

Warrior Heart

by

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“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.”

Revelation 19:11

Fort Pontchartrain November 29, 1760

The spirit of the wind came rushing into the clearing like a stream of ice water pouring over my bare arms and across my chest. Its breath warned me, but I could not understand. I did not heed its words to me.

The damp cold of the yellow sand seeped into my moccasins; sand that my grandfathers had hunted upon; sand that the Creator had formed. The spirit of the sand warned me, but I could not understand. I did not heed its words to me.

Now, many strangers gathered upon it. They were dressed in cloth dyed the color of summer leaves, and they walked stiffly in lines as was their custom. These were the very men I had fought against just a season ago and defeated. Rangers they called themselves. We named them White Devil. These were the men who had brought fear upon our brothers the French. There were others with them, weaker ones in red coats and blue leggings, standing like water birds on their spindly legs. These were the men who had come to take Pontchartrain from the French, the place we named Waweatunong, The Crooked Way.

I came to this meeting place to watch the ceremonies and listen to the great promises of their chiefs— I and many others. Some came in expectation of better trade and many gifts because we had allowed the strangers the land the fort stood upon. After hearing their words, some were glad that the strangers had come. “They will be a better father to us than the French,” they assured me. But I have no white father. My children are not their children.

The French cloth was lowered from its pole, and the British cloth raised over the fort. My people cheered, the green soldiers echoing their cries. The habitants became British children since the French soldiers had left to settle on the other side of the Great River.

Earlier, the Lenape received the same British gifts in exchange for abandoning their French brothers. But the Odawak remained strong. We would not leave our brothers’ side because we had long been in league together. Lenape heads turned easily at the words spoken. The British had declared they would empty Lenape lands of colonials and allow no settlement there. But now, here were the British among us, upon our soil where the sun rises over one lake and sets upon another.

I was not filled with awe for these red soldiers as sometimes happens between men who are enemies. I was not alone in this. My young friend, Obwandiag, stood at a distance. His back was as strong as the oak as he watched these men. He listened to them and eyed them as keenly as a hawk regards its prey. Obwandiag turned neither right nor left as our chiefs declared their allegiance. To only one man Obwandiag gave his attention.

One of the strangers called out Msko Aki's French name. At this we lifted our heads as one. The stranger ordered him to surrender his loyalty to the British commander. Msko Aki, Red Earth, was a man my people knew well. His Odawa mother was Giizhigookwe, Sky Woman, and his French father, Dabwewan, the True. Red Earth was the man who had defeated the green and red soldiers before with our People from Michilimackinac. He was a man of wisdom and power. He had fought with us, side by side. But the strangers considered him French— some, a French soldier, and because of this he was required to lay down his musket at the commander's feet. The French commandant, Bellèstre, turned his gaze upon the ground in shame as the British scanned the crowd before them, searching for his distinguished ally.

As Red Earth made his way forward, I can only remember the sound of the water lapping against the shore. The People were silent as all eyes were on this one man. Slowly Red Earth walked to the man swelled about the belly. There seemed to be an uncertainty in this British commander's face as Red Earth drew near him. My heart began to pound within my skin like drums before a feast. Obwandiag must have felt the same stirring, for now his lips parted in eagerness and his eyes came alive with interest.

Red Earth carried his musket in one hand and received the blanket offered as a gift with the other. He did not lay down his firelock before he took the British blanket with its bold red stripe running down the side. He stood in front of the commander, meeting him with only cold duty, and without a word handed the gift back to its giver. In one brief glance his eyes met with Obwandiag's, and then he surrendered his musket.

As I watched Red Earth walk out of the fort, stripped of his musket but not his dignity, I sensed a fire about me despite the growing cold. I braced myself against the spirit in the wind, repelling its force with the force that now surged inside my flesh with every beat of my warrior heart.

—Black Feather, Odawa elder

Fort Detroit 1762

Chapter 1

Lieutenant Alden Garrat leaned against the bleached log walls of the palisade as a flotilla of dugouts passed the water gate of Fort Detroit. He squinted across the steel blue water. These were the Ottawa, a formidable presence here in the new British territory. They were returning from their winter lands to the south, and with them, Alden concluded, came a static tension that affected his soldiers. Formerly Fort Pontchartrain, Detroit was an important outpost for Indian trade and had been since the French possessed the territory the last hundred years or so.

It was Alden's first spring in the western frontier. He came to the fort last September from Niagara with a company of soldiers assigned to escort the Indian agent, William Johnson, and reinforce the garrison. The Senecas had stirred these lake tribes with complaints against the new English "fathers". War threatened. Johnson had been charged with the responsibility of restoring peace, which he achieved to the relief of the fort's commanding officer, Captain Donald Campbell of the Sixtieth Regiment.

"Our frien's return, Mason," Alden commented to his companion. Warmth seeped through the red jacket of his uniform as the sun drenched the weathered gray pickets in its soothing rays.

"Too soon for me," Mason replied in his haughty English.

Alden raised his brow. Perhaps it was too soon he thought. Supplies had not yet turned up in Detroit for the gift-giving the Indians had come to expect from the French.

"We will be bothered with all their begging," Mason complained. He swept a fat, black fly, newly emerged from its winter hibernation, from his sleeve.

Alden watched the heavy insect veer off drunkenly. The Indians thought themselves entitled to the offerings as compensation for their friendships with the British. Hopefully, English traders would arrive prepared

this time with goods the Indians desired. The previous season's unrest had been stirred hotter by the traders' breach of etiquette in selling merchandise only of interest to French settlers.

"It's truth," he replied, ignoring his comrade's fastidious brushing of his uniform. "Ya'd rather be spendin' your days as t'is past winter thin?" He watched more canoes gliding over the cold water, sensing rather than seeing the scowl his words produced.

Mason spat in a muddy snowdrift on the ground. "Yes, if it pleases you to know. I would rather be dancing with delightfully interesting women than dealing with naked savages."

"Women?" Alden teased. "I recall only one woman mentioned exceedin'ly. Faith, I don't know her name. How callous o' me to forget. Annemarie, was it?" He spread his lips into a thin, sly grin.

"Jest with me if you wish, my friend," Mason replied a bit irritably. "But she is an angel of grace. And I am not the only man to notice the divine qualities of her person."

Mason was born from money and title, and the truth was he would become Alden's superior one day. But toying with the younger man was far too easy, Alden thought.

"Now ya've reminded me," he interrupted, pretending to have just remembered the fair woman's name. "Angellique," he drew the word out in an exaggerated French accent.

Mason cocked his tri-cornered hat angrily. "Someday you may have the distinct opportunity of being jealous of my happiness. But if you're quite through, I believe it is time for us to report."

Alden laughed and fastened the top button of his coat. Another canoe passed. An old warrior, his wife, and perhaps his second wife, occupied this one. The younger woman sat at the bow, paddling as strongly as any brave. Her gaze was solemn, almost haunting. She was certainly not a Pawnee slave. She had an air about her that dispelled any notion of servanthood. Angel of grace, Alden repeated silently with a backward glance at the woman in the canoe. He followed Mason along the shore toward the fort gate.

The largest garrison in the region, Detroit was built on a steep bank. Its east wall fronted the river at the bottom of the hill and opened into a water gate for unloading and loading ships. As the sand gave way to fine gravel, it crunched coldly under his boots. Alden entered the water gate and was surrounded by walls constructed of vertical logs twenty-five feet high with an earthen bank topped by a scaffold running along the north, south and west sides. Two bastions, armed with cannons, faced the river.

There were eighty houses inside the fort arranged along four narrow main streets roughly running north to south. The street closest to the water gate at the bottom of the hill was soggy with mud due to the slope draining

downhill. Another street ran from picket to picket, dissecting the other four and cutting the fort in half. Three shorter streets completed the grid of rowhouses, barracks and military necessities. The Chemin du Ronde, literally the way round, bordered the inside perimeter of the pickets.

The houses were larger than the Yanks had built in their settlements. The commandant's house, Alden's destination, was the grandest dwelling and had limestone plaster covering the interior log walls.

Outside the fort, ten miles up and down the river, lived the inhabitants as they were called, the French peasants. Indian villages were scattered along the river as well, and a Huron mission lay to the south. Across the river, a distance of nine hundred yards, was more Canadian territory and more Indian settlements. It was a prize to be sure for the British flag and to the men charged to run it.

Captain Donald Campbell sat at his desk, his portly frame only half concealed behind it. "Officers," the young Scotsman addressed the handful of men before him. "First, I must tell you that what is to be said in this room be kept in this room. It is for your safety and all the forts'."

The men sat in rapt attention.

"I believe our present situation to be precarious. Our success or failure here depends on our willingness to humble ourselves. We need to carry on relations with the surrounding tribes in a manner instigated first by the French. In a word, gifts. Ye understand how important it is to us here to keep our friends happy and our enemies appeased."

Alden noted the urgency in Campbell's voice. He was not an excitable man, more easy than harsh, but something had upset him.

Campbell sighed deeply. "Ye already know we're hard pressed to supply the smaller posts in our care without the added burden of providing for the Indian populations. But I believe the practice to be a necessity. I've written to the General of our situation and attempted to alert him of the emotions that could result if the French tradition were neglected. I must inform ye that his opinions on how best to secure this area and further the peace differ from my own."

Alden glanced at those beside him as these last words made their mark on Campbell's men now in their second spring at Detroit.

"Aye," Campbell said. "We may be in for a long, difficult season. My orders are to wean the Indians, so to speak, from receiving rewards for their friendship with us." He tapped the papers on his desk. "In addition to this," he addressed his new arrivals, "supplies come slowly to this part of the territory because transport is difficult by land or water. That's why it's an annual, ongoing task to procure from the habitants any supplies, flour, meat and the like they are able to spare for our garrison use. Lt. MacDougall, I'm

putting Ensigns Mason and Jennings under your command to assist with the procedure required.

“But I come now to the purpose of our meeting. And please, give your attention to this. Without the material means in our hands to secure goodwill, we’ll need to cultivate rapport by our behavior and understanding of the people in this region. Rumors are flying again of actions against us. In the Ohio valley, Englishmen are dead, captives taken, horses stolen, all because of dishonest traders and mistreatment of tribes in the area. The Shawnee, Delaware Lenape, these are combatants of a mischievous mind I fear, and I, unlike others, do no’ discount their threats or influence upon the local tribes. I repeat, lives depend on our behavior.

“Our best ally is our friendships that are of a true nature.” Campbell gave a short contemptuous laugh. “Which, as ye can discern from my predicament, puts us at great odds. Any questions?” The Captain pursed his lips in the following silence. “Very well. Spring is upon us. Be on your guard, but be civil. Have no talk of the matter between you or the interpreters. It is of utmost importance to the fort and the outlying area.” He dismissed them, then added, “Lt. Garrat, ye’ll remain.”

A shifting of positions signaled the end of the officers’ meeting, and the men filed out into the sunlight. Campbell waited until he and Alden were alone; then he handed him a paper on which was a list of goods requested by the Indians the previous season. Alden scanned the list quickly.

“Lieutenant, the reason I requested a private audience is that I wanted to assure you that ye are no’ being overlooked. Other men were appointed to posts, men not as qualified as you are. But I asked Johnson to keep you at Detroit, and he agreed your presence would be helpful to me. You now know why, and I count ye among the most able because I’m in need of your talent in assembling a strong army. Many here have very little bush loper training, and your experience would be a great asset to me in preparing these men.”

“Thank you, Sir.” Alden tried not to stand up straighter under the praise, but he couldn’t help it.

“Ye speak French well, I’m told.”

Alden bit his lip. When he knew he might be coming to this French fort last fall, he had made a diligent effort to learn the language. But confidence did not follow. He discovered that French rolling off a native speaker’s tongue was a different sort of French. “I think my ability only fair,” he said.

Campbell chuckled. “That’s more than most. Now, this list,” he pointed to the paper, “is a compilation of goods the traders must carry. Spoons, thread, linen, fox traps,” his voice trailed off. “And—” he held up his hand, “the regulations that must rule their trade. God bless their souls,” he said as more of a curse than a benediction. “Ye’ll ensure that they do their part.”

Alden scanned the regulations a second time.

“And in another matter, there is someone I want ye to find.”

Alden looked up, curious at the change of tone in the Captain’s voice.

“I want ye to find a man named Jean Baptiste.”

Alden’s heart sunk.

“You know him, then.” Campbell squeezed back into his chair.

“Only the rumors.”

“Aye, well I haven’t seen him in the fort since the day I arrived, nor have the merchants. This is a revealing detail. Find him. And ask him to come to a meeting with me. Make sure it is an invitation, no’ an order.”

The high spirits swelling in Alden’s chest only seconds before evaporated in the face of the Captain’s demand.

“Are ye doubting your orders, Garrat?”

“I am not, Sir,” he lied.

The Captain waited patiently.

Alden cleared his throat. “It is truth, I am, Sir.”

“Go on.”

“I have only heard o’ t’is man. But his reputation is befitting a French officer. Why he’s allowed to remain in British lands escapes my reason. He’s known for his loyalties, and he’s a man of influence. Sir, I would fear he is a dangerous combatant.”

“Exactly the reason to court him. But technically, he never held commissioned status in the French militia. His father was Laurent du Moine du Rochere, a Michilimackinac merchant, no’ a soldier, who took an Ottawa woman as his wife and left her to raise their children. And,” Campbell tapped his desk, “even though Baptiste was made to lay down his arms with the Canadian soldiers, it’s his absence in the fort that makes me believe his Indian friendships carry more weight than his French ones.”

“I understand, Sir. But I hardly think it recommends him.”

“He’s a man of influence, Garrat. Bellèstre admitted Baptiste’s status was nearly as a sachem among the tribes, and that he was a loyal defender of both French and Indian. But my orders may prove dangerous if I have no ally. I hope to make him one. Ye’re to exhibit civility and society. He may be a valuable personality in our diplomatic cause. If I fail in this endeavor, it is still wise to keep him close where our eye can be upon him. But all in due course, officer. You will bring him in.”

Alden respectfully took his leave. In the days following, he made his rounds to the various traders in the area, securing their promises of compliance. But he was no fool. Alden knew that much of their trade rested on shaky morals and deception was the standard. All the more reason trade was now limited to inside the forts. This would stop illegal trade of liquors and gunpowder, or so the British leadership supposed. Alden also made

inquiries about Jean Baptiste du Rochere, uncovering his whereabouts and the gossip bordering on legend.

The man was called simply Baptiste, or Jean Baptiste, and somehow it distinguished him from other men of the same name. He had served under several commandants, fighting against the English efforts to establish posts as far back as 1747. He had fought in the recent war under another mixed-blood Frenchman from Michilimackinac and was partially responsible for several British defeats. He also had the distinction of being a local hero and had only recently returned to a settlement not far from the Potawatomi village, about two miles south of the fort. But none of this discouraged Campbell, and Alden's orders stood as the Captain gave them.

Alden chose from his ranks Conny Shaw to accompany him to the Baptiste homestead. Shaw was a wiry twenty-year-old with ruddy skin and hair who barely made the military's height requirements of five foot six inches. He spoke French well, a talent necessary in these parts as the inhabitants did not speak English. And, Alden knew his faltering French needed all the help it could get, which was why he intended on making good friends with the man.

At the designated time, the two men mounted fort ponies and traveled along the south road bordering the river. They were fortunate that the frost had not worked its way completely out of the soil as the land surrounding the fort was muck and almost impassable in the spring. The ponies plodded along the wide road, and Alden patted his shaggy unkempt mare who promptly tried to bite his leg. The horses were English breeds crossed with French stock, squatly, rough creatures. These were not handsome ponies, but sturdy enough due to the French habit of neglecting their animals by turning them out to roam and forage at will with no aid whatsoever. Indeed, Alden half expected the homely creature beneath him to bray.

Alden settled deeper into his saddle. "Whatever happens, Shaw, if we're t'rown out, tomahawked, we're to be of the highest character," he addressed the young soldier at his side. "Men of duty. Men of respect," he smiled, only half jokingly.

"Perhaps, t'is Baptiste fellow will be affable?" Shaw offered.

Alden laughed heartily. "O', if Heaven were only so willin'," he said as if he did think it were possible. In his gut he knew the task ahead was a difficult one. Baptiste was an experienced soldier, and Alden's orders would be quite transparent to a man of his sensibilities.

Despite the doomed mission, Alden was calm and in good humor as the sunny day was too joyous a spring day not to celebrate. The weather in this land was quite unruly, and if you couldn't appreciate the many shades of gray, you had no business living in it. They soon passed the first of the habitant farms beside the road.

“Odd arrangement for farms,” Shaw commented.

Alden eyed his young soldier. These farms were spread along the river like ribbons stretched perpendicular to the water. They were about a hundred yards wide, but the largest plots ran three miles inland. “To the outsider perhaps,” he said. “But consider why t’ese properties are laid out so narrowly.”

Shaw thought a moment and shrugged.

“So each has undisputable access to the river and enough land to support its family. The inhabitants are not as backward as those in the barracks believe. Just t’ink how sparse an’ lonely we’d be wit’out their supplies to the fort.”

Shaw didn’t seem convinced.

Finally the men rounded a curve in the road, and their destination lay before them. The Baptiste house set back from the road a bit farther than its neighbors. It was built in the French style with a steeply sloped thatched roof and dormered windows, glass not oiled buckskin. The cheerful house was fronted with pickets and brightened with a door painted apple green.

“And here we are,” Alden said with a lingering, sweeping gaze of the prosperous settlement and cleared fields. “Kept pretty well for a man o’ adventure I’d say,” he concluded as he dismounted.

“Should we call out, Sir?” Shaw dismounted and, adding Alden’s reins to his own, looped them around the branches of a bush next to the path. “A friendly greetin’? I dunna see anyone.”

Alden stopped short. Shaw was full of pluck but not possessed of much experience. “Men o’ respect,” he reminded him. “Aut’ority. We’re not women come to take tea!” He frowned and motioned for Shaw to follow him to the opened door. Alden was about twenty paces from the door of the house when an arrow whizzed past him and struck into the tree beside them. Both men stopped, and Shaw tightened his grip on his musket.

“Etienne!” A woman swept briskly out of the house and pulled a boy of about ten from the brush bordering the field. “These men are guests in your father’s house,” she scolded in French and confiscated his bow.

Alden glanced at Shaw as the young man breathed a sigh of relief.

“Henri! I know you are here. Come out at once.” The woman surveyed the field, and a younger boy emerged holding a slingshot.

Alden raised his brow. It seemed their arrival was no surprise, and the farm was not only well-tended but well-fortified.

“You will not shame yourselves again!” The woman turned to the men and addressed them as she came near. “I beg your pardons, Monsieurs. I hope you were not frightened.”

Alden took a breath, letting out the best French he could manage from nights spent with his soiled, worn primer. "We were not harmed, Madame," Alden replied.

She laughed. "I said frightened, gentlemen. He was only playing with you. If he wanted to harm you with the arrow, he would not have missed."

Alden blinked.

"Is there something that you need? Flour, perhaps? You are a long way from the fort," she continued, not the least bothered by their stunned expressions.

Alden looked down at this small woman clothed in a simple dress and moccasins. She was probably in her mid-thirties, tanned, with a sprinkling of gray through her dark hair. It was pulled into a type of knot at the back of her head, but loose strands carried by the wind whipped across her cheek. She had been beautiful and was still quite attractive, much better Alden decided than the fort women who powdered their hair and took great pains to arrange themselves fashionably. But Alden sensed an air of authority about her seldom witnessed in a woman.

"There is," he said at last. "Does Jean Baptiste du Rochere live here?"

"Who makes this inquiry?"

Alden looked at the bow she held in her petite but strong hand. He smiled. "Forgive me, I have forgotten my manners. I am Lieutenant Garrat. Captain Campbell makes the inquiry."

"Hmm." She lifted her chin, considering the implications. "Jean is in the field. I will send Etienne for him. Would you like to come in and sit down at the table? I can offer you bread."

Normally Alden would not have accepted because he was on duty, but Campbell had ordered society, companionship, so he made a quick decision. "Thank you, we will."

"Hmm." She barely nodded, eyeing him thoughtfully and called to the boy. "Etienne; go get your father. Tell him he has visitors."

The boy darted down the path through the field, the younger boy ready to follow.

"Henri, you will remain."

How she knew the little tike's mind was beyond Alden as her back was to the boys and her scrutinizing gaze upon him. At any rate, the youngster rose eagerly just to collapse in a defeated heap.

"Come then." She motioned toward the house. "I am Adelle du Rochere."

Alden and Shaw followed behind with a shared glance between them. This was Baptiste's wife? She barely stood tall enough to reach his chest, Alden observed, but her confidence before two officers was unwavering.

There was no hint of fawning like many inhabitants displayed. A fitting wife, perhaps, for the man of legends Alden thought.

“This is Therese,” Adelle du Rochere said with a wave of her hand as they entered. An Indian woman turned from the hearth where she had just placed a kettle over the fire.

“Mademoiselle,” Alden greeted her, trying not to stare. She was the young woman he had seen days ago in the canoe. She nodded with a downward glance, and Adelle motioned for the men to sit in the chairs at the table.

She spoke to the younger woman in the Indian language Alden had come to recognize as Ottawa, though he understood none of it. Whatever she said, however, enlisted a giggle from both women. Alden cleared his throat. Madame du Rochere smiled and served the bread on simple wooden plates with a cup of fruit ale for each man.

“Thank you,” Alden said again with another glance at the Indian woman. He had no idea what to say next. Talking to a fellow soldier, even the enemy, was one thing, but surrounded by giggling women was quite another.

“This grain is different.” Shaw turned the bread over and looked at it. “Rice, is it not?”

Adelle smiled. “Yes, I added some ground rice into the wheat this time.”

“It is very good.”

“Thank you, Monsieur.”

Alden chewed his bread, trying to unglue it from the roof of his mouth. He turned his chunk over in his hand with a sideways glance at Shaw. Who would’ve believed he’d know what he was talking about? Rice indeed. He took a draw of ale.

Baptiste walked into the doorway and stopped just inside it. Alden stood slowly; Shaw followed suit. There was nothing said as the men took in each other’s presence. Baptiste was tall, six feet, about forty but fit and muscular with dark hair and eyes.

“Jean,” Adelle said, “this is Lieutenant Garrat. He wishes to speak to you on behalf of the commandant.”

Baptiste regarded them in silence, his lips fixed in a firm line. Another boy, older, perhaps fourteen, and obviously Baptiste’s son as the resemblance was striking, came to stand behind him.

Alden spoke first. “It is a pleasure to meet you, sir. Captain Campbell sends his regards.”

Baptiste said nothing.

“Therese.” Adelle motioned for her to follow her outside, and Baptiste moved to let them pass. She touched the older boy’s shoulder. “Come, Louie.”

When the men were alone, Baptiste poured himself ale but did not refill their cups. He sat on the bench next to the wall and motioned for them to be seated. He emptied his cup.

Alden tried again. "Your service to your cause has brought you many admirers in the fort—"

Baptiste help up his hand. "What do you want?"

Alden was relieved to get to the point. "The Captain invites you to his house. He admires your distinguished loyalty and would like to make your acquaintance."

Baptiste smiled sarcastically. "He would, yes?"

"He has no ill intentions I can assure you." Alden knew Baptiste would be suspicious.

Baptiste glanced at Shaw. "Send him away," he told Alden.

Shaw, fully able to follow the conversation in French, shot a surprised look at Alden who nodded his consent. Baptiste waited until Shaw was outside and out of hearing.

"When you come again," Baptiste informed Alden, "you will come alone, unarmed; that is, if you have no ill intentions."

"Agreed." Alden shifted in his chair. Baptiste talked like an Indian, looked like an Indian, and now it seemed he behaved like one.

"I sense you are uncomfortable with formalities, Lieutenant."

Alden eyed him evenly.

"And that is good," Baptiste said, "because I do not like them." He cocked his head to one side, studying him.

Alden's mind raced with considerations of what this man might present next. Campbell had ordered civility, but this man had done nothing but insult the Crown with his sullen behavior.

Baptiste's eyes narrowed. "It could be, that you do not like me."

Alden refused to flinch under his accusation. "You could be right. I am not the one inviting you to my house."

Baptiste smiled. He got up and poured Alden another cup of the fruit ale. "I am not going to give you an answer." He pushed the cup toward Alden and sat down opposite him at the table.

"Not now," he said and leaned back in his chair. "You referred to my distinguished service. That service came at a great sacrifice to my family. For the last fifteen years I have served as an interpreter, soldier and spy while my wife raised my sons and farmed my father's land with no guarantee of my return."

Alden drank the last of the ale in his cup and studied the man across the table with new interest. His frankness concerning his past activities against England was either political stupidity or bold confidence in his station. Alden decided it was the latter.

“My honest desire,” Baptiste continued, “is to now enjoy my wife and sons and work this land. The Master of Life has kept me along my path, and if it is His choice, I will see your Captain. My wife deserves to know of these things, and when you come back, I will give you an answer.” Baptiste rose to his feet.

Alden stood and offered his hand. It was fortunate that Campbell’s request had been to invite and not to order a meeting as Baptiste did not seem to recognize a governing authority. “Thank you for your hospitality, sir. I will return in a few days.”

Baptiste nodded his reply, ignoring Alden’s open hand and escorted him outside. Alden reunited with Shaw, and they led their ponies back to the road. A dull thud and instant thunderous pain throbbled from Alden’s neck.

“Ow-w!” he yelled as he whirled around, rubbing his neck. He felt a welt forming. Henri, clutching his slingshot, quickly disappeared into the woods beside the road. Alden bent down and picked up a pebble.

Shaw whistled. “T’at one’s a little warrior.”

“Bloody terrors, bot’ whelps!” Alden declared. “God only knows what villainous weaponry the older lad excels at! By the Queen,” he said rubbing his neck. “Brassy nipper!” he shouted over his shoulder.

Shaw chuckled briefly, his mirth cut short by Alden’s scowl.

Both men mounted their horses and headed back to the fort, Alden sputtering curses and Shaw dutifully silent.

In the days following, Alden designed a series of drills to further challenge the men assigned to him and make them comfortable and confident with their musket. Many of these men entered the army with no formal training because it was difficult to recruit regulars in the new country.

Hiring German mercenaries had proven unsuccessful recently. Even among the few gained, European warfare had to be adapted to the camouflage and ambush tactics of Indian warriors and their newly taught French allies. He had some measure of success due only to his willingness to acclimate himself to their technique and to work as hard as he could to develop character that would persevere under impossible odds.

Not only did he take his light infantry training under his former commander, Colonel Bouquet, seriously, but he had spent time studying the bush lopers, or Canadian fighters, as well. He had also fought alongside the Rangers who were Yankee bush fighters. He was doing his best to become like one, self-sufficient and trained in wood lore.

The result was that during campaigns he modified regulation dress. Moccasins replaced boots. Green or blue replaced the red coat, if the coat was worn at all. Their hats were trimmed down, and packs were fitted to hang higher on the back. These changes enabled his men to move faster and lighter. His soldiers carried their own cornmeal, washed their own clothes.

No luxuries were allowed. These were not his inventions, but those of the commanders of the Sixtieth, and they began changing the way their soldiers fought.

The ragged men now making up his ranks were well-suited in character for this type of training. Most of them— Irish, Scot, and Brit— were birthed in scarcity and raised with grit. Even among the unsoldierly colonials Alden sensed a tenacity of spirit.

“One thought weighs on your mind, soldier.” Alden raised his pointed finger above his head and scanned the men lined before him in the practice yard. “After you gain your position, to stop an’ steady your aim.” He backed away to the side of the line and lowered his raised arm to his side. Four men took off across the clearing and dropped to their knees at the designated spot, aiming their muskets without firing then continuing the charge.

“Hastings!” Alden shouted. “Ya are not leveling your musket. Our enemy is not Goliath!”

Alden bit his lip as he watched the next charge. “Mott! Ya just aimed to the side. An ill-fated shot, soldier. Ya killed your bunkmate!”

“Elbows in to your sides!” Alden shook his head. “T’ey look like a flock o’ chickens flappin’ t’eir wings,” he muttered.

He motioned for the men to return, and as they joined the rest, Alden picked up his own musket. “T’ere are no individuals on the field. T’is troop’s strengt’ is its spirit, soldier to soldier, man to man, heart to heart. T’ere is no room for surrendering orders to fear. It will cost lives.

“Awareness of your fellows in the field is the difference between unity and confusion. Side vision assists, but what o’ smoke, forest gloom an’ fog? T’ey are fickle allies, your protection one moment, your blindfold the next. Awareness o’ movement, yours, your regiment, your enemy, depends on concentration to detail in the midst o’ chaos an’ under fire. Our battles are not fought in open field, so our opponent is often invisible wit’ the ability to navigate from cover to cover wit’ ease and silence.”

As Alden scanned their sweaty faces, he noted their fatigue. He wanted them uncomfortable. “The commitment to perseverance an’ purpose wins battles an’ ultimately wars,” he went on. Drilling them in their outer coats in the sun prepared them for the hot humid summer. They might as well get used to sweat stinging their eyes and that nauseous wrenching in their gut.

“Wit’ t’ese objectives before us, we’ll charge again, only t’is time ya’ll call out the position of your fellow in approximate paces. The first charge, call the position to the left an’ the next to the right. End stations will rotate on the succeeding charge. After charges one then two. On the fourt’, middle stations rotate. Later ya’ll learn to prime and load on your knees.” He stepped to the line. “But for now we’ll stay wit’ movin’ as a unit an’ becomin’

familiar with peeling off in flanks. Jennings. Sgt. Rawlings. Gordon. Corporal Domery.”

These seasoned soldiers, part of his original platoon, came forward and joined him in a staggered formation.

“We’ll demonstrate the procedure.” At the signal, Alden led the men across the yard in a successful unified exercise.

After completing the return drill, he observed the self-doubt in the new soldiers’ eyes. “I realize t’ese are not drill tactics many of ya are familiar wit’,” he said. “The times are such that the methods in which we wage war must adapt to our enemy. An’ soldiers and commanders much better thin meself have utilized similar formations to train men who went on to experience favorable gains against the enemy in our last battles.” He took the line again and raised his arm.

The new recruits stepped forward.

“Diligence and attention to detail,” he said, “with a measure of Divine Providence, ensures t’at ya live to fight the next battle, men.”

That night, Alden stretched out on his bunk in the officer’s quarters satisfied at the day’s work. But the matter of Jean Baptiste was not forgotten. On the contrary. Alden dreaded the visit, and many times throughout the routine of his days it would rise into his thoughts like a mountain he didn’t want to climb. He felt inadequate to manage the man’s shrewdness.

Baptiste was older, more experienced, and as intelligent as he had feared. Diplomacy was not the training Alden received, and Baptiste was certainly the superior fellow to his schoolboy attempts. Merely showing up offended the French loyalist, and the reality of failing his orders brought Alden no end of anxiety. The time had come, however, to push such worries aside and get on with duty.

Two days later, the Baptiste homestead was quiet on his approach, and no one was visible outside the structure. Alden watched warily in anticipation of similar events as those of the previous visit, but no treachery awaited him in the form of arrow and sling. He was startled then as Henri raced around the corner of the house, stopping directly in front of him. Who was the more surprised, Alden couldn’t guess, but the boy turned on his heel and disappeared as quickly as he had come.

With no greeting from the house forthcoming, Alden followed the boy’s retreat to the back of the house. He saw Therese in the distance stooped down beside a maple tree lining the property, and as Henri announced his arrival, Alden greeted her look of surprise with a raised hand. The Indian woman quickly gathered her skirts and made her way to him, Henri skipping along beside her. She seemed afraid. Alden sensed she must be alone and spoke first, hoping to put her at ease.

“Bonjour, Mademoiselle.” He hoped she spoke French as he had no other means of communicating than English. “I came to see Monsieur Baptiste.”

“I am sorry, Officer. He is not here. They have gone to the mission.” She pointed across the river.

Alden knew the Huron mission. The Jesuits commanded it, a Father Potier and one more he had forgotten. No wonder Baptiste didn’t come to the fort. He traded at the mission to avoid the British merchants.

“They will make their return soon,” she went on. “I expect them after midday.”

Alden squinted into the morning sun and bit his lip. Her French was better than his. He gazed thoughtfully at the river.

“You are welcome to wait, if it pleases you.” Her tone was polite, careful not to offend, but not warm. His presence made her nervous. She was younger than he had first thought. Her eyes were cinnamon brown, circled with black lashes and beautifully set under thin brows. How else to show good intentions but to put her fears to rest?

He cleared his throat. “Thank you. I will accept your suggestion,” he replied.

If she regretted her offer, she did not reveal it. “Henri, help me move this bench into the shade,” she directed, pulling her braid to one side.

Alden stopped Henri. “That will not be necessary.” Alden met their confused stares with a quick smile. “There is no need to fuss on my behalf. I can assist you in your work, yes?”

The sideways glance she gave him told him that she wished he would remain on the bench, but she took Henri’s hand. “If you wish, Monsieur,” she said.

She led them to a maple grove where she had assembled birch baskets and flattened hollowed-out reeds. Alden picked a reed from a basket and turned it between his fingers. He thought it might have been elderberry.

Therese waited for his attention. “First you make a cut like this,” she directed, holding a sharpened axe.

“This is woman’s work,” Henri announced.

Alden glanced at the boy. Apparently he was losing respect, if he held any, in the lad’s eyes. Therese sliced a v-shape in the bark where the sun shone on it.

“Then insert the reed at the bottom of the cut for a spout,” she continued. “And place the basket.” After she had finished, she handed the axe to Alden. “You try.”

Alden pointed to the adjacent tree. “Here?”

“Lower.”

Alden cut a line, but it wasn't deep enough, and no sap appeared. Henri laughed.

"Strike it," she coached.

This time he succeeded.

"Now the reed and the basket," she instructed.

When he had finished, she took back the axe.

"You place the reeds," she said.

Henri laughed again. Alden frowned at him. Henri was fully enjoying the fact that a woman had demoted him. Therese moved to another tree, and Alden assisted as she repeated the process on several more. How she had come to be at Baptiste's home puzzled him. He was sure she was the woman in the canoe with the old man.

"Have you ever visited the fort?" he asked.

She weighed her answer.

"I mean, I have been assigned to the fort since last fall. I came to assist Mr. Johnson." He was a bit sorry he had mentioned the Indian agent's name since the purpose of his visit had been to restore favor among the tribes toward the British. But saying he came to reinforce the fort was worse.

She watched him.

"And I have not seen you there. In the fort." Alden finished pushing the reed spout into the base of the cut. He wished he had paid more attention to Mason and his easy manner with women. He would rather face a line of soldiers alone than try to talk to one— one worth talking to. He attempted a different maneuver as she went back to her axe.

"Well, I may have seen you the other day. You arrived with your family? You passed the water gate."

"Yes."

Alden's hope rose as she responded at last. He waited for her to go on.

"I returned with my uncle, Black Feather, from our winter home. When Jean visited, I came back here with him."

Baptiste didn't seem the type to have a mistress. And his wife didn't seem the type to tolerate it even if he were.

"To work?" He couldn't help the bewilderment in his tone.

"To live. I am Jean's sister," she said matter-of-factly.

Alden's brows shot to his forehead before he had a chance to consider his response.

"After my mother's death, when I was very young, I was raised by Black Feather."

Her dignified manner made him ashamed he had asked, and his conscience made him feel guilty for his desire to know.

“Since Jean has returned to stay, he has asked Black Feather’s permission that I live here now.” She struck the bark of the maple a firm, confident blow.

Alden placed the last basket. He thought it best to put his inquiries to rest even though the information gained made him more curious than ever. Had she never married? If not, why? It wasn’t her physical appearance that would hinder a prospective husband. Her beauty was as natural as her grace. But she was much more careful of her person than some women were. She had kept Henri between them the entire time. For her safety or Henri’s, Alden didn’t know, but he sensed she practiced keeping admirers at bay.

She picked up the remaining reeds and coiled them together with strands of cord. “Are you hungry, Henri?” Therese asked as she rubbed his head.

“Very hungry,” he answered.

“Wait with the officer, and I will cook our meal.” She turned to the house, and Alden looked down at Henri.

“Want to see my horse?” Henri whispered.

Alden chuckled. “Absolutely.”

Henri led the way to a small barn surrounded by fields and a fenced pasture at the back. A tall, black gelding trotted to greet them at the fence as Henri held out his hand.

“That is a lot of horse for a little boy.” Alden ran his hand down the horse’s neck as it nuzzled Henri’s outstretched palm.

“Well...it is not mine especially. My father brought it back when he came. A man named Braddock gave it to him.”

Alden snapped his neck twisting to face the boy. “Braddock?”

The boy nodded, oblivious as to what it meant. British General Braddock had fought in the recent Indian wars. The French and Indian force utterly defeated him near Fort Duquesne. The French gained much in supplies and paid the Indians gifts consisting of booty taken, including British horses.

“Henri!” Therese called.

“Time to go.” Henri jumped off the fence.

Alden gingerly touched the horse’s nose. “You’re a grand ol’ boy,” he said to the horse. With a backward glance, Alden followed Henri to the house where Therese had started a cooking fire under a wooden platform. She mixed dough in a bowl and formed it into flat cakes that she fried over the fire. She served it alongside venison strips.

After they had eaten, Alden watered his fort pony and hitched him to a bush in the shade while Therese resumed her tasks. Alden assisted when allowed, with Henri at his side to keep him in line. Therese already had some sap collected into buckets that she began to heat in preparation for making maple sugar. For Alden, the time passed quickly.

Soon Baptiste arrived with his wife and older sons. Alden plopped the hot rock he had just fished out of the fire into a bucket of collected sap while Baptiste was landing the canoe at the dock. Alden snatched his red outer coat from the ground where he had tossed it and put it on. Baptiste stepped onto the shore, staring up at the house at what probably seemed a strange assembly.

Alden buttoned his coat and bit his lip as he shrugged to adjust the uniform. Henri had abandoned him as soon as he saw the canoe party, and Baptiste greeted the boy in Ottawa, giving him a quick tousle of the hair. He continued to communicate to him in Ottawa, questions it seemed. Adelle, Etienne and Louie unloaded packs and carried them to the house, giving Alden only a curt nod as a greeting. Adelle's opinion of him was obvious. Perhaps that did not bode well for him in the matter of Baptiste.

"Bonjour, Lieutenant," Baptiste spoke first, motioning for Henri to pick up the remaining packs and follow his mother. "Henri has told me that you have had a long wait."

"Bonjour, Monsieur Baptiste. I have waited, sir, but on the contrary, the time has flown by thanks to the good company I have enjoyed. I hope I have not been a burden to your gracious family." He turned to indicate Therese, but she ignored them both as she greased wooden sugar molds placed beside the bucket. She was obviously not prey to flattery.

Baptiste regarded him without comment; whether he appreciated the compliment was undetermined.

"The purpose of my visit is plain from our previous conversation." Alden got to the point. "I do not intend to waste your time."

"Time is mine now." Baptiste motioned for him to follow as he made his way into the house. "Ale for us, Adelle." He sat down and pointed to the chair across from him. Adelle served them and afterwards quickly shelved the goods emptied from the packs and left them alone in the house with the boys.

"You visited the mission, I understand. Do you trade there often?" Alden's tone was innocent. He decided to let the infringement of the law pass without comment.

"Yes, Lieutenant, I do. I have many friends there. You should know that." Baptiste gave him a brief smile and took a sip of ale. "Know that I am a grateful follower of Christ, willing to help others in the same situation. Christian Indians do not have many friends, you see."

Alden did not know, and the humble answer surprised him. "I am sure your efforts are well-esteemed then. How long have you lived near the fort?"

Baptiste slid his cup aside. "The Anishinaabek have been here long before the fort existed."

Alden understood the inference.

“I have lived here,” Baptiste went on, “since I was a boy. My father settled us here to be nearer the French traders. And better winters, I suppose. Do you know L’Arbre Croche?”

Alden shook his head.

“It is near Michilimackinac.”

“The northern post. At the Straits?”

“An important post. You have not been here long.”

“I have not, sir,” Alden admitted. “I came only last fall. With Johnson from New York and forty soldiers in my command for the forts. This is the farthest west I have ever been.” Alden wondered how long Baptiste would take before getting back to the subject of Captain Campbell, but he was reluctant to change the mood of the conversation.

“William Johnson, yes; you English are fortunate that he has good rapport with the Six Nations, a politically strong assemblage, or you would have real trouble on your hands.”

Except for the Seneca, Alden thought. Constant warnings of attack from the lake tribes greeted him and Johnson during the entire journey to Detroit, and the instigators were the Seneca, one of the nations in the alliance.

“Where do you call home?” Baptiste seemed genuinely interested.

“Well,” Alden gave a short laugh. He didn’t mean for it to sound so bitter. “I do not know really.”

Baptiste stared. Clearly such a notion he had never imagined. “You are from the eastern lands then?” He tried to make sense of it.

“I came from Ireland strictly to fight in the war.”

“Ireland.” Baptiste rolled the strange name off his tongue. “Across the water.” He leaned back in his chair. “There is a difference between us. You fight because you are paid to. I fight because I have to.”

Alden blinked and pursed his lips. Then he remembered Henri’s horse. “You are rewarded for your efforts,” he replied tersely. “And an interpreter is paid.”

Baptiste chuckled. “You misunderstand my meaning, Lieutenant. I fight for my family, my way of life—”

“The Crown does not intend to take away your livelihood,” Alden interrupted.

“But it already has,” Baptiste shot back. “When it limits what I may own, it limits me!”

Alden looked away. The boys were watching him in sober concentration.

“What are you fighting for, Lieutenant? What is the Crown to you? I think it may mean something different to me than it does to you.” Baptiste stood and tossed the empty cups into a basin.

Alden had no reply. It was true. The British did limit what an Indian could own: guns, ammunition, rum. His superiors had helped to create a

dependency on these commodities and now withheld them. Even the French near the fort could not own a musket. But surely Baptiste knew hostilities were the reasons for such actions. And what was he fighting for? He had no ready answer. Not anything Baptiste would understand or respect.

Baptiste laid his hand on Alden's shoulder. "Well, what of your captain?"

Alden was surprised at the friendly gesture. "He awaits your answer."

"I want to know what he has to say, even though my gut tells me not to. Your commander considers me French when it strikes him and Indian when it benefits him. But I am neither. And I am both. Adelle thinks it is time for me to go farther west. She is probably right." Baptiste shrugged with a glance toward his sons.

The French still occupied the forts beyond the Mississippi. It would be a safe haven for Indians and French loyalists alike. Alden stood. "I assure you, the Captain is a man of his word."

"So I have heard. But you are an honest man, Lieutenant, and you do not like men like me. That makes me wonder about entering the fort and meeting so many men like yourself."

"The Captain has no such designs as you may imagine, sir."

"Perhaps you cannot sympathize with my anxiety, but at least you can appreciate the fact that at another time you could point a musket at me, and I at you, and neither of us would feel any remorse at the outcome."

Alden shifted. "Plainly spoken, sir. But this is not that time."

Baptiste nodded. "True. Since it is your captain that denies me my musket."

Alden was again void of a reply, but Baptiste only smiled.

"Come." He motioned in the direction of the fort. "Adelle!" he called.

Alden followed him outside, and Adelle came to stand next to Baptiste, leaving Therese to carry on the sugaring temporarily.

"Today you are going to the fort?" She looked at Alden. "It is late in the day," she told her husband.

"I will return," he said kissing her cheek.

She didn't seem convinced.

"Before dark," Baptiste said over his shoulder.

Alden walked beside him in silence. He glanced back once and saw Adelle still standing where they had left her, flanked by her sons and watching their departure. She looked worried. Alden wondered how many times she had stood like that watching her husband walk away and hoping for his safe return. She was a strong woman, but everyone had their weakness. He had never allowed himself to consider the families of the men he fought. Mercy for the enemy didn't keep you alive on the battlefield.

"How long have you been a soldier, Lieutenant?" Baptiste asked.

“I was almost eighteen when I received my first position,” Alden answered absentmindedly. They had reached the road, and after uncoiling the reins of his pony from the bush he used as a hitching post, Alden looked back at the house again. Therese stood with Henri at her side, a picture of calm as she, too, watched their departure. She was a mystery to him. Never before had he met a young woman so contentedly unattached and reserved. But it wasn’t a haughty spirit she possessed. It was more of a quiet intelligence. He had to force himself to turn away. He led the pony behind him.

“New York, you said,” Baptiste stated as more of a question.

“New York it was, sir,” Alden replied, and he swatted a swarm of insects from his face as Baptiste pondered this.

“That has been, what,” Baptiste looked him over, “about six, seven years then?”

“Seven.”

“Your regiment?”

“The Sixtieth, 1st battalion,” Alden informed him.

“New York or Duquesne?”

“I arrived here in ‘55, so both but Duquesne in ‘58.”

“Pity.”

Alden waited. Baptiste’s tone had suddenly changed. “What do you mean?” he finally asked.

“I mean, it is a pity.” Baptiste kept his eyes on the road. “I was at Fort Duquesne in ‘55, Lakes George and Champlain in ‘57... but we never met.”

Alden let the words sink slowly into their designated target. It was a direct insult, or challenge. He didn’t know which. The Indian and French force had dealt a stunning blow to the British at Duquesne, now Ft. Pitt, in 1755. At the forts around New York, the British narrowly escaped the same fate. Many of the Indian warriors had come from tribes around Fort Detroit in both battles. Apparently Baptiste would have relished the thought of fighting against him.

“In what capacity did you serve— soldier, spy or interpreter?” Alden mocked Baptiste’s earlier revelation with cutting sarcasm.

Baptiste remained unruffled. “Oh, when I interpret it is for the French, but when I fight, I fight only for the Odawak.”

Baptiste was deliberately baiting him, he knew, but still he struggled to keep the anger from his voice. “It must be convenient, this slipping between skins,” he said.

“Oh, it is,” Baptiste said. “Fully necessary at times.”

Alden studied him. He didn’t seem to be joking anymore. Baptiste’s jaw had become a hard line, and Alden thought what a fiercely determined opponent he would make on the field.

