

NATIVE SON

The American Patriot Series
Book 1

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Native Son

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To Jay, my dearest champion

*O Lord God of my salvation,
I have cried day and night before Thee:
Let my prayer come before Thee:
Incline Thine ear unto my cry;
...Thou has laid me in the lowest pit,
In darkness, in the deeps.
Thy wrath lieth hard upon me,
And Thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves. Selah.
Thou has put away mine acquaintance far from me;
Thou has made me an abomination unto them:
I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.
Psalm 88:1-2, 6-8*

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.
Hebrews 11:1*

The flag shown on the cover is known as the Grand Union or the Continental Colors. The thirteen stripes signify the original thirteen colonies, and the blue canton carries the red cross of St. George and the white cross of St. Andrew from the British Union flag. Although the Continental Congress never officially commissioned it, on January 1, 1776, General Washington ordered this flag to be raised on Mount Pisgah, a fortified hill just outside of Cambridge, Massachusetts, during the siege of Boston. It flew over the Continental Army's encampments until mid 1777. Washington referred to the flag as the Great Union, although today it is generally called the Grand Union.

Chapter 1

“No chance to get away to see Beth tonight, I take it,” Major Charles Andrews ventured.

Brigadier General Jonathan Carleton threw his aide a brooding look as he urged his bay stallion forward, farther out of earshot of the riders trailing down the road behind them. It was nearing two o’clock, Sunday, July 2, 1775. Pulling off his wide-brimmed slouch hat, he wiped his brow with the back of his gloved hand before settling it back on his head with a jerk.

“We’ll undoubtedly be tied up with the generals until late.”

Andrews pulled his mount alongside Carleton’s. “I thought you’d break away yesterday when we stopped at Watertown to meet with the Provincial Congress.”

Carleton shook his head in frustration. “The General insisted I attend him. But I mean to see Beth tonight, even if it’s past midnight before we get there.”

“Washington has kept you on a short rein ever since we met him in New York.”

“All to your credit, Charles. If you hadn’t felt obliged to share every minute detail of my arrest and imminent hanging, we’d have been in Roxbury days ago.”

“It’s a good thing the General is being cautious,” Andrews countered. “If Isaiah hadn’t been on the alert on the road to New York, Gage’s agents would have us aboard ship to England by now, trussed up like a covey of Christmas geese.”

“And thank you for contributing a report on that little incident too,” Carleton returned sourly. “You managed to persuade Washington that the price Gage has put on my head—and on yours—will prove too tempting for someone whose need for cold coin is greater than his allegiance to the cause of liberty.”

Andrews returned a grin. “I’m a small fish. It’s you Gage wants. Considering the reward he’s offering, he obviously means to exact revenge for his humiliation at your hands. After all, you did pluck him clean of all the intelligence the Committee of Safety could have hoped for—while nestled sweetly in the general’s bosom.”

Carleton’s face clouded. “That’s what I despise about this. I should never have allowed myself to be persuaded to take on such a dishonorable role.”

“But spying in time of war is an ancient and necessary profession—even a biblical one. Don’t

forget the twelve Hebrews who spied out the land of Canaan for Moses.”

“Yes, and because they listened to the ten who had no faith instead of the two who trusted God, the children of Israel wandered in the desert for the next forty years,” Carleton responded with a short laugh.

With each step, the horses’ hooves plopped deep into the muddy road. The day was hot and humid following an early morning rain, and thunderclouds were again building overhead. At ground level, the rising wind stirred the trees that shouldered each other along the road’s edge, and patches of shadow and sun chased each other across the low, wooded hills four miles from Boston Harbor.

“I hate to admit it, but in this beastly heat and humidity these buckskins are not as comfortable as our new uniforms would have been. And it occurs to me—too late, as usual—that we’d make a better impression on Ward and his staff in full regalia than in Indian dress.”

Andrews surveyed Carleton’s leather hunting shirt, leggings, and moccasins that matched his own. “I’m surprised to hear you say it,” he retorted with a grin. “I’ve not observed that you’re often overly concerned about making an impression, favorable or not.”

Carleton struggled to adopt a wounded expression. “Now, Charles, you hardly know me at all if you can say such a thing. Besides, the New Englanders are already suspicious enough of us Southerners being foisted on them without their having any say in the matter. And you know full well how reluctant I always am to add fuel to a fire.”

Andrews snorted. “I can imagine what they’ll think if your former connection to the Shawnee comes out. But, at any rate, it’s a tad late to transform ourselves into proper officers now. We’ll have to bear their disapprobation with fortitude.”

“I’d as soon arrive in war paint with my head shaved,” Carleton growled, turning serious. “Let them think we’re true savages, and maybe they’ll mend their ways. But then, I’ve never been renowned for being exceptionally politic.”

“That’s an understatement, my friend. And speaking of diplomacy, how much have you told the General about you and Beth?”

Carleton grimaced. “Too deuced much, I fear. He seemed extraordinarily interested in Beth’s role as spy and smuggler for the Sons of Liberty. But when I mentioned our intent to marry, he changed the subject rather abruptly.”

Andrews raised an eyebrow. “Do you think he opposes your plans?”

His mouth tightening, Carleton turned in the saddle to measure the distance to the officers who rode at a leisurely pace behind them. All except their commander appeared too involved in conversation to pay him and Andrews much attention. As Carleton’s glance met his, however, Washington spurred his stallion forward.

“I suspect I’ll soon find out,” Carleton said in an undertone as Washington closed the distance between them.

Both officers saluted as the newly elected commander of the Continental Army drew up beside them. Forty-three years old, with auburn hair and grey-blue eyes that smoldered with an inner fire, General George Washington exuded an immense physical energy that was both intimidating and highly attractive. A born horseman, powerful in build despite narrow, sloping shoulders, he possessed a natural charm that equally drew men and women to him.

On occasion, however, Carleton had witnessed the prodigious temper that lay beneath that charm. Most of the time it was clamped under iron control, but it was a force Washington had learned how to unleash to the greatest effect when other means failed to motivate those under his authority.

Studying his commander, Carleton harbored no doubt that the Continental Congress had chosen the right man for the difficult and delicate responsibility of molding into an effective fighting force the undisciplined and often contentious militia units besieging Boston. Considering the conflicts between the various factions in the Congress, he was confident the choice had resulted from much more than a merely human decision born of political considerations.

“I expect you are impatient to call on that young lady of yours,” Washington observed.

Carleton forced a smile. “Indeed, I am. Miss Howard and I—”

“Unfortunately, I am going to need you at Cambridge until late,” Washington cut him off. “We have urgent business to settle with Ward and his staff before any of us will be free to attend to personal interests.”

Carleton felt Washington’s penetrating gaze on him, but deliberately did not meet it. Keeping his expression and tone carefully neutral, he said, “I wait upon your convenience, sir.”

Frowning, he stared along the curve of the road that stretched before them to the small town of Cambridge, currently the center of the rebel army besieging Boston and its garrison of British troops commanded by Lieutenant General Thomas Gage, commander in chief of His Majesty’s armies in North America. To their right, the land sloped to the banks of the Charles River, where the knee-deep grasses had been mown and raked into windrows to provide fodder for the army’s horses.

He drew in a deep breath of the wet hay’s heavy, sweet fragrance but could take no pleasure in it. Once more the subject of most interest to him had been abruptly turned aside. And the feeling that this boded no good to his hopes sank to the bottom of his gut like a leaden weight. The low growl of thunder in the distance did nothing to assuage his spirits.

Three-quarters of a mile ahead, past the handsome mansions dubbed Tory Row for the politics of their wealthy owners, the road terminated in a wide, grassy field at the town’s center. Formerly a pasture for the townspeople’s animals, the Common had been entrenched and turned into a

campsite for soldiers, as had every available field in and around Cambridge—around every town surrounding Boston, in fact, from Dorchester to Winisimmit.

Along the Common's farthest boundary Carleton could make out the three-story red brick buildings of Harvard College. With the beginning of the siege, they, as well as many other buildings in the town, had been commandeered to house rebel troops.

As they drew steadily nearer, Carleton noted idly that on this quiet Sabbath large groups of soldiers lounged at ease among the weathered tents and ramshackle huts dotting the Common. Here and there the smoke of campfires swirled upward in the light wind, adding another pungent scent to the sea tang blowing off the bay. At the field's far side a group played a game of rounders, hitting a ball with a stick, then running from one base to another.

Washington followed his gaze. "What is your estimation of the troops' discipline and abilities?"

Carleton wrenched his thoughts back from the subject that had occupied very nearly every waking moment since he had left Roxbury a fortnight earlier. "Judging by their performance on Charlestown peninsula, their abilities are excellent. As far as discipline is concerned, there's much work to do, not only among the rank and file but among the officers as well."

"New lords, new laws," Andrews put in, his tone dry. "What's needed is some extensive housecleaning."

Washington shot him a keen glance. "Which will not be welcomed by anyone. We need to tread carefully if we hope to gain the army's cooperation."

Each occupied by private concerns, they rode without speaking until they reached the street that curved around the northern boundary of Cambridge Common. This terminated at an intersecting thoroughfare that ran southwest through the town and on into the country, a road with which Carleton was well familiar. After crossing the Charles River, it curved back to the southeast toward Brooklyne. Four miles farther along it, the village of Roxbury nestled on the bluffs above the bay, overlooking the narrow neck of land that connected Boston to the mainland.

As it crossed Stony Brook on the edge of this village, the thoroughfare passed the mansion of Tess Howard, who with her niece Elizabeth played the part of loyalists to the crown. From the beginning of the conflict between Britain and her colonies, however, both had secretly used every wile and resource to aid the Sons of Liberty.

It had been two weeks since he and Andrews had left Tess's home for New York following Carleton's rescue from a British scaffold, two weeks since he had held Elizabeth Howard in his arms and tasted the heady wine of her kisses. But although the longing to see her, to reassure himself of her love, had intensified into an almost unbearable ache deep in his breast, he took care to reveal nothing of his thoughts.

Also to the right along this intersecting road and directly opposite Cambridge Common stood an imposing gambrel-roofed mansion formerly owned by Harvard's steward, Jonathan Hastings.

Currently the house served as headquarters to General Artemis Ward, commander of the left wing of the rebel army encamped around the perimeter of Boston since the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord two and a half months earlier. There another road branched off, one Carleton could not keep from mentally tracing as well. It angled northeast, leading inexorably to Charlestown peninsula, where the charred ruins of that town bore mute testimony to the savage battle fought on the heights above it while he had suffered the agonies of the damned in a British gaol.

Fighting the dread certainty that Elizabeth was in the midst of the battle. Terrified that she would be killed. Wrestling with physical extremity brought on by brutal beatings, deprivation of food and water, fearful anticipation of the hangman's rope that awaited him.

How could he not have known that she would find a way to save him? She had led him back to the Lord, after all, had been the instrument God had used to impart forgiveness and reconciliation to his prodigal son.

All Carleton wanted now was to spend the rest his life loving this remarkable woman. But relentlessly the fear tightened around his heart that even as the physical distance between them grew shorter, the sweet hopes he cherished were slipping ever farther out of his reach.

He would not allow that to happen, he reassured himself. No matter what the consequences, he would never again allow any obstacle to part him from Elizabeth.

"Please! Don't take my leg! Dear God, don't let 'em take my leg!"

With the assistance of the two surgeon's mates, Elizabeth Howard wrestled the screaming soldier onto the makeshift surgery table. Satisfied that the mates had their patient under control, she cautiously relinquished her hold.

While they held him down, she deftly buckled leather straps across his chest and arms, his pelvis, and his healthy leg. Finished, she covered him with blankets and slipped a small pillow under his head.

"Whatever happens, hold the leg steady until I finish the cut," ordered Dr. Benjamin Church, directing a frown at his assistants. "I don't want to splinter this limb."

"God, help me! I cain't tend my farm if I'm a cripple!"

Elizabeth dabbed the perspiration from her forehead with the edge of her apron and impatiently pushed out of her eyes the dark auburn curls that had escaped from her chignon in the struggle. Wringing out a cloth in the basin of water, she leaned over the anguished soldier to sponge his face, fighting not to gag at the stench of rotting flesh, blood, and sweat that pervaded the room.

"Other men have managed quite well," she soothed him. "You will too. You still have one good

leg, and before we release you, you'll be fitted with a peg leg that will allow you to do most of your farm work as you always have."

He stared up at her, his eyes boring into hers, pleading. "My wife don't need no useless cripple to take care of with three young 'uns."

"I suspect she'd rather have you alive and by her side than in a grave. We've done all we can. If we don't amputate, you'll die."

"I'd be better off dead than alive and half a man!"

As gently as possible Elizabeth forced a twisted length of cloth between his clenched teeth. "I assure you, Sergeant Wilkerson, your manhood will remain fully intact."

Both mates guffawed as the sergeant's face mottled to a dull red. Grinning meaningfully at each other, they positioned themselves on either side of Church.

Elizabeth shot them a severe look. "Faith, but this is hardly a laughing matter. You wouldn't be quite so brave, I think, if it were you on this table."

The two mates studiously applied themselves to holding their writhing comrade still while Elizabeth cut away the bandage that wrapped the sergeant's right leg from thigh to ankle. Checking the tension of the tourniquet's heavy, worsted tape that was wrapped around the man's upper thigh, she adjusted the screw slightly.

Church tapped the curved amputation knife against his other hand. "You gave him plenty of rum?"

With a practiced motion she wound several lengths of tape around Wilkerson's bare leg just below the site of the cut. "All we could spare. Our stock is so depleted we've been forced to water it down. I'm afraid it won't do him much good."

The doctor sighed in resignation. "With luck, he'll pass out quickly. Most do."

He bent over the swollen, blackening leg veined with malignant crimson streaks that radiated from the site of the festering bullet wound just above the knee. Elizabeth motioned to the mates to hold the leg still. Wasting no more time, Church began to cut through the healthy flesh above the diseased area, ignoring the soldier's muffled screams as he exposed the bone.

Closely following the movement of the knife with the curved point of a tenaculum, Elizabeth drew out the end of each severed artery and tied it neatly off with a ligature of waxed shoemaker's thread. As soon as the cut was complete and all arteries were tied off, the mate nearest the tourniquet released and removed it. At the same time Elizabeth wrapped a narrow leather strip around the bone, using it to draw the muscles above the cut out of the way of the saw. Holding the leather strip steady in her right hand, with her left she sponged seeping blood away from the bone.

Church exchanged the knife for the saw one of the mates extended. The thick thighbone took greater effort to cleave. By the time he finished and handed the detached limb to the mate, the doctor was sweating profusely in the July heat.

Both his coat and Elizabeth's apron were splattered with gore. The sergeant's head lolled to one side, and his irregular breaths rasped in the silence. Mercifully he had lapsed into unconsciousness.

Carleton, Andrews, and Washington had tethered their mounts to the hitching post before the rest of their party drew to a halt in front of the Hastings mansion. In the lead rode Major General Charles Lee, a British officer of some reputation who had immigrated to the colonies from England to embrace the cause of rebellion. As usual, he was trailed by his pack of dogs, and when he dismounted, they crowded closely around him, whining for his attention.

Lee stroked their heads with one hand and with the other indicated the mansion with a lofty gesture, his angular face contorting into a grimace that Carleton took for a smile. "So much for your rag-tag rank and file. At least our officers have the sense to accommodate themselves in appropriately elegant style."

Carleton surveyed the general with a distrust he found difficult to dissemble. Short and thin to the point of emaciation, Lee by habit dressed negligently. With his big head, whose main feature was a comically large nose, he reminded Carleton of nothing so much as a scarecrow. Although their association had thus far been a short one, Carleton was rapidly developing a keen suspicion that Lee's eccentricity cloaked an ambition bound to collide with Washington's.

Washington's handsome young aide-de-camp, Thomas Mifflin, gave a sanctimonious sniff. "What better use for the Tories' ill-gotten property than to house the instruments of their most deserved destruction." Dismounting, he threw his horse's reins over the hitching post.

The General's military secretary, Colonel Joseph Reed, directed a characteristically dour frown toward Mifflin. "From the looks of this army—if you can call it that—the Tories' destruction isn't assured quite yet. You'd best not count your chickens a'fore they're hatched."

Carleton gave Andrews a wry glance. He was learning to expect nothing but platitudes from Mifflin and gloom from Reed. Andrews suppressed a snicker.

"It is not the army's appearance, but their resolve, that will determine the outcome of the contest. In view of what they have accomplished thus far, it would appear that, at least, is not in question."

There was reproof in Washington's tone as he straightened to his full height. At six feet, three inches, he towered over the other officers, surpassing even Carleton by an inch.

Carleton had left his servant, Private James Stowe, behind in New York to take care of a

business matter for him, but Private Henry Briggs, Andrews's servant, rode with those bringing up the party's rear. These included Sergeant Isaiah Moghrab, a free black man who had been employed by Elizabeth's father until the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord.

When the colonists had laid siege to Boston, Isaiah had joined the Lincoln regiment commanded by Elizabeth's uncle and had quickly been promoted to lead a platoon of black soldiers. With him was his seventeen-year-old son, Sammy, a private in the army whose well-muscled form and proud stature gave promise of the powerful man he was destined to become.

Washington's valet and companion, Will Lee, a youthful, round-faced mulatto clad in formal livery with his head wrapped in an exotic turban, completed the entourage. A horseman by every measure Washington's equal, wherever his master went, Will followed.

The previous day Reed had sent a message from Watertown advising Ward of the approximate time of their arrival, and it was quickly evident they had been anticipated, though not with exceptional delight. Before they could mount the steps to the front door, it was thrown open and Ward's aide sauntered down them as the strengthening wind spattered the first drops of rain on their hats and shoulders. Greeting them with admirable restraint, he ushered Washington and his officers inside, his mouth drawn up as though he had just bitten into an unripe persimmon.

Washington led the way into an expansive room at the front of the house. They found Ward waiting to receive them along with several members of his staff.

A few years older than Washington, the newly promoted major general disguised his average height and portly figure beneath an impressive powdered wig and long, silver-buttoned coat. With him were Major General Israel Putnam and brigadier generals John Thomas; tough, seventy-year-old Indian fighter, Seth Pomeroy; William Heath, who had led the rebels during the British retreat from Concord back to Boston; handsome, impetuous John Sullivan of New Hampshire; and tall, slender Richard Montgomery, veteran of the French and Indian War.

Ward's bluff countenance remained sober, his bow stiffly formal, echoed by the other generals as Carleton introduced each in turn. There was no mistaking the tension that charged the air. Remembering their private discussions about how likely these Yankees were to accept orders from a Virginian, Carleton threw Washington a veiled look, to which the General responded with a faint smile.

As Washington exchanged pleasantries with the man he was to supersede, his subordinates openly took the measure of their new commander through narrowed eyes before transferring their attention to the rest of Washington's party. From their raised eyebrows, it was obvious that Carleton's and Andrews's choice of dress was not making a favorable impression. "Looks like we're commissionin' savages as officers now," Pomeroy rasped.

"The next time we face down the might of the British army, we may find it useful to have a savage or two on our side," Carleton returned. "If it would help, I'd be glad to supply the war paint—but then, I seem to recall that you all do have some expertise in that area."

He studiously ignored Washington's displeased frown. The scene reminded Carleton of his first meeting with Ward and several of the other generals the afternoon following his rescue from a British noose.

Even the explanations offered by Colonel Joshua Stern, Elizabeth's uncle, that Carleton was a close friend of Washington and Patrick Henry, that Joseph Warren, the handsome, personable leader of the rebels in Massachusetts, had worked with and trusted him, and that Carleton had just narrowly escaped hanging for his efforts on their behalf hadn't diminished the officers' reserve. They had made abundantly clear that, as far as they were concerned, the fact that Carleton was a Virginian and a British officer effectively negated all the rest.

With his wealth and social connections, to say nothing of his training and experience in the Light Dragoons, Carleton knew he was considered a threat to the colonial officers' ambitions. They had regarded him then, as now, with varying degrees of suspicion, jealousy, and dislike.

The trouble was that among the officers of the Northern colonies only Warren had known the full extent of the service Carleton, as the spy Patriot, had rendered in service of his country. But Warren was dead, killed during the final British assault on Breed's Hill a fortnight ago.

Rinsing his bloody hands in the basin of water, Church said, "I'll let you finish, Miss Howard."

A muted flash of light and the rumble of thunder brought Elizabeth round to glance toward the window. Hissing in the rising wind, the bushes outside beat softly against the glass.

Frowning, she perched on a tall stool beside the table and concentrated on carefully cleaning fragments of bone from the exposed end of the sergeant's now truncated thigh. Church pulled up a chair and sat beside her to watch.

In his early forties, the doctor was handsome, stylishly dressed beneath his surgeon's smock. Elizabeth had heard the shocking rumors of his recent separation from his wife and that he kept a young mistress whom he entertained lavishly and who was now pregnant with his child.

Defly she placed two round pledgets of lint over the bone end, drawing the exposed muscles over the end of the stump, then covering it with fine linen. Over this she methodically wrapped lint sprinkled with flour and additional pledgets of tow and lint, which she held in place with two long strips of linen crossed over each other.

"Your father taught you well. You do fine work."

Elizabeth regarded her handiwork with a critical eye. "Thank you. I only wish we had anaesthetics on hand for these cases so the men wouldn't have to suffer so."

Church snorted. "We're lucky to have enough ligatures and bandages—for today, at least. But I suppose we shouldn't complain. Powder and cartridges are in dangerously short supply

throughout the camp—which does provide the benefit of making it highly unlikely that we'll undertake another attack anytime soon. However, should Gage and Howe decide to take the initiative, I'm afraid they'll overrun our lines with little effort."

Occupied in wrapping the sergeant's stump neatly in bandages, Elizabeth threw a furtive glance at the doctor, amazed at his talkativeness. From her uncle Joshua Stern, colonel of the Lincoln regiment, she knew that the shortage of ammunition was not something the rebel leaders wanted to broadcast, particularly not to someone like her who was believed to be a Tory. The confidante of men on the highest levels of the rebel leadership, Church should have been well aware of that fact.

And why had he implied that the rebel army had attacked the British when it was the other way around? Had it been merely a slip of the tongue? Or was he testing her?

Church glanced at the soldier, who had begun to moan and roll his head back and forth. "I was confident we could save the sergeant's leg," he noted with a sigh.

"I'm so sorry we couldn't."

At the sincere regret in her tone, Church gave her a probing look. "It's hard to believe you're a Tory, as kindly as you care for our wounded. I've heard claims the British suffered many more casualties at Breed's Hill than we did and are in desperate want of surgeons. I'm sure they could use your expertise in Boston."

She kept her head bent, her eyes on her work. "Unfortunately my aunt and I are stranded here, for the time being, at least. At any rate, I've never connected politics to the practice of medicine."

Leaning back in his chair, the doctor conceded lazily, "I agree with you there. If I were in Boston, I'd certainly offer my services."

He remained silent for several moments before adding, "I've been privy to some idle talk linking your name with that officer who escaped hanging by the British and joined our side right after the battle. Evidently our new commander has made him a general. Carleton is his name, I believe. Any truth to the rumors?"

She felt her cheeks warming. "He was a mere major when I knew him. It appears his treachery has resulted in a considerable elevation of his fortunes—though a temporary one, I devoutly hope. Believe me, he is nothing to me."

Church laughed, then sobered. "You'd be advised to dissemble your venom in public. General Carleton has done the cause of liberty an exceptionally good turn if the reports I've heard are accurate—which they undoubtedly are, considering the reward Gage is offering for his capture, dead or alive. It's so generous I fear it might tempt even one of our staunch Sons of Liberty to betray him."

“Let’s hope he receives his just deserts then.”

Elizabeth prayed her frosty tone would quash the doctor’s interest in the subject. Struggling to keep any trace of concern out of her face, she finished the dressing and covered the bandaged stump neatly with a knitted woolen cap made for the purpose.

She couldn’t help inwardly breathing a plea for Carleton’s safety. It was almost two weeks since he had left for New York hoping to intercept General Washington, and he should have returned by now.

The two men had long been friends, she knew. Along with Patrick Henry, Washington had persuaded Carleton to obey Gage’s summons to Boston after his return to Virginia at the death of Sir Harrison Carleton, the wealthy uncle who had reared him. As the spy Patriot, Carleton had provided the rebel leaders in Massachusetts with a wealth of military intelligence while serving as Gage’s aide-de-camp. But for Elizabeth, who in the guise of the rebel courier Oriole had rescued Carleton in a daring raid on the British gaol, his body would now be rotting at the end of a gibbet on Boston Common.

Suppressing a shudder, Elizabeth left her perch to wash her hands, then removed her stained apron and replaced it with a fresh one. Rain was drumming down outside as the half-conscious soldier was carried from the surgery.

No sooner had the stretcher disappeared through the doorway than her cousin Captain Levi Stern stepped into the room. Outfitted in the new uniform of the Lincoln regiment and carrying a musket, he feigned a scowl as he blocked Church’s path.

“Is Miss Howard ready to go? My orders were to have her back at her aunt’s house a’fore noon, and it’s already past two.”

“I’m afraid we had an emergency, Captain.” Turning back to Elizabeth, Church took her lightweight cloak from the hook by the door and held it for her, then offered her parasol. Bowing, he motioned her to precede him through the door. “You will be on duty again tomorrow morning?”

“Certainly, Doctor Church. It means a great deal to me to have useful work to do while we’re unavoidably detained here. I thank you for your kindness in vouching for me in spite of your colleagues’ opposition to employing a woman—and a Tory at that.”

“As much as we need qualified surgeons, I can hardly turn away one who has the ability and experience you do, regardless of your sex or your politics. Good day, Miss Howard.” Bowing again, he strode off down the passage and disappeared into another ward.

The hospital had been set up in a once-luxurious house on the south edge of Cambridge that had been abandoned by its Tory owner at the start of the siege. Bereft of most of its fine furnishings, it now accommodated an assortment of beds, cots, and pallets for the use of the army’s wounded and ill.

Pretending not to notice the disapproving stares of the hospital matron and the two nurses they passed, Elizabeth opened her parasol and hurried outside to run through the downpour after her rawboned, tow-headed cousin. Wasting no time, they crossed the expansive lawn of the estate to where her phaeton waited, its black top raised over its gleaming, moss-green body against the rain. She settled herself on the oilcloth that covered the padded, velvet-covered seats, while Levi, his uniform drenched through, climbed up beside her. After stowing his dripping musket beside his feet, he slapped the reins across the chestnut gelding's rump.

When they had navigated the puddled road to a safe distance outside Cambridge, he gave her a sidewise glance. "How much longer you aimin' to keep up this charade?"

"I don't know. Jonathan fears that if I reveal my true loyalties, someone might suspect that I've been on the side of the patriots all along and connect me to Oriole. And if that were to happen, I'd be in the same situation Jonathan is since there's a price on Oriole's head too."

By the time they reached the outskirts of Brooklyne, the rain had let up. Although the wind still gusted, lancets of sunlight broke through from scattered patches of cerulean sky.

As Levi eased the phaeton through a wide stream flooding across the road, Elizabeth caught hold of the side of the phaeton to steady herself. "Dr. Church said the reward for Jonathan's capture is so high it might tempt someone on our side to betray him. He said it almost as if he were tempted himself."

Levi slowed the horses as they passed a company of Mahican volunteers clad in linen hunting shirts, leggings, and breechcloths, who were marching purposefully in the direction of Cambridge. "I can't imagine anyone with Church's reputation and connections in the Sons of Liberty turnin' his coat for money. But it's a good bet someone'll take the bait sooner or later if Gage's agents don't capture Jon first."

"I haven't received a letter from him for several days. They should be back by now, shouldn't they? You don't suppose something has happened?"

He glanced over at her, quickly placed his hand over hers, and squeezed it in apology. "If it had, we'd have heard about it, Cuz. I'm talkin' out of turn. Everything's all right, I'm sure."

They passed through the village without speaking, weaving around ox-drawn wagons full of supplies and additional militia units marching in formation along the road. Crossing the bridge over Muddy River, Levi clucked to the gelding. The phaeton gathered speed and rolled smoothly down the road toward Roxbury.

"Trouble is, feelings are runnin' so high against Tories now that you're in danger from our own side as long as you stay here," he said at length. "And if you and Jon are plannin' to marry—"

Staring down the road ahead of them, Elizabeth pressed her fingers against her temples. "I don't know what to do, especially since I hope to be of some service to General Washington. But that would mean Jonathan and I would have to keep our marriage secret. I wish we'd had more time

to discuss it before he had to leave.”

“You’re not lettin’ him talk you into something you’re doubtful of?” Levi questioned gently.

“No!” she protested, her voice softening. “I love Jonathan with all my heart, Cuz, truly. I can conceive no greater happiness than to be his wife.”

While on the way from Philadelphia to New York, Washington had received preliminary reports of the recent battle that had greatly concerned him. He was eager for a firsthand report. Under British arrest throughout the battle, Carleton and Andrews were equally anxious to hear the officers’ assessment, and for the next hour Ward and his staff outlined the details.

Initially the engagement had been considered a defeat for the rebel forces because they had been driven from Charlestown peninsula. In the battle’s aftermath, however, information filtered into the rebel camp that considerably altered that perception.

In fact, the British had suffered staggering losses, which included many of their most experienced officers, while the rebel army’s casualties had been comparatively light. The rebel force had stood its ground in the face of three brutal frontal assaults by a force that far outnumbered and outgunned them and had been driven from the peninsula only when their ammunition failed. Even then, units had covered the retreat with exemplary skill and resolve, avoiding capture while allowing most of the dead and wounded to be carried from the field.

Encouraged by what they heard, Washington and his officers spent another hour settling into temporary accommodations while brief, but intense showers passed through the area. The new commander in chief, his aide, secretary, and servant took over the three-story, hip-roofed mansion that had been the residence of Samuel Langdon, the president of Harvard College. Carleton and Andrews were soon comfortably established in the Lechmere mansion a short distance down Tory Row. As a concession to propriety, before joining the others to survey the nearby fortifications, they exchanged their buckskins for the handsome blue and buff uniforms they had acquired in New York.

Late in the afternoon as the skies cleared, they rode a mile north to Prospect Hill, called Mount Pisgah by the army. From the fort at its summit they could see the arrow-shaped peninsula of Boston lying in deceptive peace in the harbor to the southeast. Directly to the east, on the other side of a small prominence called Cobble Hill, loomed Charlestown peninsula and the double bulk of Bunker’s and Breed’s hills, guarded now by British soldiers. Even at that distance Carleton could make out the glimmer of red coats in the glow of the lowering sun.

Refusing to allow his thoughts to stray to more appealing subjects, he noted with approval that the colonial force had entrenched a number of naturally strong defensive positions. As he, Lee, and Washington consulted, they concluded that by making a few adjustments in the placement and design of several of the forts, it should be possible to contain the British while building up the army.

Later, when they gathered for dinner with Ward and the other generals back in Cambridge, Washington drew Carleton and Andrews aside. "I think it advisable that we review the disposition of our right wing this evening as well. As soon as we can get away after dinner, we will ride to Roxbury and—as a courtesy, of course—drop in on Colonel Stern. That will give me opportunity to speak privately with you and Miss Howard without compromising her guise as a Tory."

The knot in Carleton's stomach tightened. "There's something in particular you wish to discuss with us?"

"It will wait until later."

Washington's expression revealed nothing. Turning to Andrews, he said, "Major, I want you to ride to Roxbury and advise Colonel Stern and the Misses Howard that we will call on them this evening. We will meet you there."

Andrews responded with a brisk salute. "Your Excellency." Giving Carleton a quick, sympathetic glance, he left.

The hours that followed were pure torture for Carleton. It took every effort of his will to pretend an interest in the officers' conversation. Dinner stretched on interminably with no apparent end in sight, fueled by an abundance of toasts—which considerably improved the camaraderie of the colonial officers with their new commander in chief, but left Carleton in an extremity of frustration.

In spite of himself, at odd moments his last meeting with Elizabeth replayed itself in his mind. She had clung to him, not wanting him to go, but knowing he had no choice.

"Return as quickly as you can," she had pleaded, her large, expressive eyes filling with tears. "I shall long for you every second of every day you are gone."

The image of her beautiful face filled with sorrow at their parting and the exquisite memory of her nestled in his arms came close to driving him mad. How many times on the journey to New York had he fought to keep from turning his mount around and going back to take her away with him to Thornlea, his estate in Virginia, there to make her his wife and stay where they would be safe.

But could they ever be safe anywhere now? Or was that entirely a vain hope?

He also had to ask himself if his allegiance to the cause of his country's liberty and to the path God had called him to tread was so fickle that it could be undermined by a woman's love. Yet he knew as well that God had given him and Elizabeth to each other.

It was a dilemma that seemed to have no solution. And so, with stubborn determination, he forced his mind to overrule the tender yearnings of his heart.