered in all directions.

Only the Senecas held firm in a thick patch of woods, and a lone island of resistance developed in that sea of retreat. Jeffrey, who was racing in pursuit of the rapidly disappearing uniforms of blue and white, heard a rising crescendo of shots and screams and whirled toward his right. Half of his followers hurried after him, while the remainder stayed on the heels of the French.

Before he quite realized where his feet were leading him Jeffrey plunged into an arena of hand-to-hand combat. Firearms

were useless among the trees and vines, for no bullet could distinguish between friend and savage foe. Jeffrey saw a Seneca warrior clad in war paint, loincloth, and little else drop from a tree branch to the shoulders of a militiaman. A long-handled knife in the savage's hand flashed downward in a vicious stroke and missed its target only because the white man stumbled and threw his attacker forward as he fell. Jeffrey dropped his rifle, drew an Indian ax from his belt, and let fly at the Seneca. His aim was true, and the savage died without making a sound.

Another painted figure rose up behind Jeffrey, but a white officer threw himself at the Seneca. They went down together. And a few seconds later they died together.

More Indians appeared from nowhere as scorces of English colonists fought for their lives in an unexpected epilogue to battle. The sun chose this inopportune time to dip behind a bank of clouds, and the deep green shadows of the forest served as a cloak for the Senecas. But the Indians were heavily outnumbered, and the final outcome of the fight was never in doubt.

With the familiar smell of the Senecas' rancid war paint stinging his nostrils, Jeffrey fought them with their own tricks and their own weapons. Again and again he scrambled into the branches of a tree, waited for an Indian to pounce on a soldier, then hurtled down from his perch and drove Seneca knife or Seneca ax into Seneca flesh. He never knew how many braves he killed in those few minutes, but those who saw him declared later that at least twenty men died by his hand.

Thus the great battle ended as abruptly as it had begun. Jeffrey returned to the body of the officer who had saved him and carefully wrapped the dead man's ring, watch, and notebook in a handkerchief. Belatedly he recognized the officer. It was Major Hilton. . . .

For the first time since the final advance began Jeffrey thought of Colonel Church and hurried back toward the spot where the commander in chief had fallen. His footsteps led him to within a few feet of Paugus's body, but he didn't tarry. He could see a knot of high-ranking officers gathered in a cluster on the opposite slope and, fearing that Colonel Church had perished, he started to run.

As he approached the group he called out to the first man he recognized. "Colonel Walton! Is the 'general'——"

He bit off his words, for he became uncomfortably conscious that Colonel Church himself was speaking. The great leader was reclining on a blanket spread on the ground. Coats and

knapsacks had been piled under his head. His right shoulder was heavily bandaged, and a faint smudge of crimson showed through the linen. But his voice was as sharp, as uncompromisingly firm as ever.

"I find it exceptionally difficult to think, much less speak, when young men bellow at the top of their lungs. I'll be much obliged to you, Major Wyatt, to remember that in my army you remain silent until addressed by someone your senior. Don't stand there gaping and gawking at me, young man. Sit down. All of you—sit down! I'm in no mood to twist my neck out of place trying to see your faces up there."

Jeffrey sat down promptly, and even full colonels dropped to their rumps with alacrity. Colonel Church was rarely this touchy, and Jeffrey was sure his wound must be causing him considerable discomfort. He hoped the colonel in chief was in his right mind, for he had called him "Major Wyatt." Surely he knew his scout captain's rank by this time.

Colonel Church surveyed the tired, battered group before him and spat. "Gentlemen," he said, and his voice was cold, "Baron de St. Castine is a better soldier than any of us. We've beaten him today, but he's escaped. No, Colonel Schuyler—no interruptions if you please. St. Castine has escaped, and what's left of his army is gone too. A dozen of our companies have chased themselves ragged, but they haven't found the French.

"That means we'll have to fight them again. Unfortunately we have no choice. It's my belief that if the remnants of the French army can reorganize they'll make a dash for Port Royal. Let them. We'll cut them off. We'll apply a nutcracker pressure —from front and rear. The army will march at midnight tonight. That will give you time to bury your dead, gentlemen, and to provide your men with a short rest. Meantime, one battalion will sail across the bay to Port Royal in the whaleboats and cut off the French from the rear. I'll show St. Castine that I won't stop while there's a Frenchman still alive on this peninsula. Well, gentlemen—any comments?"

"What will we do with the supplies in the whaleboats, Ben?" Colonel Tyng was too tired to use formal address.

Colonel Church's answer was prompt. "Take 'em out. The men who continue on foot will carry what they can. The rest we'll dump into the bay."

Kent Schuyler, his uniform dirty for the first time since the campaign began, coughed delicately. "If you'll give me permission, I'll scour these woods all night for the enemy, sir."

Benjamin Church chuckled wryly. "Exhaustion—plus a handful of French stragglers and Indian renegades—will finish off what's left of your regiment, Kent. I tell you, the enemy is gone. Besides, it's too dark to go Frenchy hunting. And our troops need a rest. They haven't the strength to search the woods now."

Colonel Schuyler shifted his approach. "What about you, Ben? You'll travel to Port Royal by whaleboat, I trust."

"I'll march with my men. As I've always done. I'll thank one of your gentlemen to have a carpenter prepare me a litter. And perhaps you'll arrange for a team of your soldiers to carry me. They'll find me none too heavy. And, gentlemen, you'll please me greatly if you'll stop looking at each other out of the corners of your eyes. I'm very fit, thank you. It takes more than an Indian bullet to put me out of action. I've too many of 'em in my hide already for that."

There was little more that anyone could say, and the meeting broke up. Unit commanders scurried off in search of their drummers. It was going to be nasty work rounding up the army in the gathering dusk. Jeffrey was wondering how long it would take him to find his scattered scouts, when Colonel Tyng, who stood a few feet away muttering to Lieutenant Colonel March, caught his eye.

"Major Wyatt!"

Jeffrey stepped to the side of the regimental commander, thinking it strange that Colonel Tyng had mistaken his rank too.

"Before you arrived at our little meeting the 'general' announced some changes in command, Wyatt." Colonel Tyng was smiling wearily. "There's no longer a need for scout companies—as scouts, that is. So all three companies will be absorbed into the first battalion. God knows March here can use replacements. As Hilton is—gone, you've been granted a temporary but full promotion to major. You'll be battalion executive and adjutant."

Jeffrey blinked his eyes and felt lost. "But—but my own men, sir——"

"If you approve, young Sam will be made a captain and will command the scouts."

"There's no one in the army deserves a promotion more, Colonel." Jeffrey was vastly pleased, for Colonel Tyng was careful never to favor his son. Sam had more than earned every advancement.

"No one except—yourself. Good luck, gentlemen. I have work to do. And so do you. I'll see you in Port Royal, God willing." Colonel Tyng shook hands quickly and departed.

Evelyn March slapped Jeffrey on the back and grinned. "We'll make a fine pair, Jeff. I'm mighty pleased they let me have you."

"Thanks, Colonel. But—I don't understand all this. What did Colonel Tyng mean—he'll see us in Port Royal?"

Colonel March chuckled audibly. "You heard the order that one battalion is to cross the bay of Fundy by whaleboat——"

"And we're that battalion. I see." Everything was suddenly clear.

"That's right. And I hope those boat crews had a pleasant sleep during our little fracas today. They've a long row ahead of them tonight. And we may have a hellish battle on our hands when we land at Port Royal. I visited the place in peacetime, and I tell you, those guns at the Citadel can tear us to bits."

"Why don't we land up the bay a mile or so from the town—march inland and approach from the rear? Then the guns can't touch us." Jeffrey's suggestion was made gingerly, for he was unsure of the relationship between a battalion commander and his executive and didn't want to overstep the bounds of military custom.

"I had the same idea myself, Jeff. How did you know the guns couldn't be turned inland?"

"I didn't *know*, sir, but I've studied the charts of the place. And I remember that my father once told me of French military architects. He had little respect for them."

Colonel March's eyebrows flew up. "So your father fought the French, did he? Well."

"These men look like ours, Colonel," Jeffrey interrupted hurriedly. "First battalion this way. First battalion! Lively, now!" he bawled.

Officers and bedraggled troops milled about, and Jeffrey had difficulty in finding the battalion drummer boy. But volunteers took up his cry, and it soon became apparent that within a matter of minutes the battalion would be re-formed.

Two hours later the men of the reorganized first battalion were at sea. Twenty stout whaleboats nosed into the choppy waters of the Bay of Fundy in a single line, and while their crews strained at the oars, the soldiers shivered in their ragged uniforms and pulled blankets over their shoulders and faces in a vain attempt to protect themselves from the heavy salt spray. Colonel March rode in the first boat, as befitted his rank, but he deemed it unsafe for his second-in-command to travel with him, and a fretting, fuming Jeffrey brought up the rear.

After so many weeks of leading the whole army he felt useless,

and it was little consolation that Benjie Brown had so maneuvered the whaleboats that Jeffrey was placed in his craft. Each boat carried fifteen passengers, and after Jeffrey saw that the enlisted men who accompanied him were settled, he clambered past the straining oarsmen and dropped down beside Benjie in the prow. Not that he felt conversational, but the boat was bobbing up and down in the sharp swells, and he was afraid that if he didn't talk he would be seasick.

Benjie glanced at him briefly, then turned his eyes back to the fat stern of the boat ahead. The coxswains had been ordered to keep their vessels in sight of each other at all times, and Benjie was a cautious and methodical crew chief. "Heave-and-three-four!" he shouted. "Heave-and-three-four. Even-numbered oars rest. We've a long pull tonight, lad. Heave-and-three-four."

Jeffrey made several attempts to speak but didn't trust himself. At last his stomach became accustomed to the rhythm, and he grew less tense. "Well, Benjie," he managed at last, "we're together again."

"Yes, sir. Why don't you get some sleep, Major? You'll maybe have a fight on your hands again come t'morrow. And you weren't exactly sittin' idle t'day, neither, so you could use a mite o' rest." Benjie chuckled in the darkness. "I've been hearin' that you're a hero, sir. Mistress Leah will be mighty proud o' you, Major."

A stab of anger shot through Jeffrey. He was not allowing himself to think about Leah. Ever since he had learned he was going to Port Royal tonight all his old fears had been reawakened. What if her captors had moved her elsewhere? He might never find her. He might never see her again.

Two hours after dawn Jeffrey heard a cheer from Colonel March's boat, and every few seconds the shout was repeated by those in successive crafts. He cranked his neck but could see nothing.

"Land ho!" a sailor in the boat ahead called back lustily, and Jeffrey's men began to yell too.

He wondered why the poor fools were so pleased, when they might meet a reception ashore that would wipe them out. He shrugged and ordered the men to eat. They had breakfast only a short time after dawn, but Colonel Church insisted that a soldier fought better on a full stomach, and Jeffrey, in the light of the past month's experiences, was inclined to agree. His own mouth full of salt pork, he asked Benjie to pull alongside

Colonel March. It had been agreed last night that the whaleboats would approach the Port Royal shore prows abreast, and all the coxswains increased the speed of their boats as they saw Jeffrey's vessel pull ahead. The maneuver was accomplished in a remarkably short time. . . .

Jeffrey saw they were heading into a little cove where a beach of sorts awaited them. Behind the rocky shallows gigantic pines stretched as far as the eye could see. The silence was forbidding, and Jeffrey quickly realized that if the little armada had been seen by a hidden enemy the battalion might be massacred before one boatload of men could land. The pines afforded perfect protection for a defender. There was no sign of life, but if a French force was lying in wait it would never disclose its presence prematurely.

"Load your flintlocks, men." Jeffrey watched the fourteen soldiers in his boat obey his bidding. "When you step ashore, keep your powder dry," he added. "And if the enemy is waiting for us, make no attempt to join your company until we've established a foothold. Just start shooting."

A tense silence settled over the boats, and there was no sound save the splashing of the seamen's oars. The hull of the whaleboat rasped on a rock, and the spell was broken. Jeffrey leaped from the boat into knee-deep, icy water.

"Follow me!" he shouted. "Lively, now!"

The battalion waded ashore, ready for anything. A few members of the First Scouts dived into the woods while company commanders formed ranks on the rocks. The scouts returned, grinning and shaking their heads negatively. The men stood about, feeling a little foolish and more than slightly disappointed after having steeled themselves for a fight.

Anxious eyes fastened on Colonel March and Major Wyatt, who stood a little distance apart, studying a worn map.

"This cove," the battalion commander said, "looks familiar. I spent a summer fishing in these waters, and I'm reasonably sure this is it."

Jeffrey nodded his head admiringly. "You ought to be a professional navigator, sir. If this is the cove that's shown on the map, we're no more than a mile from Port Royal."

"Right. But we'll go inland—to this farm—and then cut back to the town and approach it from the safer side. The boats will wait for us here—although not many of us will come back, should the French be setting an ambush for us. I don't like this silence."

"Neither do I, sir." Jeffrey squared his shoulders. "How soon shall we——"

"Now." Colonel March threw back his head. "Close your company ranks!" he bawled. "Captain Tyng! You'll be good enough to lead the way. Send your Algonquins ahead. They're better than the rest of us in unknown territory. Follow the direction of that fallen tree until you come to a farmhouse with a white shingled roof. We'll make battle formation there. . . . Battalion, forward!"

The next hour was so startlingly uneventful that the uneasiness of the men grew, and Jeffrey, sensing the tension, hurried up and down the line, cautioning no one to shoot until a specific order was given. In woods this dense, troops had been known to fire unwittingly on each other when some overanxious militiaman touched off his flintlock prematurely.

The woods ended abruptly, and the farmhouse with the white shingled roof appeared suddenly in a clearing, as Colonel March had prophesied. From this point to the town, he said, there were no more trees, and the battalion would have easy going over cultivated ground. The spire of St. Francis Church in the very heart of Port Royal could be seen rising above the crest of a small intervening hill. After a few minutes' march the great Citadel, perched on its forbidding rock, was plainly visible. And with breath-taking suddenness the English colonists and their Mohawk and Algonquin allies found themselves within range of the log palisades and sentry boxes of the town wall.

Company commanders gave the order for flintlocks and rifles to be held at the ready, and the battalion slowed its pace appreciably. But there was no sign of life inside the wall, and an Indian scout pushed open the gate. Thus did Queen Anne's soldiers enter Port Royal unopposed.

The men almost sauntered up singularly quiet streets toward the Citadel. Houses became more frequent, but doors were closed, windows were shuttered, and blinds were drawn. There was no sign of life anywhere until the battalion approached the Rue St. Denis. There, at the corner where the town's principal thoroughfare joined the Rue St. Joseph, stood the church. Its doors were flung open, and the faint flicker of candles could be seen in the dim recesses of the building. In the doorway stood a priest in his cassock.

Colonel March and Jeffrey hurried to him. While still several feet away, Jeffrey began speaking. *"Bon jour, Padre——"*

"Good morning, my son." The father's use of English was a great relief to Colonel March, who sighed audibly.

"Where are your troops, Padre? And what's happened to your people?" Colonel March asked without preamble.

"Our army has been defeated in battle, as you know, sir," the priest answered gravely. "Our people are in their homes. I sent them there when I learned that our beloved baron had been wounded and that the English would soon arrive. I want no murder of innocents here."

"My men fight soldiers, Padre. We don't attack civilians," Colonel March snapped. He would have added more, but Jeffrey interrupted him.

"How did you receive news of your defeat so rapidly, Padre?" he asked curiously.

The slight gray-haired priest smiled wearily. "A small ketch arrived in the harbor shortly before dawn. In it were a few survivors of the battle. I fear your strength was greater than our prayers."

Colonel March was impatient to return to what he considered more vital topics of conversation. "Will your troops in the Citadel surrender to us, Padre? Can you persuade them to surrender without a fight?"

"There are too few men remaining at the Citadel to fight so many, my son. Our baron took virtually every able man into the battle you fought yesterday. You will not be opposed at that Citadel."

There was a silence, and Colonel March made no attempt to hide his suspicions. He had been raised on the belief that priests never told the truth, and his reluctance to accept the Port Royal padre's assurance was no greater than that which any other Protestant would have displayed in an age when bigotry was universal.

"We'll see," he said shortly. "Meanwhile, Padre, if your people behave themselves, they'll have no trouble. I'll speak with you again after I've taken the Citadel. Major Wyatt, be good enough to have a guard posted outside this church. The citizens of Port Royal are free to enter the building at any time. And any of our men who attempt to steal anything from the church or to destroy anything here are to be shot. Give the necessary instructions, Major." Colonel March paused significantly and looked the old priest straight in the eye. "You see, Padre, we're not as bad as you've believed."

"I never believed you bad, my son," was the mild reply.

After the great fortress which Governor Frontenac had built at Quebec, the Citadel at Port Royal was the strongest man-made structure in New France, and numerous additions and improvements had made it virtually impregnable. As Jeffrey and Colonel March strode along the flagstone walks of the fantastic Acadian castle and saw the empty barracks and unmanned parapets, the deserted blockhouses and idle cannon, they realized how desperate Baron St. Castine had been for men to fill the ranks of his army for yesterday's battle. He had deliberately gambled his full strength in a reckless attempt to stop the English colonists in a single decisive battle in the field rather than meet them here, where he lacked mobility. The echo of three hundred pairs of stout English boots on the Citadel's ramparts was proof that the gambler had lost. With admirable precision Colonel Church's first battalion took possession of the mighty fortress.

A handful of French volunteer militiamen appeared at the entrance to one of the bigger buildings, their hands held high above their heads. They were either elderly men or boys too young to join the army, and Colonel March quickly disarmed them and ordered them to their homes. They complied silently, and even the most rabid French haters in the battalion were forced to admire the simple dignity of Port Royal's last defenders as they walked with unflinching steps past the ranks of their enemies.

Captain Sam Tyng's First Scouts were ordered to secure the arsenal, and there a brief flurry took place. Four caretakers, all men of military age, tried to put up some semblance of resistance, but they were subdued after a brief scuffle.

The only other incident of note was the discovery of forty emaciated, sickly male prisoners in the dungeons. All were English colonists, and all were hysterically happy to be delivered from their cells, though they were too weak to demonstrate their feelings. When Jeffrey asked them about female prisoners they looked blank. They knew of no female prisoners.

A seventeen-year-old militiaman hauled down King Louis's once proud banner, and the English ensign was hoisted to the flagpole as the battalion cheered. Not one shot was fired, not one man was injured as the powerful fort fell into the hands of her conquerors. Colonel March stood on the edge of the expansive parade ground, one foot resting on a mound of French cannon balls, and surveyed his domain. Within a few hours the ships of Commodore Newton's fleet would sail quietly into the harbor, unmolested by the guns that commanded every approach from the

sea. And when Colonel Church and the army arrived in the next day or two, a royal welcome would await them. Organized resistance was undoubtedly a thing of the past. . . . The battalion commander watched his executive officer approach and was about to make some cheerful remark when he noticed that Jeffrey was frowning. He sighed. Something was amiss. He should have known the conquest had been too easy.

"What's the bad news, Wyatt? I knew at thirty paces that you'd run into a snag somewhere."

Jeffrey pointed to the opposite side of the parade ground. "Do you see that house, Colonel?"

"Of course. It's the governor's home, I presume. I kept the men out for fear they'd steal. Colonel Church is very much opposed to looting. And knowing him, he'll probably send St. Castine his personal belongings—if we ever discover the baron's whereabouts, that is." Colonel March relaxed and smiled. "There'd be no harm in a little tour of inspection, however. You and I. What do you say?"

The lines on Jeffrey's face remained rigid. "I'm sure it's the governor's house, sir," he said carefully. "But I don't believe you're aware that it's occupied. People have been watching us from behind almost every blind."

"The devil, you say!" Colonel March peered intently at the imposing three-story building. "You don't suppose that Baron St. Castine came back here—when he was wounded? You don't suppose he might be in the house—right now?"

"The idea crossed my mind, Colonel. I wanted your permission to investigate."

"By all means. At once!" Colonel March nodded vigorously. "And take some men with you. If the baron is hiding out there, his aides will put up a stiff fight to protect him."

"We'll have no trouble, sir." Jeffrey was quietly confident. After the rigors and dangers of past weeks, he had no doubts of his ability to disarm and capture a wounded French commanding officer and his retainers, no matter how fanatical their resistance.

Saluting, he spun about, and as he did so he caught sight of an approaching column of men. "Captain Martin!" he shouted. "Over here, please!"

The officer hurried to him. "We've gone through the cellars of the main fort, Major. There's not a Frenchman to be found down there, sir."

"You needn't be so disappointed, Martin," Jeffrey grunted. "There are some Frenchmen for you in that fine house. Be good

enough to have your men surround the building. But they're not to fire, even if fired upon. They'll wait for an order from me. Understand?"

"No, sir. I mean—yes, sir."

"We believe Baron de St. Castine may be inside. It's his house. And if he's there—Colonel Church will want him taken alive. Please dispose your men, Captain."

Jeffrey strode off across the parade ground as Captain Martin barked a series of orders to his men. If the baron was in hiding, Jeffrey thought, he would have a delicate situation on his hands. By rights Colonel March, as senior officer, should accept the baron's sword. But Jeffrey was tempted to receive it himself, should it be offered to him. *That* would be something worth relating to his children and grandchildren. For the first time he was beginning to look toward the future. Once this task was done, he would make more specific inquiries about female prisoners.

There were four broad stone steps leading up to the front door of the imposing home. Jeffrey mounted them at a run and drew his pistol from his belt. Captain Martin, standing a few feet way, nodded nervously. Jeffrey could see that the men of Martin's company had been quick to draw a cordon around the building. He sucked in his breath and pounded on the door with the butt of his gun.

"Open in the name of Her Majesty, Anne of England!"

There was no sound from within, and Jeffrey could hear the thumping of his heart as he waited. Surely those inside had seen the approach of the troops—why were they so slow? He would give them a few more seconds, and then they would come out of he'd shoot the door from its hinges. He rapped again, impatiently.

"Open, I say, in the name of the Queen! You are my prisoners!"

A single pair of slow footsteps approached the door slowly. Jeffrey took a fresh grip on his pistol and pointed it directly at the heavy oak panel which opened slowly.

He steeled himself, then started so violently that the pistol dropped from his hand. Facing him was a radiant, beautiful Leah.

"I am your prisoner, sir," she said.

Chapter Twenty

For six long weeks after Colonel Church's arrival the army languished at Port Royal. Officers and men alike were bored and apathetic. With the colonel in chief's hearty approval, the church authorities had hidden all girls and young women from temptation behind the walls of the local convent, and a strong guard was posted there twenty-four hours a day. In protest against the occupation, the three local taverns had closed their doors, and neither persuasion nor threats forced them open.

Baron St. Castine's army had been scattered over so broad an area that is was senseless to send out companies or even small platoons for mopping-up operations, and as tension relaxed, the once disciplined army became a group of farmers and merchants and traders, anxious to go home.

There was no doubt that the offensive power of the French had been crushed, and the officers swilling brandy from the wine cellars of the Citadel bragged that never again would regiments under the banner of the fleur-de-lis swoop down into Maine or New York.

Word was received from spies who had been in Quebec that Baron St. Castine had fled there, recovered from his wounds, and had very sensibly decided to put the New World behind him. With forty-two companions he had set sail for France in the largest ship he could find, and it was reported that he expected to resume his place at the court of Versailles. His Indian wives and their offspring, of course, remained at Quebec.

The news of St. Castine's escape was responsible for a new wave of inertia, and court-martial boards were kept busy trying men who, with nothing better to do, took to quarreling and fighting with each other. But despite the bitter complaints, Colonel Church refused to budge and was deaf to pleas that the army sail for home. He had claimed all of Acadia in the name of the Queen, and it was an open secret that he awaited approval of a plan to leave a strong garrison to administer order and keep

peace until spring. By that time it was commonly assumed that a royal governor would be sent out from London to take over and that English troops would appear to relieve the colonials. Few men wanted to remain in this austere place, but all agreed with Colonel Church's logic. So anxious eyes swept the approaches to the harbor each day, for a ship bearing Governor Dudley's reply to the colonel's proposals was expected momentarily.

Optimists boldly predicted that Colonel Church would be knighted for his remarkable achievements. There was one officer who might have told them that the Queen's ministers were too busy fighting in Europe to pay heed to what they considered miniature warfare in the New World. But that officer was otherwise occupied.

That is to say, Jeffrey lived in a dream during those six weeks. He and Leah were inseparable, and only when his light duties claimed his attention did he leave her side. However, he was kept busy fending off brothers-in-arms who were starved for the company of a pretty girl. He—and they—never ceased marveling at the good fortune she had enjoyed throughout her captivity. Baron de St. Castine had displayed a surprising decency and kindness toward his female prisoners.

Jeffrey and Leah were alone the night he told her about her father's death. And no one who had seen him shooting and knifing his way to victory in the recent battles would have believed him capable of the tenderness he displayed when Leah clung to him and drenched his shoulder with tears.

Nor would those who had been subjected to his uncompromising discipline have believed it possible for him to be reduced to the status of a blushing, stammering schoolboy. But such was certainly the case on the memorable day when he silently handed Leah her precious silver box. She had already heard of the part it had played in battle. Sam Tyng had made a casual reference to it one day, and Leah had wormed the story from him. But with the wisdom of a woman in love, she had said nothing until Jeffrey presented the box to her. Then her praise had sent the blood rushing to his face, and he had been so flustered that he could think of nothing to say. Then it occurred to him to ask for her hand. Leah listened quietly to his formal proposal of marriage and gravely accepted him.

During this six-week period Jeffrey had only two worries. First, he took pains to avoid Captain Riddle of the *Seraph*, and on more than one occasion made it evident to all within earshot that he had no desire for private conversation with the sea captain.

His other concern was more urgent. Colonel Church had assured the sixteen liberated women that they would be returned to their homes in the first comfortable ship that sailed from Port Royal. And Jeffrey was afraid that he might be included among those who would remain to rule Acadia in the Queen's name through the bitter winter. He was increasingly sorry he had agreed to Leah's request that they delay their marriage until they returned to Schenectady.

The changes in weather were noticeably sharp, and as September gave way to October, Jeffrey found himself secretly hoping that the entire expedition would remain until spring. Then he and Leah would be married at once, and no power on earth could separate them again. But one blustery day a fast sloop arrived from Boston, and Jeffrey's fond daydream was smashed. With dozens of others, he hurried to the docks, but neither the sloop's captain nor his officers had any idea of the contents of the message which Governor Dudley had sent to Colonel Church.

The colonel remained closeted in his quarters in the drafty fortress through the long hours of the afternoon, seeing no one but his regimental commanders and Colonel Gorham. They scurried in and out with long faces, and unfounded rumors spread through the army with the speed of a hurricane. Jeffrey tried to close his ears to the guesses and conjectures, but he couldn't stop his own mind from spinning. Then at five o'clock invitations were received by every officer in the army requesting their presence as Colonel Church's dinner guests.

Attached to Jeffrey's invitation was a brief note scribbled in the colonel's own hand: "Do me the Honor, Major Wyatt, to be here a quarter of an hour early. B. C."

Dressed in the fresher of his two uniforms, Jeffrey stopped first at the women's quarters. He showed the note to Leah, but she was as mystified as he had been. And her trusting attitude indicated only too clearly that she considered him capable of surmounting any difficulty that might threaten their love. When he left her he was uneasy. It was just like a woman to have no understanding of army methods, he muttered to himself as he climbed the cold stone stairs to the colonel in chief's office. To Leah, Benjamin Church was a kindly and courtly old gentleman. She didn't and indeed couldn't see him as a commander whose most casual order must be instantly obeyed.

The sentry at the door saluted and stepped aside. Jeffrey knocked, and the colonel's voice bade him enter. Colonel Church, as usual, was absorbed in a pile of papers.

"Major Wyatt at report, sir."

The colonel threw down his papers and rubbed his wounded shoulder vigorously. As he raised his head Jeffrey was shocked by his appearance, for the colonel looked old and very, very tired. His bright, piercing eyes were dulled and apathetic.

"Sit down, Wyatt," he said, and studied Jeffrey carefully for a moment. "When do you and Mistress Hill intend to be married?" The question shot out with the speed and intensity of a rifle volley.

"As soon as possible, sir—after we go back home." Jeffrey tried not to betray his amazement at the colonel's interest in his personal affairs.

"Mmmm. By home—you mean Schenectady?"

"Yes, sir. Of course."

"You'll be there sooner than you think," was the cryptic reply. "Luckily for you, my sons are married. If they weren't, I'd see they gave you a fight for the lady's hand." The colonel smiled, then sobered instantly. "You've been a good soldier, Wyatt. Proud of you."

"Thank you, sir." Colonel Church handed out compliments sparingly, and Jeffrey was bewildered. There was more here than met the eye.

The colonel wet his lips and spoke slowly, as though thinking aloud. "I'm recommending you to Governor Cornbury for a permanent captaincy in the New York militia, Wyatt. Colonel Schuyler tells me he'll gladly endorse my suggestion. So I reckon you can be garrison chief at Schenectady, if you'd like the job."

Jeffrey was instantly wary. When the war ended he wanted to settle down with Leah and stop running around the countryside in uniform. "Wouldn't that take all my time, Colonel?" he asked cautiously.

Colonel Church smiled thinly. "Less time than you'd imagine. Colonel Schuyler had letters today which indicate that Schenectady has become a busy place since you left. More than a thousand new settlers—English and Germans—have gone through the town in the past few weeks. With the Senecas away, the frontier is being pushed back, Wyatt. People are moving West as fast they can get there. So the district is more secure all the time. And the military needs grow fewer."

"I see. Under those circumstances, sir, I'd be honored to accept the command of Fort Schenectady. And I appreciate your faith in me."

"Faith, Wyatt? Faith? Fact! Proven facts!" Colonel Church

pounded on the table to emphasize his words. "One of the best officers I've had."

He rose to his feet and moved toward the door that led to his private dining room. "I'd ask you to serve with me again—if I had any fight left in me. Don't stand there with your jaw sagging, Wyatt. Come along. The others are waiting."

Jeffrey followed the commander into the dining hall, where the officers of the army were gathering. As he found a place with his own battalion he tried without success to untangle the puzzle of his private interview.

Someone was trying to catch his eye, and he looked up. Across the oak-timbered room Captain Riddle of the brig *Seraph* was smiling at him enigmatically. Jeffrey refused to meet the seaman's stare and attacked the food on his plate.

The elderly townswomen who had been pressed into kitchen service had worked long and hard, and Colonel Church's gentlemen dined sumptuously. The meal began with two soups, one a clear chicken broth, the other a thick and savory fish stew which the women from Marseilles had brewed. Then came steaming platters of poached salmon, followed by breast of quail, partridge, and grouse, stuffed with mushrooms and herbs. Sides of beef had been barbecued, and venison had been roasted; and after these had disappeared down hungry throats, huge platters of cold wild turkey made their appearance. The meal ended with a pudding of chopped venison meat, apples, raisins, sweet batter, and cinnamon, over which flaming brandy had been liberally poured. The finest wines from Baron St. Castine's cellars were present in abundance, but no one was drunk. Jeffrey didn't know if that was because the English palate didn't take kindly to wine or because the others, like himself, were concerned over Colonel Church's ragged gray face and the mystery of the message from Governor Dudley.

At last the meal came to an end. Frontiersmen, who had picked up the habit from the Indians, lighted cigars made of long rolls of tobacco. Lieutenant Colonel Gorham arose to his feet, tapped with a spoon on the side of a globet, and cleared his throat. The buzz of low-pitched conversation died away.

"Gentlemen," Colonel Gorham said, "the colonel in chief has a few words to say to you."

As Colonel Church pulled himself to his feet, rubbing his injured shoulder. Jeffrey could feel the tension mount. The air of casual well-being vanished instantly, and the officers leaned

forward in their chairs, ready for anything. Anything, that is, but the news they were about to hear.

"You've been patient with me, gentlemen." Benjamin Church's eyes swept the room. "Very patient. You've been wondering about the contents of the letter I received today from Governor Dudley." There was undisguised scorn in his voice as he mentioned the name of the Queen's representative in Boston, and the officers shifted in their seats uncomfortably.

"You're entitled to the complete truth, gentlemen," he went on. "The very day I arrived in Port Royal I dispatched a courier to Master Dudley, requesting that he and his brother governors give us permission to take Quebec."

Someone started to cheer, but Colonel Church waved his hand for silence. Jeffrey was afraid he knew what was coming next, and his dinner felt like a heavy lump in his stomach.

"I told the governors," Colonel Church continued, "that such a campaign must be started immediately. My plan was to capture the city before winter and remain there until spring. Had I been granted permission to proceed, the war in the New World would have ended before the first snows fell.

"However, politicians and lords cannot be expected to understand military matters, though they pretend to such understanding. My request was refused."

A groan swept through the hall, and even the lowliest ensign realized that an opportunity to achieve complete victory had been lost. Again Colonel Church waved for silence.

"Governor Dudley writes that it would be impossible for him to correspond with New York and Virginia within the time limitations I set. He said further that approval of the House of Commons would be required for such a large undertaking and that London would no doubt want to send an officer of suitable rank as commander in chief."

"Like Admiral Sink-Me Walker?" a voice cried out. There was a burst of laughter, but the elderly Frenchwomen listening outside the door thought the Englishmen were growling.

"Therefore, gentlemen, Governor Dudley has ordered us to return home." Colonel Church made no attempt to hide his weariness and disgust. "I have been directed to leave no garrison at Port Royal. Without exception, every officer and every man is to return. Governor Dudley congratulates all of you on the magnificence of your victory. . . . No doubt some of you will take part in the campaign—next year—or the year after that—perhaps

when Port Royal will again be captured. I wish you good luc in the venture, gentlemen.

"As for me, any of you who wish to visit me will be welcome a my plantation at Little Compton, near Plymouth. I shall b happy to offer you my hospitality there at any time."

Amid a deathly silence Colonel Church started toward the doo A chair scraped back, and a voice was raised in a cheer. In twinkling every officer was standing, shouting at the top of hi lungs. As the colonel reached the door he turned, and those nea him could see that his eyes were filled with tears. Waving bot hands, he tried to speak but was unable to express his thank and hastily left the room.

The officers had come to life, and bottles of rum and brandy began to pass from table to table. The room was filled with hum of angry conversation, but Jeffrey sat as in a stupor Stupidity—criminal stupidity, he told himself—had ruined th chance for a complete victory over the French. In the years t come it would be necessary to wage another campaign agains Port Royal; and unless those in command had sufficient authority the fruits of success would again vanish into the mists of the Ba of Fundy.

As the meeting broke up, Jeffrey pushed his way toward th door and was about to pass through it when Colonel Tyng laid strong fingers on his arm.

"Wyatt! A word with you, please."

"Of course, Colonel Tyng."

"It has been decided to break up the regiments when we embar for Boston, Wyatt. Each officer will be responsible for the men he enlisted and will look after those men on the return voyage. As you brought no one but yourself into the campaign, you'll be free to do as you please—as soon as you step on board your brig."

"I see, sir." Things were happening so fast that Jeffrey wasn't at all sure that he saw. "Have sailing arrangements been made sir?"

"Indeed they have. And you needn't be afraid we'll separat you from your lady, Wyatt. All the females will travel aboard th same ship. And you'll go with them. In fact, the gentleman who'l take you straight to New York Town begged Colonel Church fo the pleasure of your company."

Colonel Tyng nodded toward his right. Jeffrey turned an found himself staring into the pale, watery eyes of Captain Riddl of the *Seraph*. Apparently the brig's master had been waiting fo

this moment, and he returned Jeffrey's surprised start with a slow grin and a broad wink.

Thirty-six hours later the army of Benjamin Church set sail from Port Royal. The docks were as deserted as the town's streets had been when Colonel March's battalion had taken the town. Houses were shuttered, and not one citizen of New France was to be seen anywhere. Yet the senior officers who watched their troops board the ships of the flotilla knew with sickening certainty that the men of Port Royal would begin to appear from hiding places in the woods before the sails of the frigates disappeared over the horizon. And someday English blood would again be shed in the retaking of the community which was being so shamefully abandoned. Thanks to London's lack of understanding and the stubborn blindness of a colonial governor, a great victory was being negated. It was small comfort to the colonels that from this time forward the French could fight only a defensive war. Church's commanders had won a war, but as they watched their triumph slip away with the tide, Port Royal once again belonged to France.

The brig *Seraph*, three hundred and forty tons, bucked and rolled in a choppy sea, and her rigging creaked dismally as she settled herself for the run down the coast to Boston and New York Town. Her few guns were stowed away, for she carried so many soldiers that every inch of space was being utilized. Enlisted men were crammed like sheep into the hold, and officers strained the capacity of the few cabins. Even the saloon had been converted into an officers' dormitory.

Most of those aboard the brig were New Yorkers, and Captain Riddle was planning to stop at Boston just long enough to discharge a dozen female passengers. Leah and those who had shared captivity with her were crammed into staterooms which ordinarily held half their number. But so great was the desire of the frontier ladies to reach their homes that not one complained.

Through Jeffrey's last-minute intercession Benjie was on board the *Seraph* and, like a true sailor, he had struck up immediate friendships among the crew, with the result that he was invited to sleep in the fo'c'sle, which was somewhat less crowded than the dark hold. As an indentured servant bonded to Leah, he was carefully solicitous of her welfare, and after the ship had put to sea he presented her with a box of French cakes which would help relieve the tedium of sea fare. No one ever learned how those cakes had found their way into Benjie's possession, for Colonel

Church had forbidden his men intercourse with Port Royal's citizens.

Despite the smallness of the brig, Jeffrey's path didn't cross that of Captain Riddle for several days. While heavy seas were running the captain spent most of his time on the quarter-deck and could be seen from a distance. During his free hours he mixed but little with the passengers and disappeared behind the door of the master's cabin. But the meeting which Jeffrey hoped to avoid was inevitable.

One afternoon, when the last traces of the storm were disappearing, Jeffrey and Leah stood at the starboard rail looking down at the muddy black water which was beginning to turn a deep green. Leah's long blond hair was tousled by the wind, her cheeks were a bright pink, and the hollows beneath her eyes and at the base of her throat had vanished. To Jeffrey she had never looked more beautiful, and he said little, content to watch her in admiring silence.

Suddenly a shadow fell across the deck, and Jeffrey stiffened. Captain Riddle was walking directly toward them, and his manner was that of a man who had something on his mind and would tolerate no further delays in ridding himself of his mental burden. As Jeffrey stood in rigid silence Captain Riddle touched his hatbrim and bowed to Leah.

"Your servant, ma'am," he said. "I'd appreciate your company at dinner tonight, Mistress Hill. In my cabin. You too, Major—ah—Mr. Wyatt," he added with a gleam of amusement in his puffy eyes.

Leah curtsied. "You are very kind, Captain," she said as Jeffrey nodded his agreement abruptly.

Captain Riddle, murmuring pleasantly, departed as quickly as he had appeared, and when Jeffrey turned back to the rail Leah was startled to see that his fists were clenched. She touched his sleeve with a tentative hand, but he seemed to be unaware of her presence.

For a long time there were no sounds but the creak of canvas and ropes and the slap-slap of water on the brig's hull. At last Jeffrey turned to Leah, and he wore an expression that was alien to him.

"Leah, my dear," he muttered, "you may hear things about me from Captain Riddle's lips that will shock you—and disgust you. But I beg you to believe that I'm innocent of the most terrible criminal charges that can be brought against a man."

Leah studied him with a tender sympathy for a moment, and

her arms flew around his neck. "I don't care what anyone says about you, darling. Nor does it matter what you've done—or what you haven't done. I love you."

They kissed passionately, to the infinite delight of three sailors who were climbing the rigging.

Although the *Seraph* was a tidy, trim vessel, even her proud owners couldn't claim, as did their rivals, that they owned a palace afloat. But the master's cabin was unquestionably a minor miracle of seagoing luxury. A mammoth teakwood chest, ornately carved, dominated one bulkhead. Directly opposite was Captain Riddle's bunk, which, according to fo'c'sle rumor, was the only full-sized bed on any merchantman flying the English flag. A real bed it was, too, held in place by cleverly contrived metal braces. On another bulkhead a gaudy red-and-yellow Indian mat was hung, and directly below it sat a massive ebony table which the captain used for dining and for work. Most unusual of all was the thick carpet from the Near East. It was scuffed and threadbare in spots, but it was a rug nevertheless, and visitors to the cabin never ceased marveling at it.

Leah drank in every detail of the stateroom, but Jeffrey kept his eyes fastened on his plate and spoke only when directly addressed.

Captain Riddle, with a sidelong glance at Jeffrey, addressed himself directly to Leah. "Mistress Hill," he said in his booming voice, "you're marrying a sly young man. Would you believe that I've waited since July for a chance to pass a friendly word with him? I hoped for a visit from him at the St. John River—and I tried many times at Port Royal to seek him out. But he'd have none of me."

He chuckled and his watery eyes moved to Jeffrey and stopped. He cleared his throat impressively and spoke slowly. "Major—ah—Mr. Wyatt," he said, "your uncle is dead."

Jeffrey turned white and sat motionless, while Leah gaped at him in wonder. He tried to say something, but the words caught in his throat.

"Furthermore, Mr. Wyatt," Captain Riddle went on, "Mary Watrous has admitted—everything. You're free to come home whenever you please. That's the news I've been waiting to tell you."

Jeffrey gripped the edge of the ebony table so hard that his knuckles went white. When he found his voice at last he could only whisper, "Thank you, Captain Riddle."

Leah was all but forgotten for the moment, but she reminded the men of her presence in no uncertain terms. "Jeffrey Wyatt," she cried, "I demand to know what all this is about. I've tolerated your sulkiness and your mystery long enough. Now—tell me!"

Jeffrey smiled wearily. "I avoided Captain Riddle, my dear, because the *Seraph* was a reminder of the most hopeless days of my life."

Leah stamped a dainty foot, and her long fingers drummed impatiently on the table. "I'll stand for no more of this, Jeffrey," she said in a tone of utter feminine finality. "I've been patient for years, but I'll wait no longer. I want to know everything about you. This very instant. And if you won't tell me, I appeal to Captain Riddle."

The *Seraph's* master pushed back his chair as if to escape the impact of Leah's wrath. He threw a glance of masculine commiseration at Jeffrey, then started to rise to his feet.

"You may talk here in my cabin," Captain Riddle said. "It's the only place aboard where you'll find any privacy. And I'll go up to the quarter-deck, if I may be pardoned."

Jeffrey waved him back to his chair. "No, Captain. Stay, if you please. You know the story, and there's no need for you to leave. And when I've satisfied Mistress Hill's curiosity, there's a question or two I'd like to ask you."

Captain Riddle sank back into his chair.

"There's no mystery surrounding me, my dear," Jeffrey said to Leah. "As you well know, my name is Jeffrey Wyatt. I am the only son of the late Charles Wyatt, lieutenant general of cavalry to King William and Queen Mary."

Leah gasped, but Jeffrey ignored her interruption. Now that he had started to tell his story he was eager to present her with all the facts. "We lived in Cornwall," he continued, "where my father had considerable estates. Benjie Brown's family were tenant farmers on the property, and Benjie and I played together as boys, before he went off to sea and I went into the Army.

"We were constantly together as children, for my mother died when she gave birth to me, and my father was a busy man. My only other relative was my half uncle, Barnabas Wyatt, the bastard son of my grandfather and a serving wench. How he came into my life, you'll see shortly.

"When I was fourteen my father persuaded the General Staff to commission me an ensign of cavalry. I served as an ensign for four years, working day and night, for my father was determined

to make an officer of me. Then on my eighteenth birthday I was promoted to lieutenant and was made my father's aide-de-camp. That's when I learned the real meaning of work, for I wasn't allowed an idle second. I fenced, I rode, I shot. And in bad weather I studied Greek and French.

"Father and I spent several months each year at Wyatt Hall in Cornwall, and that's where I fell in love—or thought I did—with Mary Watrous."

Leah's gasp was more pronounced this time, and Jeffrey continued hurriedly: "Mary was a slut, as I learned to my sorrow in due time. But a lad of eighteen can be bewitched by a flaming mass of red hair. And—I was."

Captain Riddle's presence was forgotten as Leah leaned forward and looked earnestly into Jeffrey's eyes. "Did you truly love her?" she asked.

"No, Leah," was the immediate and tender reply. "I never loved anyone—until I found you." Jeffrey became aware of Captain Riddle's smirk and picked up his narrative hurriedly.

"Mary had me fooled for a time, I freely admit. She was seeing my uncle Barnabas secretly whenever he came down to Wyatt Hall. He made an appearance there only when he was in trouble, but as he was constantly in difficulty, he was a frequent visitor. You see, Uncle Barnabas was a year older than my father, and he thought Father's property and position were rightfully his. He was always in debt, for he couldn't stay away from the gaming tables. He had an eye for a pretty ankle and a bare bosom, too, and I dare say that half the doxies of London knew him well.

"He killed three men in duels, and once he made such scurrilous remarks about King William that Father paid a visit to St. James's Palace at dawn one morning and had to plead all day to save him from exile."

Jeffrey stopped suddenly, and his self-assurance vanished. Leah, who was watching him round-eyed, guessed that he was coming to the climax of his tale.

"One day late in 1701 we were at home, Father and I. I spent the afternoon with Mary Watrous—at her invitation. When I left her cottage I saw Benjie, who had just returned from two years at sea. He'd been to the Colonies and was bringing my father a sack of tobacco. My father was fond—very fond—of tobacco. So Benjie and I walked together to the Hall."

Jeffrey took a deep breath, and his voice trembled. "When we arrived the servants were nowhere to be seen. Benjie and I ran into the library and saw at once that a violent fight had taken

place. Draperies were torn down, chairs were overturned, a table was broken. And in the middle of the room, lying on the floor in his own blood, was my father. He was dead."

The cabin was deathly still, and Captain Riddle pushed a bottle of rum toward his young guest. Jeffrey poured a drink and downed it in a single gulp.

"Before I had time to cry out a dozen men jumped on me and on Benjie. I didn't know it at the time, but they were in the pay of my uncle Barnabas. They put blindfolds over our eyes, trussed us like dumb geese, and tossed us into a carriage. We were driven to London and thrown into a tower room at Newgate Prison. Only then did I discover the diabolical plans of my uncle.

"I was charged with the murder of my father. Uncle Barnabas, it's plain, had my father killed, and once I was removed, too, he would come into the lands and money he'd always claimed. Benjie—poor Benjie, who might still be in Cornwall if his path hadn't accidentally crossed mine that day—was named as an accessory.

"I had no money and I wasn't permitted to see Sir Toby—my father's lawyer. From the little our jailers told us, I was to be hanged. Then late one night I had a visitor. Mary Watrous. She'd bribed the guards, and there she was, bold as you please, in my cell.

"Mary said she knew I was innocent and had a plan to help me escape. She gave me a bag of gold to ease the consciences of the guards and told me she had a carriage waiting down the street. I, dupe that I was, believed every word. Well, within the hour Benjie and I walked out the front entrance of Newgate. It was as easy as that. Too easy, if I'd stopped to think.

"Mary was true to her word. There was a carriage waiting for us a square away. As Benjie and I stepped in we discovered—too late—that we'd been tricked. Heavy sacks were thrown over our heads, and our hands and feet were tied.

"Through the thick cloth I could hear a laugh. Mary Watrous's laugh.

"As I reasoned later, Uncle Barnabas had no wish to see me brought to trial. It would have been too easy for me to prove my innocence. But as a fugitive from Newgate I could never hope for a fair trial. I'd be condemned without a hearing.

"It was Uncle Barnabas's plan, I'm sure, to have the ruffians who seized Benjie and me put us to death. But the brutes were greedy—and that greed saved our lives."

Captain Riddle nodded sagely, and as Jeffrey gulped down

another drink of rum the *Seraph's* master took the opportunity to interrupt. "It was at this point that I came into the story, Mistress Hill. Like other shipping men, I was paying five pounds a head for convicts from our prisons to serve as bondsmen. I asked no questions, mind you, ma'am. I couldn't afford to ask questions—I have five expensive daughters in Bristol. So when two men came to me and told me they had—ah—some Newgate runaways who were young and strong, I agreed to pay *ten* pounds apiece for 'em. Mr. Wyatt and his friend Brown were delivered to me at Plymouth Harbor the next day. I had 'em sent out to the ship."

Jeffrey grinned sourly, savoring the bitter experience again. "Those sacks were kept on our heads until we were thrown into the hold, Leah. I didn't see daylight until the *Seraph* was out of sight of land. Then I demanded an audience with the captain here. I finally *did* see him, too."

Captain Riddle chuckled heartily. "I had to let the young devil speak his piece. He thrashed half my crew before I let him come up, and would have thrashed the other."

Jeffrey turned and faced the *Seraph's* master for the first time. "You showed me more kindness than I deserved, Captain. By rights, after the wreck I made of your hold, you should have had me whipped. But you listened to my story and gave me the ship's freedom until we sighted Sandy Hook off New York Town. I realized now that you were taking a chance. For all you knew, I might have persuaded your crew to mutiny. The idea *did* cross my mind."

"I knew a gentleman when I saw one," was Riddle's gruff reply. "And if you bear me no ill will, I ask no more."

The two men shook hands solemnly. Leah watched them and then spoke in a timid, shaking voice.

"Your uncle is dead now, Jeffrey, Captain Riddle says. So what will you do next?"

It was no wonder that Jeffrey failed to take notice of Leah's emotional state, for he himself was more excited than he realized. Yet he cursed himself a thousand times in the days to come for not understanding the meaning behind Leah's words as she laced and unlaced her fingers. Before he could reply to her question Captain Riddle's hearty voice filled the cabin, and his heavy hand slapped the table.

"What will Mr. Wyatt do, ma'am? What would any gentleman in his place do? He'll go back home and live in one of Cornwall's fine, snug houses! He'll apply again for his commission in the

Army, and if there's anyone with a dram of sense in London they'll make him a captain or major at the very least. He'll be a *real* officer, ma'am. Not only of your colonial militiamen."

Jeffrey bristled. "What's wrong with the colonial militia, Captain Riddle? We took Port Royal, did we not? We fought——"

"No offense, boy. No offense. I'm answering a lady's questions, that's all."

"You're making free with my future a bit too fast, Captain. I need time to think, sir."

A great bellow of laughter burst from Captain Riddle's thick lips. "Damn, ma'am, listen to him, will you? He's going back to England with his past wiped clean. He's going to be a gentleman again—and as grand an officer as ever sat aboard a horse. Yes, and he's taking one of the loveliest ladies in the Colonies with him as his wife." He wiped a tear from his cheek. "And he wants time to think, does Mr. Wyatt!"

Fear and doubt filled Leah's eyes, and her voice shook. "Do you think I'd be—acceptable to the English gentry, Jeffrey?"

The question was so unexpected that Jeffrey stared at her in dumb astonishment, still unaware of her anguish. He picked up her hand and stroked it gently.

"You'd be acceptable anywhere, my dear," he said tenderly. "The Queen herself——"

"You wouldn't present me to the Queen, Jeffrey! You wouldn't!"

"There's no one on earth too good for you, Leah," was his instant reply. "I'd be proud to take you to St. James's court. And Her Majesty would be pleased to meet such a lovely subject."

Leah turned her face toward the bulkhead, and tears welled up in her eyes.

The final days at sea passed uneventfully, and if Leah was quiet and withdrawn, Jeffrey had little opportunity to observe the change in her, for Benjie was constantly in attendance. Told of Barnabas Wyatt's death and the clearing of Jeffrey's name, Benjie joked and quipped in a never-ending stream of small talk.

Aided by a freakish wind which left the heavier, more cumbersome frigates wallowing in a sluggish sea, the *Seraph* was one of the first ships of Colonel Church's fleet to make the port of Boston. The heavy men-o'-war struggled in after her. Jeffrey was anxious to go ashore and bid a final farewell to the men who had been his close companions on the long march to Port Royal. And

he hoped for a last word of thanks with Colonel Church, for he sensed that the colonel had been told everything by Captain Riddle and had found time, despite his heavy responsibilities and grave disappointment, to arrange deliberately for Jeffrey's passage aboard the *Seraph*.

A tremendous crowd was gathered at the wharves, and as the *Seraph* slid to her berth Jeffrey could see that even more people were approaching. Church's army was going to receive the welcome of heroes, for the citizens of Massachusetts Bay cared little that Frenchmen were again in possession of Port Royal. Their own homes were safe now, and they were concerned about little else.

Leah stood silently on the deck, watching the shouting throngs below. Suddenly she gripped Jeffrey's arm, and her face was pale.

"I—I don't think I'll go ashore, darling," she said. "Captain Riddle will sail at sundown tonight, so I'll stay in my cabin until we clear the harbor."

Jeffrey eyed her in alarm. "What's wrong, Leah?"

"It's—it's nothing serious, darling. I have the megrims, I think."

"Then by all means go to your cabin. You'll want to be healthy and strong when we land in New York Town. Is there anything I can do for you? Would you like me to bring a surgeon to see you?"

"No, Jeffrey dear." Leah was finding speech difficult. "Don't be concerned about me. Not—ever."

Leah kissed him, and the warm taste of her lips lingered on his as she ran down the deck toward her cabin. Jeffrey watched her with a smile, and when the door of the stateroom closed after her he pulled his hat to the side rakishly and made for the gangplank which the *Seraph's* crew had set in place. Never, he thought, had he been so happy. Leah was his, and his good name had been restored to him. He was the equal of anyone who had served under Benjamin Church, and he walked ashore with the confidence of a man who has won the greatest of all battles, that of acquiring faith in himself.

•

It was late when Jeffrey returned to the *Seraph*, and he sprinted down the wharf, fearing that she would put to sea without him. As he arrived on the brig's deck he was impatient to tell Leah every detail of his day ashore. He hurried toward her cabin, making a mental note not to forget Colonel Church's message for her.

He rapped on the door and jangled his sword. Lord, it was

taking Leah a long time to answer his summons. He was dimly aware that the *Seraph* was moving out to sea, but he had no thoughts for anything or anyone but Leah. It had been seven—no, eight—hours since he had seen her, and with a lover's impetuousness his one desire was to be near her.

After a long wait he knocked again, and when there was no answer he had a faint foreboding but dismissed it with a shrug. If Leah was seriously ill the brig's first officer would have told him so when he had come aboard. He decided she must be watching the shore recede, and he walked quickly along the deck, trying unsuccessfully to maintain a dignified pace. But Leah was nowhere to be seen, and, aroused at last, he searched for Benjie, who apparently had disappeared too.

Jeffrey stopped every sailor he could find, but they replied to his questions with blank indifference. The New York contingent of army officers were of no help either, and, thoroughly alarmed, he was making his way toward the forbidden quarter-deck when he felt a hand on his arm. He stopped short and found himself face to face with a sullen, taciturn woman who had been one of Leah's cabin mates.

"Ye're Major Wyatt, ain't ye?" she asked harshly.

"I am."

"Then—here. This is for ye. And don't ask me nothin'—b'cause I don't know nothin'."

Jeffrey blinked as the woman scurried away. He realized belatedly that she had given him a large sheet of folded paper. Glancing at it rapidly, he saw his name. "Jeffrey Wyatt, Esquire," in Leah's firm, round hand. He ripped the seal open, and by the light of a dim, wavering ship's lantern his eyes raced across the top page. He read.

Addressed to those concerned with the Affairs of Jeffrey Wyatt, Gentleman. Taking it upon myself to weigh the duties which have been performed in behalf of our Queen and Colonies by Master Jeffrey Wyatt, late Captain and brevet-Major in the forces of Colonel Benjamin Church, I do herewith and hereby release Master Wyatt from his bond to serve me until the year 1712.

Master Wyatt was indentured to my father in the year 1702. As sole surviving Member of the Hill family, this indenture has passed to me. But I do freely and of my own will release Master Wyatt, from this time forth.

Written on board the brig *Seraph* on the Eighteenth day of October, in the year of Our Lord 1707, at the Town of Boston.

LEAH NANCY HILL

Jeffrey's brain whirled giddily, and the words had no meaning for him. It was not until he recovered presence of mind to look at the second sheet of paper that he understood. This was a personal message, and it told him all he wanted to know, and more.

MY SWEET JEFFREY,

One who Loves you with all her heart hopes you can find a place in *your* heart to forgive her for what she must do. I make no Quick and Foolish decision, but have thought of little else these past Days.

I have known from the time we met that you were no ordinary Bondsman. I blush with shame when I recall how you have been abused and forced to act as a Menial to those who are Below you. For it is apparent to all who know you that you are a true Gentleman, with a Nobility of spirit far greater than that of the poor souls who live in this Barren New Land.

Your place is in England, at Wyatt Manor or Wyatt Hall—so confused am I that I cannot Remember the name. There you will be loved by your Tenants and your many Servants, and you will become a Great Hero and Soldier, albeit you have already achieved such Fame as can be granted in this corner of the World.

But I am not fit to join you at your great estates as your wife. Nay, I tremble at the mere thought, for I am ill-suited to play the Role of the gracious Lady.

With my countrified manners and my bumpkin speech, I should soon make you Ashamed of me, and the Love which you now feel would be turned to Contempt and Disgust as those whom you hold in Esteem would Snigger and Laugh at my Unrefinement.

And so with a trembling hand I pen you this note of Tender Adieu. Benjie will see me safely home across the mountains. We shall never Meet again, and I believe from the bottom of my Sorry and Aching heart that it is best so. Think well of me, dearest Jeffrey. In years to come, you will Hate and Loathe me less than you do as you read these sad lines.

You will always be beloved by

LEAH.

For a night and a day and still another night the crew of the *Seraph* grumbled unceasingly. Even the officers swore that never before had they been driven toward a port with such relentless demands for speed and yet more speed from their captain. Despite a rolling sea and unreliable cross winds, the brig maneu-

vered her way toward New York Town with the determination of a ship that knew why she was hurrying. Perhaps the *Seraph* knew, but her officers and crew were very much in the dark.

They gossiped, of course. They knew that a wild-eyed officer of militia had burst into Captain Riddle's cabin when the ship had first put out to sea from Boston. And the master's personal steward, who had eavesdropped outside the door, was the authority for the statement that a raging, storming Major Wyatt had demanded that the *Seraph* put about. The steward also claimed that this overwrought young man had threatened to jump overboard and swim back and that the captain had countered by saying he would put young Wyatt in irons.

Even those who took no interest in the mystery were impressed with Major Wyatt's agility when he leaped to the wharf at the foot of Broad Street in the pre-dawn quiet of morning. Ordinarily the *Seraph* would have waited for daylight to ride past the Battery and accept the salute of New York's harbor guns. But Jeffrey refused to tolerate a single minute's delay, and he sprang ashore while several feet of water still separated the slowly moving brig from her berth.

Although the geography of New York Town was hazy to Jeffrey, there was no hesitation in his long-legged stride as he ran up Broad Street to Beaver Street and then raced two blocks to the Broad Way. He had rehearsed every move so carefully that he had the feeling he was dreaming. But the impatience that consumed him told him that this was no dream.

A few early risers were making their way up the Broad Way and Jeffrey dashed past them, slowing down only when he saw the farmer's market at Cortlandt Street looming ahead. He had ten pounds in silver in his pocket and a letter of identification which he had persuaded Captain Riddle to write. The money, the document—and, if necessary, his sword—would take him to his destination.

Farmers offering the products of their gardens stared placidly at the excited militia officer who demanded a boat. They displayed so little interest in him that Jeffrey angrily decided to waste no more time on them, and after asking directions he raced off toward Hudson's River. There, at the Cortlandt Street wharves, he found boats aplenty, but persuading the shrewd owners of these fishing crafts to charter their frail vessels was another matter. He coaxed, he pleaded, he roared, all without results.

Finally, after hours of maddening delay, he found someone who

took pity on him. The sixteen-year-old owner of an ancient bark demanded to see Jeffrey's money, bit each coin expertly, then pocketed the silver and waved Jeffrey aboard.

The slow trip up Hudson's River to Fort Albany was a torture for Jeffrey. On similar journeys in the past he had always been impressed by the towering cliffs and dark green forests, but he was in no mood to appreciate scenery now. And when the bark's youthful owner grew tired and wanted to pull ashore and rest on dry land for the night. Jeffrey, who had never sailed a boat in his life, took the helm and ordered the lad to sleep on the crude wooden bench which was the only furniture the boat boasted. The boy looked hard at Jeffrey's haggard face and unyielding eyes and curled up on the bench without a protest. . . .

At Fort Albany, Jeffrey's patience was tried beyond the capacity of his aching, shattered nerves. His only desire was to secure a horse, but Major Stephens inundated him with eager questions about the campaign and insisted that Jeffrey tarry as his guest for a lavish breakfast. Even in this moment of personal crisis it was necessary to observe the military amenities, for Major Stephens would be his immediate superior when Jeffrey took command at Schenectady. So he stayed for breakfast and surprised himself by eating a meal of eggs, fried pork, potatoes, roasted beef, cold turkey, and venison stew.

But once the repast was finished, he renewed his urgent request for a horse, and Major Stephens, who had learned more in the course of their conversation than Jeffrey had intended to reveal, took pity on him and loaned him the best and fastest animal at the post. . . .

Jeffrey's heels sped the horse along the familiar trail to Schenectady, and settlers hurried to their gates as they heard the thundering hoofbeats. But they saw little of Jeffrey as he flew by. However, despite his desperate anxiety to reach the Hill house, Jeffrey was acutely aware of his surroundings and was dumfounded at the new signs of civilization that he saw on every side. . . .

The weeds grew high in the courtyard of the Hill house, the corn and potato patches looked unkempt, and the sawmill was smaller and more battered than Jeffrey remembered it. But there was clean wood smoke rising from the chimney, and as he pushed open the door he heard laughter in the front parlor. The little group gathered before the fireplace was so absorbed that no one heard Jeffrey come in, and he stood unnoticed, watching.

Directly in front of the blazing fire was Benjie Brown, holding a bulky, blanket-wrapped form in his clumsy arms. A tiny red face was half hidden in the woolen folds, but a tremendous voice emerged from the blankets as Benjie's and Matilda's son roared a welcome to Jeffrey.

Leah, looking more beautiful, more fragile, more desirable than ever, clasped her hands as she peered at the infant, while Matilda beamed placidly at her husband, her child, and her employer. The baby howled again, and his appreciative audience favored him with brilliant smiles.

"Listen to him, will you! Jeffrey Wyatt Brown, your voice is the equal of your father's!" Benjie bellowed.

The infant subsided at once and emitted a series of happy gurgles. Leah's peal of laughter at his antics was so spontaneous that Jeffrey laughed aloud, too, and three pairs of startled adult eyes focused on him.

Matilda was the first to recover. Moving with unaccustomed speed, she dragged her husband out of the room before he could utter a sound. Jeffrey and Leah were alone.

As he kicked the door shut behind him Jeffrey caught a glimpse of the charred silver box resting in its usual place on the mantel. Then he saw no more as he stepped forward and swept Leah into his arms.

Leah was the first to speak. "Didn't—didn't you—get my letters—darling?"

"I read them. I have them here." Jeffrey reached into a pocket, pulled out the crumpled sheets of paper, and carefully threw them into the fire.

"I—I can't go to England with you, Jeffrey. Please don't—force me to go," Leah whispered.

"You'll stay here," Jeffrey replied in ringing tones. "And so will I. What led you to think I'd give up—all this?" With a sweep of his free arm he included the sawmill, the river, and the vast country beyond.

"Captain Riddle will speak to my father's lawyer. I've already given him a letter authorizing Sir Toby to act as my agent and sell Wyatt Hall and all my lands. I'll use the money to build us a bigger house and a finer sawmill—here. And I'll use a part of the funds to buy Benjie's and 'Til's freedom. We'll settle them on the acres to the north."

He was silent for a moment, and when he spoke again there was great depth and fervor in his voice. "I've put Europe behind me forever, Leah. There's something strange about this new land

that gets into a man's blood. There's a freedom here that's to be found nowhere else on this earth. I'd be a fool to give up all I've fought to win—for the sake of a few acres in England.

"We'll live in America—always. This is our home, Leah."

Appendix

TEXT OF Colonel Benjamin Church's letter to Governor Joseph Dudley of Massachusetts, requesting authorization and supplies for the campaign against Port Royal, New France:

May it please your Excellency—

According to your request, when I was last with yourself, and in obedience thereunto, I present you with these following lines, that concern the preparation for . . . my expedition, to attack the enemy. According to my former direction; for it is good to have a full stroke at them first, before they have opportunity to run for it. For the first of our action will be our opportunity to destroy them, and to prevent their running away, in waylaying every passage, and make them know we are in good earnest. And so we being in a diligent use of means, we may hope for a blessing from the Almighty, and that He will be pleased to put a dread in their hearts, that they may fall before us and perish. For my advice is,

First. That . . . good, capable soldiers, well equipped, be in a readiness fit for action . . .

Secondly. That five and forty or fifty, good whaleboats be had ready, well fitted with five good oars and twelve or fifteen good paddles to every boat. And upon the whale of each boat, five pieces of strong leather be fastened on each side to slip five small ash bars through; that so, whenever they land, the men may step overboard, and slip in said bars across, and take up said boat that she may not be hurt against the rocks. And that two suitable brass kettles be provided to belong to each boat to dress the men's victuals in to make their lives comfortable.

Thirdly. That four or five hundred pairs of good Indian shoes be made ready, fit for the service of the English (scouts) and Indians, that must improve the whale boats and birch canoes; for they will be very proper and safe for that service. And let there be a good store of cow hides well tanned, for a supply of such shoes, and hemp to make thread and wax to mend and make more such shoes when wanted, and a good store of awls.

Fourthly. That there be an hundred large hatchets, or light

axes, made pretty broad, and steeled with the best steel that can be got, and made by workmen, that [they] may cut very well, and hold, that the hemlock knots may not break or turn them. . .

Fifthly. That there be a suitable quantity of small bags, or wallets provided, that every man that wants may have one to put up his bullets in, of such a size as will fit his gun (and not be served as at Casco, where most of their shot was so large that it was useless . . . and was not discovered until an engagement took place with the enemy). That every man's bag be so marked that he may not change it. For if so, it will make a great confusion in action. That every man's store of ball be weighed to him, that so he may be accountable and may not squander it away and also his store of powder, that so he may try his powder and gun before action. And that every particular company may have a barrel to themselves and so marked that it may by no means be changed. That men may know beforehand, and may not be cheated out of their lives by having bad powder, or not knowing how to use it. And this will prove a great advantage to the action.

Sixthly. That Colonel John Gorham, if he may be prevailed with, may be concerned in the management of the whale boats, he having been formerly concerned in the eastern parts and experienced in that affair. And whalemen then will be very serviceable in this expedition, which having a promise made to them, that they should be released in good season, to go home a whaling in the fall, your excellency will have men enough.

Seventhly. That there may be raised for this service three hundred Indians at least, and more if they may be had; for I know certainly, of my own knowledge that they exceed most of our English in hunting and skulking in the woods, being always used to it. And it must be practised if ever we intend to destroy those French enemies and Indian rebels.

Eighthly. That the soldiers already out eastward in the service, men of known judgement, may take a survey of them and their arms, and see if their arms be good and they know how to use them right, at a mark, and that they be men of good reason and sense to know how to manage themselves in so difficult a piece of service as this French and Indian hunting is, for bad men are but a clog and hinderance to an army, being a trouble and vexation to good commanders, and so many mouths to devour the country's provision, and a hinderance to all good actions.

Ninthly. That special care be had in taking up the whaleboats that they be good, and fit for that service, so that the country be not cheated as formerly in having rotten boats and as much care that the owners may have good satisfaction for them.

Tenthly. That the tenders, frigates, transports, brigs and other

vessels to be improved in this action, be good decked vessels . . . having four or six guns apiece for defense . . . and there are enough such vessels to be had.

Eleventhly. That said transports be directed to meet the main column of advance at an appointed time and place in the territory of the French enemies.

Twelfthly. That as colonel-in-chief commanding, I may be authorized to require each member of the army to pray daily upon rising, to the Almighty, so that our enterprise will be assured of the success which the publick of Her Majesty's Provinces so earnestly desires.

Thirteenthly. If your excellency will be pleased to make yourself great and us a happy people, as to the destroying of our enemies and easing of our taxes &c., be pleased to draw forth all those forces now in pay in all the eastward parts, both at Saco and Casco bay, for those two trading houses never did any good and never will, and are not worthy the name of Queen's forts; and the first building of them had no other effect but to lay us under tribute to that wretched pagan crew; and I hope will never be wanted for that they were first built; but sure it is, they are very serviceable to them; for they get many a good advantage of us to destroy our men and laugh at us for our folly, that we should be at so much cost and trouble to do a thing that does us so much harm, and no manner of good; but to the contrary when they see all our forces drawn forth, and in pursuit of them they will think that we begin to be roused up, and to be awake and will not be satisfied with what they have pleased to leave us, but are resolved to take from them that they took formerly from us, and drive them out of their country also. The which being done, then to build or occupy a fort at a suitable time, and in a convenient place, and it will be very honourable to your excellency, and of great service to her Majesty, and to the enlargement of her Majesty's government. The place meant being at Portroyal.

Fourteenthly . . . That there be no failure in making preparation of these things aforementioned; for many times the want of small things prevents the completion of great actions. And that everything be in readiness before . . . the enemy's having intelligence. And that the general court be moved to make suitable acts for the encouraging both English and Indians, that so men of business may freely offer estates and concerns to serve the publick.

Fifteenthly. That there be suitable quantities of negotiable coin provided in advance, that so each officer and gentleman may be paid at the rate of one pound per month for ensigns, three pounds ten shillings per month for colonels, and ten shillings per month for ratings and enlisted men.

Thus hoping what I have taken pains to write in the sincerity of my heart, and good affection, will be well accepted, I make bold to subscribe as I am, your excellency's most devoted humble servant,

BENJAMIN CHURCH
Colonel-in-chief
Commanding.

To Joseph Dudley, Esq.,
Captain General and Governour in Chief,
in and over her Majesty's province of the Massachusetts bay,
in Newengland,
in America,
and Vice Admiral of the same.

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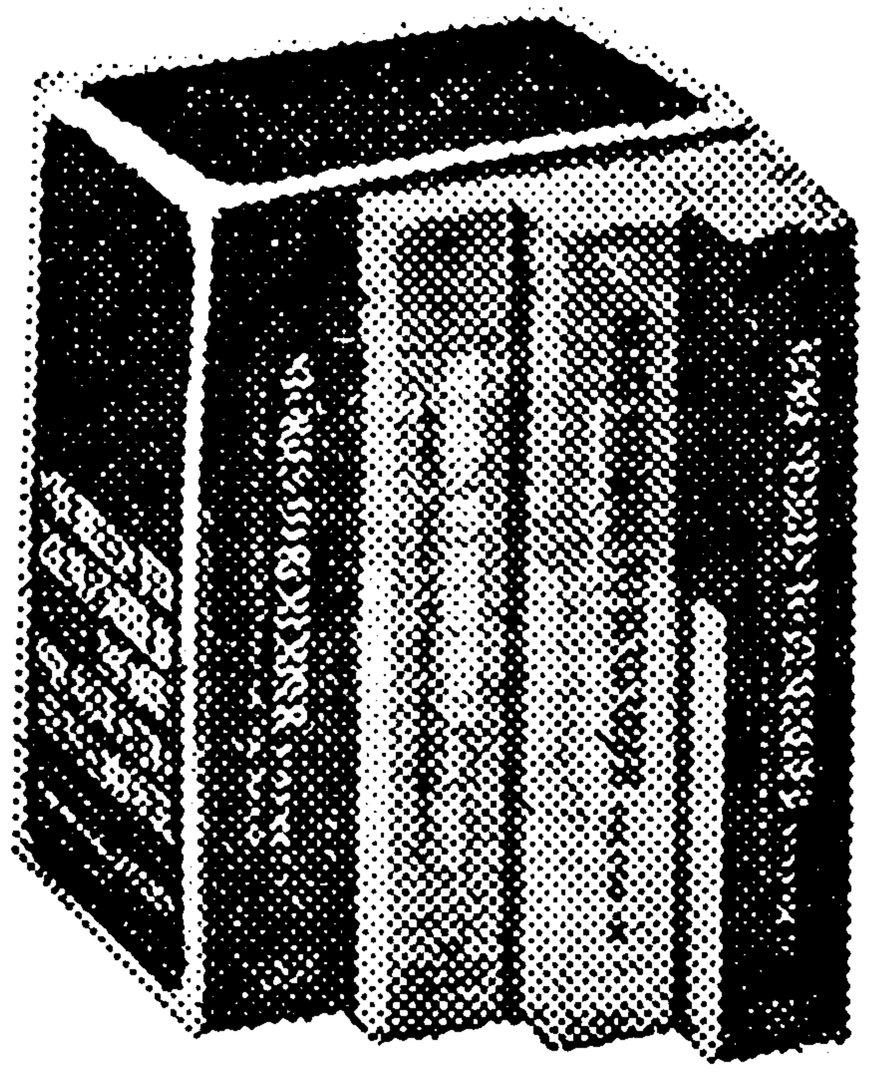

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