

## ABYSS OF THE BRAVE

by MJ Politis

[mjpolitis@yahoo.com](mailto:mjpolitis@yahoo.com)

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### PROLOGUE

Dec 6 1775. Quebec City.

Forty three years of what some would call 'interesting' living required, somehow, that the woman who endured and experienced it be in the middle of those who were becoming experienced faster than they ever imagined possible. The winter sky decided to give the inhabitants under it a break, providing them with a slight wind under gray clouds that held onto the snow within them. The sunlight felt warm when it shone on Marie's face, penetrating through the long, still thick auburn hair that enveloped it. Her feet felt the hardness of the ground under a thin layer of soft snow. Ground that permitted nothing to penetrate it. Neither pick nor shovel nor axe could make a dent in the surface of the earth as it said 'no' to anyone who decided to carve out a ditch to bring much needed water from the nearby river for their aching bowels. Or those who needed to dig trenches to keep themselves warm. Or those who would, eventually, need to bury their comrades who would die of dehydration, dysentery, cold or musketballs that penetrated into their half-starved bodies.

In front of Marie stood the proud walls of Quebec City, guarded by Redcoats sent from England. They were accompanied by French Canadians and mixed-blood Indians who saw the best chance of survival for their culture and progeny by fighting with their former British enemies. Behind her, several hundred yards beyond range of cannon, musket-shot or arrows, were tents occupied by former English subjects who now called themselves Americans, determined to liberate Canada from the yolk of British oppression. In Marie's hand, a piece of paper given to her by the American rebel general, informing the inhabitants of the fortress that following the surrender of Montreal to the American Expeditionary force, it would be useless to hold out against them as they were the superior force.

"But superior in what?" Marie pondered as she looked behind her at General Montgomery's 300 American enlistees and half as many French Canadian recruits he picked up along the way, to be eventually reinforced by a hundred or so soldiers that Benedict Arnold brought up from Cambridge, Mass. "The American soldiers' enlistments are up January first, and most of them are determined to go home with Canadian bootie if they are able, or their half-alive bodies if they can," she said to herself, as silently as she could.

"It's the generals who are in this for the glory, if indeed anyone still believes that there is glory in any of this," she considered as she noted Montgomery and his aides, clad in their tailor-made military uniforms as they went into the biggest and possibly warmest tent in

the camp, looking over a map of the fortified City prepared by one of the French Canadian volunteers who was not on anyone's official payroll. A map that Marie didn't comment on, as she knew that Canadian volunteer all too well, and hoped that he would not reveal to Montgomery that she knew more about Quebec City than anyone in the American Camp, as well as most of the present defenders of that last stronghold of British presence North of the 13 rebellious colonies.

The mild South breeze shifted to a brisker North wind, forcing Marie to look towards the city she both loved and hated, which had now become a fortress. She counted the guns and cannons lining the walls, her eyes not able to see if behind them were alert, fighting-fit men, scarecrows with fancy hats and coats, or corpses which had once been given meaning and life by patriotic souls who had died in the call of duty. And indeed there were many ways to die in this new war, besides the sword, musket or cannon. Old Man winter had made an early and harsh appearance that year, enabling starvation and disease to take its toll on the weak, or unlucky. And so much about if one survived depended on luck.

Indeed, Marie considered her own provisions with regard to that elusive gift from the fates, or the mercy from the Heavenly Father. Since her arrival in what was then New France two 'interesting' decades ago, Marie had evaded death for a quarter of a century years, for reasons that she was thankful for, and for some which she was not. But, God, if He still had any interest in what happened to His most favorite, most interesting and no doubt frustrating of created beings, had seen fit for her to be in the middle of these two camps that were playing a dangerous game of poker with each other. Charged with a letter that could enable the players to survive the day, month or even the War, if reason ruled.

The terms of surrender in the letter written by Montgomery and entrusted to Marie to deliver to the British were generous, particularly to the French Canadians and Indians with them. Surrender your cannons, your stores of ammunition, and the city, and you could take your muskets home with you to hunt rabbit, moose or Redcoats to your heart's content. The English Redcoats would briefly be sent to prison camps, then boats back to their homeland, a place where there are no rebels trying to shoot at them from behind the trees in the woods. Where winter makes your hands a bit chilled rather than freezing off your fingers with frostbite. Marie hoped that something could be arranged, so that the men would not fight each other and thus make a reason-based peace even harder to be achieved.

She could hear men on both sides of the lines vent out their frustrations and re-activate their hopes with music. The violin from behind the walls of Quebec City echoed out a French song which now had English lyrics to it, given voice to by a tone-deaf Englishman who believed himself to be an opera singer. From the American side, a pipe and drum bellowed out a Yankee melody in 4/4 march time that was repetitiously annoying but found its way into your head and into your step.

Marie smiled as she pondered something between the deep wrinkles in her weather-beaten face. "What if they allowed me to bring my piano along on this expedition instead of only my doctoring kit?" she considered after putting the note from General Montgomery inside the garters on her blood-stained dress. Blood which even if it did come out, she would feel against her skin forever. As to her fingers, each one of those digits had incurred in the last two months some kind of cut from suturing up wounds too quickly or sawing off a limb from a febrile, gangrenous patient not ready to surrender it. But at least she still had fingers. And though they were now arthritic, wrinkled stumps, they still could play the imaginary piano which she carried with her wherever she went.

Ignoring the pain that had become her constant companion, and on some days her muse, Marie played a melody with her right hand on the imaginary keyboard in front of her while holding up a very real white flag of truce with her left. As she made her way to the City Walls, she imagined how perhaps she could play some reason-evoking music into the minds of these determined men on both sides with some Bach, Handel or even Clementi. Perhaps they would hear her pleas for a peaceful resolution to all of this with some Vivaldi. But, alas, harmony to the English 'virtuoso's' melody was the mandate of the day as she headed toward the gates of Quebec City. Marie HOPED that singing harmonic 'musique de la femme' to the Officer's 'melody' would get the Redcoats in charge of the fortified town to hear French Canadian reason, which could then translate into considering Yankee rebel common sense. She KNEW that there was one man behind the City walls who understood her mind, and one in the American camp who understood her heart. Or was it the other way around? In any case it was a critical point in the lives of many people and cultures, which started twenty five years ago.

## CHAPTER 1

Marie LeBlanc had survived the journey across the Atlantic better than most of her fellow passengers in the October of 1752. As did the gold coins sewn into the lining of her dress, which her mother insisted that she tell no one about just before the King's Guards came to take her to the bastille.

After leaving Normandy, Maria knew that she would never see the shores of the Old World ever again. But, according to the broker from Bourdeaux who negotiated the terms of her departure and arrival, Maria was going to New France. A place where the best elements of her native country were preserved and the lesser qualities of the old land would be washed away by the vastness of a continent filled with opportunity. Especially for the man who had send a request to the Old Country for a new wife to redefine his life in the New World.

Pierre Noir was a rich man in search of a cultured woman, according to the broker. Maria didn't ask how he earned his money, as she trusted the broker. "He will treat a woman of your refinement and culture with respect," Michel DeVries, had assured Marie as she got on the ship. "He isn't too bad to look at either, so I heard," he pledged as his final word regarding the miracle that God delivered to Marie so she could get out of

France before she would be put into an early grave before 23<sup>th</sup> birthday. Or sold into the worst kind of bondage imaginable for a girl with a developed mind, independent spirit and heart she always devoted to the Good Lord, in very flexible ways.

Still, it was maybe a rash decision for Marie to leave everything behind in France. And to look forward to what was in the New World. Not that there was anything to go back to. Particularly after her courtesan mother, Rachel, had been reclassified as a common whore due to shifts in power in the circles of nobles who ruled Old France. Then further demoted from whore to treasonous criminal when a nobleman who she never told Marie about decided that he preferred the favor of the Royal Catholic French Court rather than the pleasures of Marie's mother's caresses.

But before all that happened, Rachel insisted that the 'accident' that became her only daughter Marie be educated. To be able to speak the language of the nobles with words, and music. Marie turned the latter into not only a form of entertainment, but a purpose for living. Had she been born a man, she would have been able to play in chamber orchestras conducted by Vivaldi. Or had her compositions played by Vivaldi. But, Marie's ability to be a sensation on the harpsicord enabled her mother to be able to afford to buy a piano forte for the parlor in her mother Rachel's 'Greecian literary discourse club'. The establishment had made lots of money for enterprising girls with flexible moralities and ambitions to become smarter between the ears than any man. It also provided much needed pleasure for gentlemen whose wives' moralities were either too rigid, or whose wives made their masochistic husbands feel like vermin when they were home.

As for who Marie's father was, her mother Rachel would tell her 'a very talented nobleman named Jean-Paul' when Marie was a little girl. 'A bastard' she related when Marie turned 10 and sprouted breasts. 'The inevitable fate of every woman in our cursed family', she spat out behind guilt-ridden angry eyes to her daughter after she had her first period.

Coming back to the present, Marie looked at the shoreline yet again. There were indeed many things in abundance in this new land on the shores of the Saint Lawrence river. "Rivers that are so wide," she said to a blonde woman with a pale, ghostlike complexion to her left. "Lined with so many trees!" Marie commented to another one of her second class passengers on her right who was finally able to keep down more food than she had vomited up. None of them replied. The bigness of the sparsely populated country scared them. Somehow it fascinated Marie.

"New France is underpopulated," a soldier-sailor with an overgrown mustache that went down nearly to the tip of his chin informed Marie and the two scared women next to her, placing his large, muscular arms around the three of them. "New France has four times the land than the English Colonies occupy, and one twentieth of the people," he informed them. "Something that I am sure you fine filles de la roi will correct very quickly," he smiled as he looked at the large, child bearing hips of the woman to Marie's left, the over-

sized breast of the 'girl of the kind' to her left, and finally into Marie's eyes, which he fixated on.

"I am already promised to someone else," Marie informed him. "As are my sisters," she continued.

The other women nodded 'yes' in agreement to it. Maybe they were lying, maybe they were not. In any case, the soldier-sailor with the strong arms and emerging third leg in his groin bowed to them politely then moved on to other women on the ship.

"Thank you," the woman to Marie's left said to her.

"Curse you for ruining the best chance I had to marry UP," the one to Marie's right spat out, after which she pulled up her skirt and ran as quickly as she could to the soldier-sailor.

The woman still next to Marie, whose name she never knew, nor asked, crossed herself, praying to God exactly as instructed by the Priests and Nuns in Old France. Marie delivered her thanks to the Lord by gazing with wonderment at His creation of trees, water and four legged animals. Then seeing, around the corner of the seemingly endless woods, something man-made. And French made.

Marie eyes finally rested on Montreal. It looked like home, with its buildings of brick and the cobblestone streets. The unique hue of French blue was everywhere. On the houses, in portions of everyone's clothing and in every kind of blanket used to cover their wagons, carts and wares. Indeed, Marie saw a portrait of Old France in this new world, which made her feel at home. Until she got closer to the portrait, and heard it speak in a language she did not recognize.

"What is that tongue that they are speaking?" Marie asked the woman next to her.

"Quebequa, they call it," the reply. "The men, and women, who are here too long wind up speaking the kind of French that is difficult to understand, so I heard."

"And repulsive to hear," Marie commented. "But, I suppose we'll have to get used to," she continued.

The woman corrected Marie's diction, requesting that she repeat the phrases in Quebecqua. Doing so made Marie's mouth hurt, and felt painful to her ears.

After the ship landed, Marie stood in front of the barnacle covered craft that somehow challenged and endured the watery turmoil that was the North Atlantic. She un-bunched her blue dress with white trim, put on her green and red scarf, then put the third yellow ribbon into her long, wavy auburn hair, declining to put on a hat like the

other ladies in town. All in accord with her being identified by her new perspective husband, Pierre, who paid for her passage across the sea to come as a first class passenger. Marie had downgraded the passage to second class, so that she could bring a companion. That companion stood next to her, covered from head to toe in plain, black cloth. "So, we made it," she said to her piano-forte. An instrument which was harder to keep in tune than a harpsicord, but which enabled the player to adjust volume, and maintain notes as long as he, or she, wanted to. An instrument that, she heard, Johan Sebastian Bach had seen, but had not made comment on. Perhaps because old Johan's canvas in sound dealt with complexities of the melodies rather than making the notes sing longer. At least for the keyboard pieces. But, Johan was ailing in 1748, so Marie heard from one of her mother's musical clients. And it would not be long till he passed. Besides, Handel, the toast of Paris and London, was far more famous and played than Bach ever was. The compositions he invented in the privacy of the small, wooden cave in his small home town would die with him soon enough. Still, the pieces that Marie had committed to mental memory, and the few that she had sheet music for, would survive through her, somehow. So she hoped, and pledged the the ghost of the Old Master who she never met, but always felt.

But Marie was in a new world now. With new rules, and new mandates. One of them was how to stay warm. This early autumn Day in New France felt a lot colder than most of winter days back home in Old France. She was tempted to put an overcoat on, but declined to do so. Pierre expected to see her clad exactly as the letters regarding her described. And, besides, a woman who is afraid of a little cold would be a cowardly prospect as a wife, or anything else, in this New World. A New World which needed supplies, and people, from the Old one to keep itself alive, and growing.

The heaviest of the supplies were carted off the boat by laborers with pale white skin, and faces that looked old before their time. The wares were placed on the pier, the boxes opened and the contents inspected by immaculately, royally-dressed men, or their merely respectably-clad assistants. After a handshake with the Captain of the ship, and a discrete transfer of coin, the old goods were carted up again, loaded onto a wagon, and taken around blue-wooden houses into larger, then presumably into larger stone buildings behind them.

As for the human cargo, a plethora of women from second and third class passage from the next ship that pulled into port poured out onto the cobblestone streets, surrounded by soldiers as they were paraded up and down the streets. The women reeked of perfume, required to hide the body odors acquired on such a long passage that could not be removed by a quick sponge bath before leaving the ship, having shared the sponge with several other women.

Those who could afford it had changed into their 'arrival in the New World' outfits, showing off what they felt were the most attractive features of their anatomy to male onlookers. Some of those men wore their wealth in the form of tailor made coats complimented by shimmering nickers and polished boots that reflected the sunlight. Others were clad in leather fringed coats and commoner, wide-brimmed, hole-ridden

hats, displaying their accomplishments and worth by shaking bags of coin. The men and women both sized each other up, the former in the market for someone who would be beautiful to look at in the light and alluring to feel in the dark. The filles du roi, 'ladies of the king', as they were called here, had mixed motives, forgiving big noses, ugly faces, fat bellies or alcohol-possessed eyes on their potential male mates.

The women who were already spoken for waited on the pier next to Marie, clad in their pre-assigned wardrobe. Some of them smiled with delight when greeted in Quebequa by their new husbands. Some faked an expression of happiness. Two of them ducked behind Marie's piano, changed into other outfits, and sneaked into the parade of filles de roi.

Marie had seen all of this before of course in Paris, Bourdeaux and Nice. Such was nothing new, except of course for the ear-piercing twang of New France French. As to how French had acquired such a coarse and guttural tone, Marie looked to the darker skinned people mulling around this village that called itself a city. None of these half or full blooded Indians were interested in the filles du le roi. Some of the women with them carried themselves with a sense of independence that few White skinned women ever displayed. Most kept their eyes to the ground, or on the children of their race wandering around town with them.

"So, these are the savages," Marie thought to herself as she noted them being greeted by merchants selling knives, pots, pans, muskets and axes, giving them furs and freshly-killed meat in exchange. Marie had never seen dark skinned people so well armed. And in so many numbers relative to the white skinned folk.

There were several 'self-made hybrids' as well, all of them men. Whereas most of the gentlemen of Montreal strolled around town, these bearded, buckskin-clad, musket-bearing men swaggered around town with a stride of their own making. Some sang songs to themselves in strange tongues. Others mumbled. Others kept a world of bliss, pain and private accomplishment behind their eyes. They said little to the merchants from whom they bought flour, beans, shot, powder, bacon and jugs containing unidentified contents. They traded for what they wanted with pelts, meat, hides and sometimes coin. And another currency, shells by the looks of them, which were more valued than coins here. More than one merchant passed up coin in preference for the shells which, according to what they were saying, was 'wampum' that could be exchanged with the Indians.

Marie felt the coins in her pocket, wondering what they were worth in this new world. And what she was worth, as the last of the women in the parade of filles du roi was picked as a new brides. Soon afterwards, the pre-spoken-for women next to her were all taken away by their new husbands. Marie stood on the dock alone, with her piano, her valise of clothes and books, a letter from Pierre, and the fear that he didn't exist, or had been killed by one of the Indians.

"If you don't have a place to stay for the night, I know of some places?" Marie heard from the ship behind her. "A woman alone here has few prospects," the soldier-sailor

with the overgrown mustache and over-developed, yet potentially-protected arms said to Marie.

"I thank you, but I am spoken for, Sir," she informed him with a courtly bow, and a polite smile.

"By a man who's bedding an Indian wife, or whose scalp and hide are perhaps being used as a bed for one of those savages," he continued, after which he jumped off the boat, onto the pier, demonstrating his prowess and manhood by pulling his arm on his hip as a swash-bucking pirate. He pushed aside the flaps of his coat, revealing a shiny pistol with English writing and a gold plated dagger bearing Spanish calligraphy under his belt. "A bride needs a husband," he declared with a confident, and all things considered, sincere smile.

"Not if that husband is Jesus," she replied, pointing to a church from which three nuns were conveniently emerging, "My heart belongs to God."

"Lying is a sin in God's eyes, you know, or should know," he countered, twirling the hairs of his mustache. "But on behalf of God, I forgive your sins, if you tell me the truth about the man who has claimed you. For your own good," he added with a courtly bow.

"Well," Marie replied, letting her eye wander around the city to invent another reason for fending off the maybe-noble but maybe not-so-noble pirate-turned-soldier. "There is a man who will soon be the new Magistrate of this city, or who will be. A noble man who is educated, kind, and probably late in greeting me because he is serving the people, quietly, and without swash-buckling fanfare, Sir," she said appending it with a respectful bow.

"A story I would believe, IF this city was run by a Magistrate," the soldier-pirate replied, his head proudly bent upward to the sky, in fluent and confident Quebecua. With a kindness that Marie's heart felt as sincere, as her mind sensed it being ultimately dangerous and confining. "We have a Mayor here, not a magistrate," he proclaimed. "And above him, a Governor General. Who thinks he runs the place. And thinks he can sit in a small room in a small town and can say or know what goes on in a wilderness that's the size of France. I will give you one more chance, as a gentleman of the high seas, to tell me why it is inappropriate for you to come home with me and share the hospitality of my dinner table."

"Because, kind Sir," Marie replied, placing her gentle, petite hand on the soldier-sailor's large, muscular forearm. "Hospitality at your dinner table will lead to both feasting upon our passions in the bedroom. Sharing stories, feelings and medical conditions that I still carry with me. Such was syphilis, which as you know..." with an everly more alluring smile, Marie continued with an erotically, very graphic description of the manner in which disease from a used woman can get into even the strongest man, and the effects of such on the man.

With each colorful and painfully accurate description of how a verile, strong man can be turned into an impotent, weak man who loses control of his hands, legs, eyes and mind, the sun-baked face of the Soldier-Pirate turned whiter, till he finally backed away from Marie, running as fast as he could to a water-trough where he pushed the horses aside and drenched every part of his body that Marie had touched, kissed or licked.

Maybe it was victory for women, or maybe it was just a cunning joke that came at a convenient time. In any case, Marie allowed herself a few moments of satisfaction, till she realized that she was alone. In a strange New World made by men, for men. And, according to the time that had passed since her arrival on the boat, abandoned by the man who, according to his letters, had pledged to allow her to be a strong, comfortable and socially effective woman.

After the Soldier Pirate finished explaining to his friends why he had elected to take a bath so frantically, Marie now had NO men who were after her. And no one to talk to, save for a stray dog reeking of some kind of wilderness animal hair who walked up to her, sat down, then nuzzled his way between her legs.

"I'd love to accept your proposal," Marie said to the half-shepherd, half-wolf licking her now shaking hand. "But we are from two different worlds, and species. My people would talk, and yours would probably gossip negatively amongst themselves as well," she said as she stroked his neck, after which she gazed into his eyes. "But since it's only you and me talking, I'd like your opinion on something. It's about Revolution and Reform, which is long overdue in Old France, and by the look and smell of here, New France also. To be effective and balanced, revolutions and reforms need the participation of women as well as men. But the idiots and sadists in charge of things have devised a wondrous way to keep women out of the Revolution and Reform Callings. It's called marriage. She takes a vow in the presence of her neighbors on earth and the Almighty above to honor and obey her husband. Then, particularly if she is Catholic, she is required have children with him. Children who she is bound by honor and biology to care about more than anything in the world. More than herself. More than her husband. More than God. And more than Revolution or Reform. But, maybe, if she had a husband who understood this, she could be allowed to dedicate her life to serving, and saving, children of other mothers as well as children from her own womb."

The dog seemed to agree. As did an unexpected two legged creature who arrived in front of Marie without fanfare, or even footsteps that her acute sense of hearing could detect. The six foot-three tall man's face was baked red by the sun, covered with a light covering of dust, a giant of no more than 25 years old by the looks of everything above the neck. Below the neck clad in dirt-stained fringed buckskin leggings, a coat composed of more holes than intact leather, and a beaver hat which still containing the tail of the slain animal, as well as what seemed like pieced of manure stuck in it. His black hair was long and straggly, accompanied by his shabby beard that somehow suited his bright, optimistic blue eyes better than a trimmed one. Someone who seemingly was living off the land on a good day, one mistake away from being buried under it on bad ones.

“Your piano, Marie LeBlanc?” he asked her, pointing to the most valued thing Marie owned, perhaps more than her virginity. It was the first time anyone had addressed her by that name since she boarded the ship in France, under of course an assumed name, so that her life journey would not wind up in a jail cell for sins committed by her no doubt by now dead mother. Or an interrogation cell in which nothing would be spared to extract information about the treasonous clients in her brothel and the whereabouts of the girls who had serviced them.

“Your dog, Pierre Noir?” Marie inquired of the man as he squatted down and gave the canine dried meat from his left pocket, his right pocket filled with gold coin-filled bags, his belt overloaded with wampam seashells. “You don't look like the REAL King of the New France, as you said you were in your letters.”

“The man who is more powerful than the king never wears royal robes,” he smiled at her, holding back far more than he said, or was willing to say.

“Just as a smart woman doesn't ask where a man gets his power, money or more private pleasures,” she replied. “And keeps the most special and sacred things about her private, until it's time to share them,” she smiled alluringly. The canine turned away from his master and nuzzled up to her, seeking to know what was in the bulges now sticking out from of the lining of her dress. “What does he want?” she inquired, fearing the half dog, half beast had been trained to sniff out privately owned gold coins as well as freshly-dried meat.

“You,” the wilderness king in pauper's garb replied, using the formal term for the word rather than the familiar one. “Just as I do, after hearing what you said to him about your ideas, ideals and aspirations,” he continued, in Parisian French, with a very satisfied smile. He snapped his fingers, then pointed to a man heavily snoring under the wide brim of his floppy hole-ridden brown hat atop a stationary wagon whose contents were hidden by a large tarp.

The sleeping driver woke up in an instant, and drove the team of horses towards Marie. He uncovered the tarp just enough to assess how much space would be needed for the piano, then, with the help of two Indians who appeared from nowhere, loaded it onto the wagon, along with Marie's suitcase.

Marie looked into the eyes of the dog, and stroked his neck again. She felt herself connecting with him, so deeply that she pondered that he was the reincarnated soul of the canine mongrel who she befriended when she was a small girl, then lost to a carriage 'accident' involving a nobleman whose hand in extra-marital passion he politely refused when she became a young woman. A magical moment of bringing Old World memories connecting with New World prospects. Which was interrupted after a Indian with a half-shaven head, fierce-looking warpaint and three muskets strapped around his wound-covered chest whispered something to Pierre. Followed an instant later with the 'king of the wilderness' saying something in a language she didn't recognize to the Indians, the wagon driver, and then the dog. The latter instantly jumped under the tarp of the wagon.

Marie was escorted by two Indians to the buckboard of the wagon while Pierre put on a fake smile for a detachment of five well-dressed soldiers marching his way, led by an officer in a spotless Blue Coat and freshly powdered wig, introducing himself as Major Barriere with his chin held up and his chest out like rooster who had just won a pen full of hens. The wilderness trapper introduced himself by his only Christian name, with a poetic and proud bow, though the Major seemed to know exactly who and what he was.

Pierre exchanged some mumbled free and easy pleasantries with the very official officer, which did nothing to bring anything resembling a smile to the old fart's face. Not until Pierre pulled out a jug of spirits from under his coat, offering the constipated-faced Captain a sample drink for his dried mouth, and a few gold coins sneaked into his perhaps empty, or perhaps filled, pocket.

Before Marie could hear or see anymore, the wagon driver edged the horses onward at a brisk trot, then a slow lope. A lope that quickly led her out of the town that looked like home into a wilderness with trees and animals that bore no resemblance to any forest she had seen in the Old World, nor imagined in fairy tales about Ancient Ones. But there was some civility that Marie was afforded. "The Indian with the shaved head and crazy eyes is Miqua," the driver with the big, hole-ridden brown grumbled from the side of his mouth. "Mine is Jacque."

"And the dog's name, Jacque?" Marie boldly asked, noting that canine growling angrily at a fox looking at the still-covered cargo he was charged to protect.

"Monseur Noir has many names for him," Jacque related with a warm smile, recalling many happy tales behind his wide open brown eyes regarding his remark. "As he does for me, Miqua, himself and...hmmm," he continued, holding the words hostage inside his guilt-ridden throat.

"....me?" Marie boldly put to voice.

"A New World requires new identities, and perspectives, as you well know, Mademoiselle Taillier," he answered with a sincere but secretive smile.

Marie didn't know how this common wagon driver knew the alias which she used to board the ship from Old France, but she did know enough to stop asking questions. Indeed, perhaps the tyranny-ruled Old World rule did apply in the freedom-embracing New One. 'He, or she, who asks too many questions gets too many answers'.

## CHAPTER 2

Whatever green was in the leaves of the trees on the riverbank had turned into bright red, or shriveled brown. Behind them, the pine trees proudly displayed their dark green colors. Above them, the tips of the Adirondacks acquired their first permanent layers of fresh snow. The sun took its assigned station in the early morning sky doing its best to

penetrate the cold mist rising up from the Hudson, which was disrupted by two large wooden knives pushing a floating plow through its pristine, tranquil surface.

“A good day for a canoe ride,” Pierre Noir commented as he dipped his oar into the cold, clear water. “We’ll be in Albany sooner than expected, my friend,” he commented to the buckskin-clad man behind him.

Said friend replied with silence, having put none of his thoughts, aspirations or complaints into voice since breaking camp earlier that morning.

“Cold day,” Pierre noted. “But it’s easier to row in the cold than the heat. Except for the wind penetrating into your face. Or the wind you make by moving fast against stagnant air,” he smiled.

Still nothing from his fellow traveler. But there was one thing that would break the silence that was as thick as the stack of furs which lay under the tarp between them.

Pierre broke out into a loud, bold and very out of tune version of God Save the King, in French, with some modification in the lyrics. “God fuck our gracious King, fuck all the other Kings, especially the fucking English kings,” he rang out.

“Are you trying to get us killed!” the 25 year old, small-framed, and plain-faced trapper who powering the war canoe’s forward progress from the rear yelled out, in English, appended by splashing as much water as he could onto Pierre’s back.

“Relax, Rollo,” Pierre replied, ducking before the water could drench out his voice. “We haven’t seen any Redcoats since we left Ticonderoga,” he continued in a mixture of French and Iroquois. “Besides, the English are too superior to even think about learning French. And are too lazy to even think about learning any Indian languages. It’s so much easier for all of them to huddle among themselves East of the Appalachians.”

“Which is where we are now,” Rollo growled out in a loud whisper through his overgrown beard. “As Frenchmen, carrying furs and pelts trapped in New France.”

“Which we will be more appreciated by the English here than by our own people back home,” Pierre replied, putting oar to water at a faster rate to encourage his partner to do the same.

“You mean fetch a better price here than in Montreal or Quebec City, in Wampum that is,” Rollo growled back.

“Which, as I have explained to you, is how we have to do it. The Iroquois and colonial traders pay us in Wampum, then they sell the pelts to the English for English coins. You know the penalty awaiting anyone in New France who returns home with English coins, especially if they got them by trading furs.”

“Yes, I do, Pierre,” Rollo recalled.

Pierre could feel Rollo recalling what happened to his father for trading French furs and pelts to the English and the Dutch. How Rollo's father was put into shackles for violating one of the most sacred and enforced laws in New France. Then sent back to Old France for trial, which led to Rollo growing up fatherless, then being adopted by Pierre's father, who knew far better how to work around and within the law.

“How much longer do you think we can do this, Pierre?” Rollo asked.

“Make money illegally off the English that we can use to build New France in the image of the people who built it, instead of the royalty at Versailles who take credit for our building it? I suppose as long as you live up to your name, Rollo, the Viking whose descendant became William the Conqueror, the French Norman who conquered England in 1066,” Pierre replied.

“I was talking about 1750. On this side of the great pond, Pierre. Me leaving my half-breed children with their Iroquois grandma again, and you leaving your new wife with strangers,” Rollo shot back.

“Miqua and Jacque aren't strangers,” Pierre asserted, proudly. “They are family, who will take care of the newest member of our family.”

“That is, if she wants to join it,” Rollo replied.

“Her Cause is the same as ours,” Pierre answered, looking up towards the sky feeling more like a Revolutionary Visionary than a smuggler. “You can be sure of that. And if you aren't, I'm sure of that, and that is sufficient for now, my good and still very trusted friend,” he assured Rollo, recalling what Marie had said to his dog, and the background about her that was provided by Michel DeVries while she was still in France.

“And what is that Cause?” Rollo inquired.

“Freedom,” Pierre proudly replied, reading in his mind the history books about him to be written in a few short years, and certainly after death. “And Enlightenment,” he continued, envisioning the sonatas Marie would play or compose it that Vision's name.

“And honesty?” Rollo challenged.

Pierre remained silent, unable to answer that simple question. And unwilling to do so, even to himself.

## CHAPTER 3

Father Jean LeFevre had risen quickly up the clergy ranks in New France, despite the fact that his first introduction to New France was as an orphaned lad of 6, after his alcohol-addicted, atheistic Scottish Protestant father and devout, beaten-into-compliance, Welsh Protestant mother had been butchered in one of the non-recorded wars with the Hurons which started with economic disputes that escalated into skirmishes. Unlike his brothers and sisters, who resisted the hospitality of their captors-turned-parents, Jean (then John) held onto his mother's humanity, and his father's instinct for practicality. Especially when he was liberated, against his will, by a French Expeditionary force led by an explorer whose name history didn't record because his failure to discover a river that crossed North America didn't please his patrons.

Given a new set of clothes, and a new name by the nuns at the orphanage in Montreal, 12 year old John McIntyre became Jean LeFevre, quickly learning another culture, language and belief system. "Hard work saves souls", he kept hearing from the bitter Brides of Christ in black with regret written all over their faces, especially when those Nuns gazed at and ministered to women who could show their pregnant bellies in public. And whose hair was straggly, unwashed, but at least still on their head instead of having been shorn off in the service of Jesus, the only man they presumably loved but could never make love to.

No matter how many piles of wood he carried in from the forest for the nuns, or carcasses of deer he carted back to camp with his Huron step-father before his 'liberation', Jean never bulked up his arms, or legs. But the muscle between his ears grew quickly, adopting to requirements for survival and seizing on opportunities for expansions. One of those expansions was within the clergy as a Jesuit Priest, in an Order that, for better or worse, valued how elegantly one could quote and pronounce liturgical Latin rather than how strongly one actually believed the Sacred texts.

By the age of 30, Jean had become the most sought after Priests in New France, mostly because he had a way with people. Particularly dying people. Such as Governor-General Marquis de la Janquere, who half a year earlier lay on his deathbed, requesting a private session with Jean regarding his opinions as to which Indians would stay with the French and which ones would defect to the British in the escalating dispute as to which group of Europeans had legal claim over the mostly un-mapped wilderness West of the Appalachians and East of the Mississippi. The Marquis' last political briefing turned into a very private confession, and the subsequent passing of the official ruler of New France. A confession which Jean told no one about, not because he feared the fires of hell for breaking the Seal of that Sacred institution, but because Father LeFevre knew that to serve both God and Man, he had to have access to secrets that men never entrusted to other men, alluring women, or even God.

Of course, there were secrets of his own that Father LeFevre kept to himself, which haunted him far more than the tales of horror, cruelty and fear he had heard from others. Countless 'others' who included White Catholics and as well as Redskin Pagans who had the misfortune of being converted to the Faith which LeFevre was now one Confession away from leaving entirely. Particularly when the 'children of God' who confessed their

sins to him actually believed that they could enter the Kingdom of Heaven after they had inflicted the worst kind of hell upon those still on earth. Indeed, after absolving thieves, rapists, murderers and torturers with both Red and White Skin, and commanding them to 'sin no more' and a penance involving them emptying the ill gotten wealth in their pockets into the poor box, LeFevre wished that he had become a Protestant Preacher or even an Eastern Orthodox Priest. Those 'treasonous souls who called themselves Christians' were not only allowed but encouraged to scare the shit out of their flock by proclaiming that the fires of hell awaited them for even the most minor offense and that doing good deeds until your dying day MAY allow you to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

On this day, in the early winter of 1753, LeFevre looked out of the window of the church recently assigned to him. Actually, a church he had assigned to himself. After he had used reason to convince the Bishop in Quebec City that it was in the best interest of the Catholic Church for him to be assigned to a wilderness outpost. And reminding the Bishop that it would create 'less philosophical and political disruptions' in Quebec City if he be allowed to leave.

It had been a long morning of bestowing blessings, hearing confessions, and collecting money from the rich to distribute to the less manipulative poor at his new post, a wooden shack which had been converted into a church by the addition of a hastily-constructive steeple which, at best, had a quarter-capacity occupancy in the pews on Sunday. Inside, the lingering odor of human farts, stale sacrificial wine, and semen-soaked clothing still penetrated LaFevre's nostrils. The five-foot-six priest with the neatly-trimmed beard, nerve-injured left leg and coral green eyes hobbled over to a window that had been locked shut by wet snow. It was now converted by a North wind into hard ice. He cajoled it open, feasting his coral green ocular portholes on the snow that fell between the leafless trees and lingered within the thick branches of the evergreens. He smiled as the wind blew fresh sense into his head. Then closed his eyes so that the music from a nearby cabin could penetrate his soul more easily.

"So, how do you like 'Abime du les Harti' so far?" LeFevre heard in Iroquois from the only parishioner left in the Church that Sunday.

"You mean, 'Ville du Noir', Migua. Noir City." the priest replied, opening his eyes to the harsh and cruel world of 'reality'. He looked the tall, muscular Indian with the half shaven head, noting that there was more white in his two foot long warlock half-mane than last week. "Though Pierre Noir thinks he can scare his enemies away by calling this town of his Abyss of the Bold and Independent, it is still his town. And if he has his way, it would be the Capital of his new Continental Empire. Run without any religion at all, which IS necessary to scare and guide men into being moral beings instead of emotionally-charged animals, or egotistical liberators."

"I can think of many, many less worthy White Men to plant their flag into land their ships stumbled on and claim it as their own," Migua replied with a warm smile. "Including yourself, Father LeFevre?"

“Guilty as charged,” the young Priest replied, knowing that the old Indian knew more about him than he knew about himself. But still, Miqua didn't know everything about LeFevre, thank God AND the Great Spirit.

“Why did you come here, Father LeFevre?” the spitting image of the devil according to European standards challenged, with a kind voice worthy of the Heavenly Father “Why did you come to this village of freethinkers?”

“You mean, or should mean, hideout for thieves and anarchists,” LeFevre shot back. “Which DOES have to operate with some rules, restraints, and morality if it is to be a model of what New France SHOULD be. I came because I'm more needed here than anywhere else!”

“Hmmm,” Miqua replied, stroking his tattooed chin with his still-intact but war-ravished fingers. “I thought that you came here for the music,” he continued, looking outside at the populated cabin from which it was coming. “Or maybe the woman who is playing it?”

“A woman who your philosopher king Pierre dumped here, while he coaxes the British to start a war with us by selling more French furs to the English, for money!”

“Money which is filling your poor box.” the thinking old Red-skinned man reminded the now-irrational young Paleskin as he picked up the voluntary, anonymous collection box and shook it. “Twice as much as last Sunday, as my ears can hear, Jean.”

“And your eyes won't see,” LeFevre shot back, grabbing hold of the box. “This money goes to the poor, and deserving.”

“The deserving being the woman who is playing that piano which you always listen to, day or night, Jean?”

“It's FATHER Jean! Or FATHER LeFevre!” the young priest yelled back at the old Indian.

“Who wants, needs, or maybe deserves to father Marie's child?” Miqua offered. He opened the window further. The Bach Fugue emerged into a lyrical sonata, emanating qualities that went far beyond logic, harmony or even virtue. “She has feelings for you, too, 'Father Jean',” the Old Red Sage continued.

“Special feelings?” LeFevre asked as he caught a glimpse of Marie smiling back at him through the now widely-open window.

“Which she feels for everyone, given who she is, and where she came from,” Miqua replied. “Feelings she has for my warriors who come to hear her play the piano. And feelings for the women in my village who come to learn how to read. And feelings for

the children of my people, and yours, who are inspired by the books and music she creates herself.”

“And her feelings for Pierre?” LeFevre replied, overcome with self-righteous indignation. “Who I married her to just before he left, without telling her why he left! Leaving her alone out here! Alone with---”

“--- Her music,” the old man said to the young one, placing his firm arm on Jean's shaking shoulders. “Which she loves more than she can love any man. Man of God. Or even God Itself.”

“God is a 'Him',” LeFevre informed his newest and perhaps only real friend in this isolated wilderness community of agnostics, atheists, Pagans and very-much-outlawed Protestants. “A heavenly father who has all of the kindness, understanding, caring, and wisdom that---”

“---Your White father didn't have, and your Huron step father did?” Miqua interjected before LeFevre could get lost in old nightmares about one father he yearned to forget, and another whose being slain he would never get over. Slain by French White men led by Iroquois scouts.

“I'll never forgive your people for what they did to my Huron father,” LeFevre grunted out at the Iroquois Elder who he had related and confessed his life story to perhaps too often.

“And I have a feeling that my people will never forgive what you English and French will do to us, when these border raids between you two bandits finally breaks out into war,” Miqua replied as he walked away from LeFevre, picking up his musket and bow at the door. “But in the meantime,” he continued, placing some wampum in the poor box. “This is to feed the bellies of those who are hungry.”

“And the bow and musket?” LeFevre inquired.

As always before saying something profound, useful or colorful, Miqua kept a moment of silence. A moment that to LeFevre seemed to be of average length, then longer than usual. Then as the silence became louder, intolerably fearful. Finally, the Old Chief of a tribe which was, rightly or wrongly, beginning to make it's own decisions about its fate, answered. “Everyone has a right to survive, and an obligation to serve. Which is stronger, only the Great Spirit knows.”

With that, the old Indian left the log cabin 'cathedral', leaving Father LaFevre alone again in his cerebrally-based and perhaps self-created agony. And the music coming from the 'widow' Marie, who seemed to beckon him to become a better man than he was. A different one, in any case.

## CHAPTER 4

Old Man Winter decided in his wisdom that it was appropriate for the citizens of Abime du les Harti to work for their survival rather than have it handed to them. As such, Christmas was more work than play for the collection of anarchists, traders, displaced Indians, Irish Catholics, French Protestants and sometimes practicing French Catholics who comprised the citizenry of the wilderness town that had no need for a sheriff, jail, or courtroom. But one inhabitant of the fortress that needed no walls to protect it didn't have to chop any wood, skin any deer, or even churn any butter.

Every one of Marie's physical needs during the late fall and winter were taken care of by Chief Migua, wagon driver Jacques, or the independent men who they enlisted in their service with a snap of the fingers, a soft request of the voice, or, when such failed, a subtle reminder that Pierre Noir would not be pleased if he came home to a wife who had not been treated like the philosopher-queen who she was. As for King Pierre, he had said very little to his queen on their wedding night, sharing neither his real inner thoughts nor his bed with her before his sudden departure the morning after. He left a note for her asking that she tell everyone that the blood stain on the sheets were from her and not sanguenous fluid obtained from the jugular of a slain buck. Marie honored Pierre's request in part because he seemed to be a man of Vision rather than passion, and in part because the knife he used to slay the deer could be used on her own neck, as hell hath no fury like a dedicated Revolutionary scorned, or questioned.

Though everyone around her was dressed in animal hides of one form or another, Marie chose to remain in the cloth garments she brought with her from Old France. Such suited her assigned activities as the White lady of the house who still spoke Parisian French rather than Quebequa. She found solace in playing music for and reading to the Indians, as well as the gruff White citizens of Abime de les Hardi who resembled them in most ways. She found satisfaction in teaching some of them how to play the piano and read, particularly the women with down-turned eyes who lamented that they were inferior in all ways to their husbands. She found Bliss in encouraging everyone to read any part of the Protestant Bible while trying to convince Father LeFevre that God did NOT want his flock to only read the portions the Catholic Priests deemed appropriate.

Marie didn't become a firmer believer in the Almighty after passing the time on the passage between Old France and New France with the Bible that was given to her by an elderly French Huganaut Protestant who died on his make shift death bed in steorage class only two days away from Normandy. But she did become a more interesting believer, particularly to Father LeFevre, who she addressed as such with her mouth, though she spoke to him as Jean with her eyes.

Marie never won an argument with the Priest who believed that strict Catholicism was required for New World Freedom to be accompanied by Old Time Compassion, and common sense. She did admit, however, that Jean was right when he said that if people were encouraged to read whatever passages in the Bible that suited their fancy rather than spiritual needs. They would preoccupy themselves with the fables about Jonah being

eaten by a whale. Noah living for 800 years after saving every animal species on earth in his arc, and the human race being spawned by a single woman with a craving for apples who had only two sons and no daughters. The heroic tales of King David, who slew his enemies with unbridled viciousness that was not only aided by the Almighty, but deemed morally necessary, as the Jews were the chosen people. “Unless guided through the Bible so that readers seek the meaning of the stories, they are likely to taking them as literal fact, or worse, find whatever passages justified their immoral activities and say that they are doing the Lord's Work,” he had said to Marie at the end of yet another after supper discourse that lasted well into the morning light, over the dinner table but no where else. But unlike the relationships between men and women she knew in the old world, whatever was going on between Jean and Marie was about sharing. But sharing what? That, would be determined, she hoped, as 1753 gave way reluctantly to 1754.

In celebration of such, Pierre did finally come home at noon on January 1, bearing three new layers of hair on his face, another layer of blisters on his fingertips, and dragging in an overfilled cart with his bruised back. He walked into the main room of the cabin which doubled as the town's meeting place for heated political discussions and celebratory drinking parties and inverted the cart, allowing its contents to spill onto the largest table in the room. He was not pleased with what and who he saw under that table.

“More stinking furs, to wallpaper London and Paris with, or to smother us,” Marie said to herself, as the only sober inhabitant of the establishment while cleaning up the third pile of vomit from Jacque, pooling it with a potful of emetic material from Indians who Miqua could not keep from joining the New Years celebration. The hung over producers of that vomited material lay on the floor under and around the table, barely conscious. “Welcome home, Pierre,” Marie proclaimed loudly with a fake smile to her finally-returned husband, kicking Jacque gently in the ribs. Then throwing pails of water on the rest of the slumbering or groaning examples of frontier 'humanity'.

Each man's eyes opened to the sight of their elected Head Comrade, heralding a plethora of excuses as to why they were drunk. The most popular was that it was because it was because someone else tricked them into drinking the specially-brewed firewater which was supposed to be for sale and barter, rather than consumption.

“Pierre doesn't want to hear your bullshit,” Rollo said as he entered the room with another cart of goods from Albany. “He's more interested in what Marie has to say than anything you drunkards do,” he continued.

Rollo was right, far more right than he ever thought he could be.

“I was thinking about you when I was out there, a lot,” Pierre said to Marie with his mouth, eyes and a heart that meant every word of it.

“I was...thinking, no dreaming, about you a lot too,” five-foot-five petite Marie found herself confessing to the six-foot-three giant who she had not seen since her wedding

night. He now seemed more handsome than ever in the light of the winter noon sun. She put her fingers through her hair, feeling the three yellow ribbons which always one way or another kept her long auburn main looking both seductive and dignified. Something she always did when she was contemplative, or fearful.

Pierre gently removed her hand from the trademark ribbons which had a history she never shared with anyone. He took her slender, petite fingers into his large, blistered hand. "There was so much I wanted to say on our wedding night that I couldn't,"

"Me also," Marie replied said as she felt the bigness of his hands, around her small fingers. Not like a small doe about to be devoured by a big bear. But like a tiny starfish, about to be embraced and protected by a kind and vigilant octopus.

"I brought you something from Albany and Philadephia that I thought you will like," he continued, still looking into her eyes.

"More than what I am looking at now?" she replied with a wide and trusting smile.

"You tell me," he smiled back, after which he snapped his fingers and pointed to Rollo.

Rollo removed the top fur from the large pile of goods Pierre had brought in, revealing something that opened Marie's eyes even more than the opening up of her Pioneer Revolutionary Husband's heart.

"Books for your beautiful mind, that I know I will never be able to understand. Clothes for your beautiful body, which I want to spend a lifetime admiring, and serving," Pierre said regarding the contents of the small trunk buried among the furs, knives, and axes. "And.---"

"---A violin, that isn't just a fiddle!" Marie exclaimed with glee as she picked up the perfectly laquered instrument at the bottom of the trunk.

"Which you'll need to play as a violin, and not a fiddle," Pierre added in polished Parisian French as he pulled a violin bow out from under the leggings around his left hip. He moved the horsehair bow up and down, simulating the motions of a penile erection, then inserted it firmly into the space between his crotch and inner thigh. Pierre's men smiled, about to break into a laugh. Rollo used the business end of his two hand-pistols to turn those smiles into tight and silent lips.

"So, what do I have to do to get that bow from you?" Marie challenged with a playful grin.

"Whatever you want to," Pierre replied with a courtly bow, and a vulnerable heart. He pulled the bow out and presented it to her as a general would a sword. "I surrender to you my heart, my lady," he said. He remained there, silent, eyes turned downward.

Every other face in the room now was on Marie, encouraging her to accept his surrender with a hearty spirit of New World joviality. All except for Rollo, who kept his thoughts to himself behind eyes that held even more secrets than she had behind hers.

“He's waiting for an answer,” Jacque interjected through a belch, but a sincere tone.

“Pierre, that is, is waiting for an answer,” Rollo replied, after which he gave Marie an ambiguous smile. Then his back as he tended to sorting out the rest of the goods illegally brought back from the English colonies.

Marie turned to Pierre, who remained in the position of surrender. She took two military-like steps towards him, then three gentle ones. She knelt down in front of him, taking the bow into her hand. “You surrender your heart to me, I surrender mine to yours,” she said, meaning every word of it more than she ever thought possible with anyone.

“And I declare you...” an Indian said between burps, after which he emptied out what was left in his drunken belly directly onto Jacque's lap. “And I declare you...”

“...Ordered to make love, and if you WANT to babies in the back room, while we clean up our own mess in here,” Jacque asserted. “Right, lads?” he said to his hung over companions. Those that Jacque couldn't convince to do 'woman's work' were cajoled to do so by Rollo's pistols.

Pierre rose up, He took Marie gently by the hand, escorting her to the back room. Jacque broke out into a very out-of-tune song, which was joined in by the band of now glee-infused band hung over traders and trappers. All except for Rollo, who tended to his own duties, as was his place and passion.

For the next few days, and weeks, Pierre settled into regularity, then love. As did Marie. Every day, Marie would play music for his men. And after a supper, which those men's women cooked, Pierre took her to bed. His bed. The passion was one that 'hurt so good' for the small framed Marie whose only developed muscles were the ones required to play the piano, or violin. “But,” she told herself, “Pierre doesn't know his own strength and he is a strong man, who thinks, when we are alone, that he could be a weak one. Or more accurately, a strong man who thinks he may be a stupid one.”

As such, Marie nurtured as much as as loved Pierre when they were alone. Informing and then convincing him that he was worthy of being followed by other men, and of being admired by other women should something happen to her. After each time the strong octopus with his strong arms showed his affection for the small starfish, that starfish would share a sip of wine with the octopus. The octopus would kiss her a fond goodnight, then carry her to her own bed chamber, where he would place her gently on the bed, and pour a glass of wine for her on a night-table. She would drink the wine, as he said he bought, made, or stole it especially for her. Sometimes she drank it when he was there, sometimes when he wasn't. After he left, she would go to sleep, awakening

the next day with bruises on her arm, legs and face. A consequence of battling demons in her sleep, which resulted in her battle doing battle with every portion of the bed, no matter how well cushioned it was made. Something Marie had inherited from her mother, most probably, which materialized in her mother after she had become an experienced woman.

But, even with the bruises, bumps and burps, it was a good time when Pierre was home. As good as a woman born to the kind of mother Marie had could expect anyway. And a far sight better than the fate of most Indian women, according to the stories Pierre told her about his exploits with the Savages.

## CHAPTER 5

Major Charles Barriere stood at the dock in Montreal, his chest out, his right hand laying on the handle of his sword. His blue coat was freshly washed, the buttons polished, the body underneath it shivering with the cold while the first ship from France since late fall pulled into port.

“You know, if you put a fur coat over that frock, you would be a lot warmer, Sir,” Father LeFevre, bundled up in fur from head to toe, reminded the Major.

“But I would be far less presentable, Father,” the Major replied, feeling the goosebumps under his coat, locking his feet into a stance of attention so they would not shake. “Besides, I know the price of valuing fur and hides too much, Jean,” he continued.

“While you and Pierre Noir make money selling them to your enemies, the British, at higher prices than you can get from your own people in France, I submit,” LeFevre replied with a humble bow.

“Submit all you want, you pretentious, over-educated Priest, but the British are your enemies too.”

“I have no enemies,” LeFevre asserted, placing his hands inside the sleeves of his coat, trying yet again to look like a humble monk who never got out of the monastery.

“Yes, yes,” Barriere barked back,. “You have no enemies except the devil inside you who makes you want things you don't need, and who makes you a 'less effective instrument for the Heavenly Father's Divine Will'.”

“Which is accurate,” LeFevre replied, hiding a multitude of unfulfilled desires and perhaps sins behind his eyes as he looked towards the hills from which he came three days earlier. “But the devil is not a 'who' anymore than God is a 'Him' or a 'Her',” LeFevre explained to Barriere.

While Barriere took note of the ship laying anchor and offloading its cargo, 'Professor' LeFevre rambled on about how any pictorial representation of good or evil prevents us from seeing those qualities for what they really are. And how the greatest sin we can commit is to not use the brains the Creator has given us to see 'It' as it really is, and thus serve the Divinity within us. Followed by an exuberant expressing of the ending message of every sermon the always tolerated, usually liked, but non-understandable Priest said from any pulpit, which said that Jesus requires us to love our friends, enemies and strangers equally. And that caring for friends and family more than strangers makes all strangers enemies, adversaries, and potential executioners.

“So, are you through?” Barriere said to LeFevre as the old-before-his-time virgin priest caught his breath.

“Yes, but...” LeFevre replied, about to discover and relate yet another idea about what is beyond the world of forms.

Barriere ended the one way discourse before it could start by placing one hand over the Priest's mouth, and using the other to point to the women getting off board the ship. “God made those too,” he said regarding the latest filles du les roi dancing their way off the ship. “Women in search of honest husbands. And honest men who should be who they were intended to be, rather than what the Nuns wanted them to be, Jean.”

A woman with long, blonde curly hair looked at the LeFevre with an 'interested' stare. A redhead took note of the man clad in furs from head to toe with another with loving smile. An olive skin woman who seemed more like a Hispanic gypsy Pagan than a French Catholic maiden connected with LeFevre's mind, then eyes.

“God created them, and you. And brought you all together,” Barriere said. “I heard that the Indians are allowed to have more than one wife. If you used that brain God gave you to finally see that, you can be of more service to Him, or It. And as for that collar that you wear around your neck like shackle rather than a----”

Before any more discourse or emotion could transpire between LeFevre and the three women sasheeing off the boat, he pulled down the deerskin covering his clerical collar. The blonde and redhead bowed to him apologetically then looked towards the other wilderness men on the dock dressed in interesting and expensive furs, or large ones clad in safe gentlemanly finery. The Gypsy Spaniard held her ground.

“I speak seven languages,” she said in French while seductively leaning on a pole on the dock. She demonstrated her claim with colorful phrases in each of the tongues, intermingling vulgar words with profound ideas.

LeFevre stopped her when she got to Greek, having studied enough of the Ancient form of that tongue to pique his interest in learning what the modern Hellenics said to each other when they wanted a loaf of bread, a chunk of cheese, a piece of ass or the other

things that humans on the material plane exchange with each other to give meaning to their existence.

“What do you get when you cross a Platonic Philosopher with master-fucking whore?” she inquired in the language of the present day Hellenic race.

“Trouble that's more exhausting than fulfilling, for both of them,” LeFevre smiled back at her. “Besides, I'm taken.”

“By God?” she replied. “A man who you imagine but never hear, and think is more real than anything you can touch, see or...” she continued as she stroked her breast. “...feel? You feel like a man of reason, who has reasoned that whatever you are in love with, it's not God. So, who is she, or it?”

LeFevre felt Barriere's eyes starting at him as he delayed giving the gypsy scholar an answer. The priest sensed that the old Major needed something interesting in his dull, administrative life, as did he himself. “It's a 'he', who I'm in love with,” LeFevre proclaimed in Greek with pride and joy to the woman who would not say 'no'. “Him,” he continued, in French, putting his small palms around the Major's large framed shoulders.

“He doesn't look like he's in love with you, Priest,” she replied, noting that the Major pushing LeFevre's hands away, eyeing three girls of no more than 15 years of age coming off the boat who joined the parade of women auctioning themselves off to the latest group of lonely men. “And he is interested in a different kind of love than you or I am,” the Spanish linguist-scholar clad like a gypsy whore added.

“He's a powerful and influential man who can only share his power with others if they do not reveal his secrets,” LeFevre replied in Greek. “Give him time, his mind doesn't yet know his heart,”

“A condition you seem to have more than him,” she replied, in French.

“What condition is she talking about?” the Major grumbled.

“Ask her yourself,” LeFevre replied, referring the old Major to the never-to-be-old gypsy.

She answered him with a smile, which Barriere did not understand. With that, the gypsy scholar moved along the street, joining the procession of women looking for men. Barriere stared at all the women from behind as they moved forward into their new dwelling and lives.

“Not as many as usual for this time of year,” the over-experienced young priest said to commented to the under-experienced gentleman soldier. “But there was another reason

why you personally came here to greet this ship, and your bosses told my bosses that I had to be here with you.”

“Yes, yes indeed, my good man,” Barriere replied as he looked at the crates being taken off the ship. Soldiers at the plank looked at the manifest, then peaked into their contents. They motioned for the indentured laborers, all of them White this time, to load them onto the wagons next to Barriere.

“Guns, powder and shot,” LeFevre sighed. “And even more cannons. More than you’ll need to hunt moose or protect ourselves from the hostile Indians, or pirates. I suppose you want me to bless them.”

“You will if you don’t want the Protestant British to come here and burn down your church, kill your Indian brethren, or put chains around you,” the Major informed the Priest as he stared into open space, lost in daydreams of glory. “The time for war has come, Father. Common sense and our own survival demands it.”

“And economic wisdom says otherwise,” LeFevre countered. He turned to the officer whose only real experience in War was breaking up brawls at local taverns and on occasion scaring off small hunting parties of Indians while he riding his horse in front of fifty aired infantry troops. “You, Pierre and God knows who else, make big money trading illegally with the British for top dollar, while making a very good living selling furs, lumber and Lord knows what, and WHO, else to France for a fair market price. War with England now would be very bad business, for everyone. Including the King of France.”

“And the longer we wait, the worse it will be for all of us here in New France,” the Major replied softly, and somberly, taking LeFevre aside, into an alley where the only ears that would hear would be those of rats, mice and drunks who would not know what to do with the information he needed to tell the naive idealist who was willing to die for his country, but never to fight for it. “When was the last time you were in the British Colonies lining the coast, Jean?” Barriere asked LeFevre, using that term of address for the first time.

“My travels never took me East of the Appalacians,” the Priest replied.

“Well, mine have. Under assumed names many times. And for reasons that I am not allowed to tell you,” Barriere replied. “And you know what I found in large abundance there that is in sparse numbers here?”

“Scones, Union Jack flags, and Protestant Bibles?” LeFevre spat back.

“No, you deluded idiot!” the Major countered, desperation in his voice. “People!” he said, pointing to the scatterings of people walking up and down the streets on both sides of the alley. “Ten times more people than have ever filled these streets. And ten times more streets. And outside of those cities with streets, more farms than wilderness cabins. And around those farms, villages that are rapidly on their way to becoming cities. And

when the people run out of places to walk in the streets, or land to farm, they come West of the Appalachians to the Ohio valley, or North to where we are right now. For each White man or woman in New France there are at least 20 in the English colonies this year. And next year, there will be 25 or thirty, no matter how many Women of the King we bring over from France. And no matter how endowed with sperm the men they marry here. And no matter how actively you Priests tell your parishioners that it is the right and duty of Catholic women to produce as many Catholic children as God allows them to, when, ironically, you as Priests are not allowed to have any children at all, unless you count the children who pop out of the bellies of Nuns under their black robes!"

The elderly but determined-to-not-retire yet major held onto his heart, having exhausted himself of breath and explanations. LeFevre offered his help, but the old gentleman officer pushed him aside. "If you want to help me, and your countrymen, and your God, you will see that these muskets get into the hands of men who will fight. And that you will convince them to fight for their land, family and children if they won't fight for themselves."

"I'm not a general, or recruiter, Sir," LeFevre replied.

"But by calling me Sir, for the first time, Jean," the old man said with a fond and warm smile. "You have decided to honor our Cause."

"But I won't fight for it!" LeFevre replied, turning to the wagonful of muskets. "Even when I use one of those to kill a deer, moose or angry bear, to feed my parishioners' bellies and keep them from being mauled, I ask the animal's forgiveness afterwards. Sometime before."

"I know," the old man smiled at the young one, extending his hand to LeFevre's shoulder. "You were raised by Indians. Some of whom deserve this land a lot more than most of us do."

"MOST of whom deserve this land more than ALL of us do," LeFevre countered.

"Land that will be taken by the British as their own. All of it, unless we start this war now! Before they do!" the old soldier replied with a prophetic tone that LeFevre had never heard from him. As if he was speaking with the voice of Divinely-sanctioned Necessity. Which was followed by the voice of inevitable Fate. "We need a man who we both know, hate, admire and need, to do what is necessary."

"Pierre Noir isn't going to fight for the King of France. Or any other King," LeFevre replied. "I don't really know what he is willing to fight, or die, for, Sir."

"But maybe you, we, should be thinking 'who' instead of 'what' he is willing to fight and die for, Father Jean? And by the way, we have the full support, and blessing, of the Bishop here and the Cardinals in France."

“Who officially knows nothing about all of this, I presume?” LeFevre requested.

Barriere smiled a discrete 'yes' to that inquiry. Father LeFevre was terrified about the plans behind Major Barriere's eyes. And even more terrified that he felt himself drawn into even considering it, And was coming up with an even better plan himself.

## CHAPTER 6

By the feel of the air it was hard to tell if it was late winter or early spring. The cold winds blowing over the lake West of Abime du les Hardi competed with a more-warm-than-chilling breeze from the East for superiority over the snow and mud covered valley that was shielded from more clouds by the mountains to the North. Both expressions of moving air caused a tingling on Father LeFevre's freshly shaven face as he sat on a horse overlooking the valley, contemplating what to do with, and to, the riders who emerged from the other side.

“By the way they are riding, it looks like the first part of this plan didn't work,” the rider next to LeFevre growled. “And when I get back to headquarters, and if anyone sees what's under my wig or hat, I will have a lot of explaining to do,” Major Barrier grumbled, stroking the freshly-shaven skin on both sides of his head, then feeling the feathers inserted into the fistful of hair on top. “Why did you insist that I make myself up to look like a Miami Indian?” the usually immaculately dressed Frenchman said from behind a face painted with war-paint, the torso underneath it covered with ornate buckskins or pagan designs.

“Because the Miami are aligned with the British,” LeFevre replied with a stiff upper lip, and upturned chin in Britishly-accented French. “Which, my noble savage ally, is me,” he continued.

“You don't look any more British than I look Indian,” Barriere said as he looked over the coat, tunic and breaches freshly prepared by the best tailor in Montreal that clad LeFevre from head to toe. “If they see that French insignia on your buttons, we'll be found out in an instant. And by the way they are riding down in the valley, they DO have full use of their senses.”

“Give them another...few minutes,” LaFevre replied, looking at his newly issued pocketwatch. “The special potion I put in their communion wafers this morning, and the sacrificial rum that I let them steal, does take time to take effect. And we need to let them see this uniform on me, that regalia on you, and your French soldiers in those ill-fitting British Redcoats before we do what we came here to do.”

“Which is to get killed by Pierre Noir's outriders, and the renegades in his camp?” one of the soldiers behind LeFevre protested.

“In a scheme which, if it fails, will do more harm to New France than anything the English can throw at us,” another asserted. “To say nothing about what will happen to US at the hands of Noir's men.”

“One of whom was with Longlade when he went to punish the Miami for trading with the British, and talked his Ottawa warriors into cannibalizing the Miami chieftain, Old Briton,” another said. “So I've heard in the taverns in Montreal, and so anyone who wants to keep his scalp and head intact should believe!”

“Your men speak their minds,” LeFevre smiled to his co-conspirator.

“Of course they do,” Barriere replied. “These French Canadians fight for the honor of their leaders and their freedom.”

“As do Pierre Noir's band of outriders,” LeFevre replied, looking at his pocketwatch with one eye, and with that other at the six riders who now had reached the outer perimeter of the invisible 'gate' surrounding the village. “Outriders who will be gleefully unable to even fight themselves. As you will be able to see, soon.”

Barriere removed a spy glass from his leather satchel, placing it to his eye. “Which I want to see now!” he barked out. “And do,” he continued, after seeing the riders unable to hold onto their mounts with their legs, desperately doing their best to hold onto the horses' manes, saddles, and their own lunch. “But two of the riders are sitting firm in the saddle, and look worried,” he continued. He handed over the spyglass to LeFevre.

“That would be Marie, who didn't come to Communion this morning, again, out of principle, but who I did send a Saskatoon berry scone that I baked myself,” LeFevre replied, feeling like the British Officer he was supposed to portray. “And...hmmm.. Rolo,” he continued, puzzled. “The atheist who was going to give up drinking, and never did.”

“And Pierre Noir?” one of the men behind Barriere demanded to know.

“Away on business,” LeFevre asserted.

“And you know thi, Father, because?” another one of the imitation Redcoats inquired.

“Whenever Marie goes for her Sunday afternoon rides, it is ALWAYS with Pierre. And when he isn't available, he sends Rollo out to protect her from raiding parties, renegade Indians, wildlife...or business competitors, like us,” LeFevre replied.

“Patriots, who need to get Pierre on our side in the War against the British, which he will help start,” Barriere asserted. “Trusted comrades who need to give him a kick in his 'neutral' Revolutionary Visionary,” he said to his men. “Is that not correct?”

All of them, one way or the others, said 'yes' to their commander's question. As for how much Right was in that correct, such worried LeFevre. But not so much him noting that he liked playing soldier. Liked having a sword on his hip rather than a Missel, or Bible, in his pocket. And then finding out that he liked doing the rest of what transpired as the collection of enebriated guards, a very alert Marie, and a very vigilant Rollo rode out into open ground. As soon as they were in clear seeing and hearing range of his bright red, British uniform, LeFevre shouted out in as perfectly accented arrogant English as he could to his detachment.

“Left flank, the village. Right flank, with me!” he blasted out in a voice that was intended to and very much did sound like someone else..

Major, now 'chief'. Barriere, rode with lit torches torches, leading ten 'English' soldiers and three of the men who were clad as junior Miami warriors into the village of now drugged but still conscious guards. As promised, and delivered, every gun that was aimed at Barriere and his men missed the mark, most of those firing them falling down on the ground after letting go with the first shot.

Consistent with British anti-Catholic sentiments, according to the plan that Father LeFevre designed himself, the priest's Church was the first structure put to the torch. Followed by the shack where the most recent shipment of furs to be traded with the British were being stored. Then followed by the distillery which produced Scottish whiskey which fetched more profit from sales in British territory than New France.

'Captain' Lefevre vicariously enjoyed seeing the emotionally-repressed Major Barriere enjoy being an Indian Warrior far more than he ever got satisfaction from being a French Officer, But the Priest playing at being general knew fully well that the War to follow would sober Barriere's fascination with conquest, destruction and glory soon enough.

Half of the riders accompanying Marie attempted to ride back to the village, all of them falling off their horses en route. The other half remained with Rollo as he led Marie into the woods, as she felt a queezy feeling in her stomach, then a lightness in her head.

The woods was a place where British Redcoats always felt out of place with regard to their ability to confront an adversary. Little did Rollo know that the men under LeFevre's command were Blue Coated French soldiers who were more Canadian than French. And that the reason why his own men were missing their mark with muskets, swords or sticks was because of the Native elixir LaFevre got from his Huron stepfather, the identity of which LeFevre was honor bound to not share with any man, Red or White.

The shootout in woods between Redcoats and Furcoats caused far more harm to the trees than any flesh. As for the Furcoats (other than Rollo), the elixir in them made them see four Redcoats in their mind to every one that was in the realm of reality. As well as squirrels who talked, and bears that flew. But there was still one man who had his senses, and the determination to do his duty in the very real world.

“She's not going anywhere, Captain,” Rollo yelled out in his best English as Marie, lay on the ground, feeling faint, then blissfully sleepy. He stood up tall, a pistol in each hand. “You and your men get out of here, or you're the first man who dies,” he said to LeFevre.

“That is highly unrealistic, all we want is the girl, who we will treat with respect, and return to you, for a price of course,” one of the men behind LeFevre replied.

“Which you are telling me in French that has no trace of an English accent, which says that this is all fake, or you are a traitor to your own people,” Rollo barked back. “Which is confirmed by...who I think is behind that freshly shaved face of your Captain?” he intuited.

“So, your far vision is better than anyone gives you credit for,” LeFevre commented to Rollo as he walked up to him.

“Such is how I keep my eyes, and head, intact, 'Captain LeFevre',” Rollo replied. “Is it not against even the Protestant's God to pretend to be a Catholic Priest, and to pretend to be my friend,” he screamed out.

“And mine?” Marie said as she popped her head up from the ground, abruptly waking up from her 'dream', mud covering her face. Whatever feelings of freindship, love or compassion for LeFevre diminished with each embittered, and desperate, word emanating from her bloody lips when he heard her unexpectedly speak. “I don't know what is going on here, but if you intend to capture me, Pierre will pay good money to get me back. Bad money as well. As much money as he needs to.” After delivering that proclamation, Marie slipped into another realm between her ears, her fall to the ground broken by Rollo's strong arms. Smiling and apparently freshly bruised on both arms and her neck, Marie muttered alluring then vulgar phrases to her beloved husband Pierre, begging him to love her her 'harder' and 'stronger'.

“So, you will deliver this ransom notification to Pierre, Sir,” LeFevre's newly commissioned 'British Lieutenant' said to Rollo, handing him a note, with the expertly forged signature of British Colonel Wentworth and associated seal. “It is nothing personal, just necessary business.”

“The business of making Pierre finally come to his senses and doing his duty for New France,” Rollo replied. “Which I support, and see as necessary,” he continued, then looked at Marie. “But I fear that my friend will need more motivation. And that his love for this woman of many wonders, who admired her outer beauty, but knows so little about her otherwise, needs to be tested.”

Before Marie, LeFevre or the Preist-turned-undercover soldier could figure out what was behind Rollo's intense eyes, Rollo knocked Marie out, senseless, from behind. He then pulled out a knife, grabbed hold of Marie's hair, and chopped off a large fistful of the mane which Pierre so loved to run his fingers through. He handed it to LeFevre, whose

face he recognized, despite LeFevre's attempt to conceal his identity. LeFevre feared that all was lost, until Fate delivered him an unexpected ally.

“I will give this, and the ribbons attached to it, to the Philosopher King, along with this ransom note you devised in this plan of yours, 'Father' LeFevre,” Rollo pledged, snidely. “Soon enough, he will be on the warpath with your 'boss', Colonel Wentworth, who is one of our trading partners in New York. Pierre will join in the fight against the English, as will I. And every one of his men also. But there is one thing that I ask of you for my silence and cooperation.”

“A medal from the King of France?” LeFevre's Lutenant spat out.

“We have to take care of her. She deserves better than Pierre,” Rollo replied, tears of desperation about to come out of his welled up eyes. “And one day, after all this is over, I may even be deserving of her, if I am the only one of us who is still alive. And to help with that, Father, I wish to make a confession. That is if you were ever playing this part of Priest for real.”

Listening to an absolving the man who just knocked out sheered the woman and, to tell the truth, lusted for, was the last thing LeFevre wanted to do. But the Priest collar still around his neck under the British Military Tunic with the fake buttons and brass demanded it.

## CHAPTER 7

“Making more money than I do from furs I bring here was one of the things that I allowed you to do, part of our deal,” Pierre Noir said to a terrified Colonel Wentworth at his headquarters in Plattsburg from behind a loaded pistol aimed at his sweat-soaked and not yet scalped head. “But taking my woman! This is unacceptable!” the calm revolutionary gone mad screamed out at the British Officer, Gentlemen and Scholar. “Where is she?” he demanded to know.

“I don't know,” Wentworth replied. “Maybe they do!” he barked back to Pierre, pointing to his stripped-down soldiers behind him, corralled into the main yard of the fort that prior to the surprise attack from Noir's White Traders and Iriquois allies had flown the Union Jack of Great Britain on its flag-post. “Whichever of you is responsible for extending the colonial's hostage taking trade to this special woman, speak up now, or we are all done for!” the terrified General yelled out to his men.

None of them said a word, with their mouth, or eyes. Not the large number of new recruits send up from New York City. Nor the misfit veterans who Pierre had drunk, fought, trapped or eaten with for so many years.

“They're all guilty, if not of that, then of being here, in land that WE FRENCH discovered. Land we shared with the Indians far more than you did. Land we give back to as much as we take,” Pierre heard from behind him.

“I thought you didn't want to make trouble with our English friends, Rollo,” Pierre said to his old friend. “Or that you didn't have the courage to make trouble with.”

“Pierre, they took Marie,” Rollo whispered to Pierre. “And probably had her killed, since they couldn't produce her when you presented them with the money they demanded. Honor demands blood, and more,” he informed his long time friend as he handed him a knife. A knife whose handle Marie had adorned with her own calligraphy, and one of the yellow ribbons that she had taken from her hair. Hair that was now taken from her head, just as life was taken from her body. Painfully and slowly by Miami Indians who still sided with the British, and who sought revenge for the death and cannibalization of their beloved chief, Old Briton.

Pierre's normally thinking eyes became possessed with rage as he held the knife while Rollo described to him the rumors that came to him about Marie being raped, skinned alive, eviscerated, then finally scalped of what hair she still had on her head. Rage turned into madness when Rollo showed Pierre yet again the mane of ribbon bearing hair that had been on his beloved.

“So, do I have your permission to proceed?” Rollo asked his grief stricken, revenge-possessed friend.

Pierre stared into space, envisioning the horror of Marie's death, smelling the ashes of his burnt-out village, and perhaps contemplating everything he had done to others that enabled him to obtain Marie and the wilderness town he was determined to turn into an independent empire. When asked again about proceeding forward with Wentworth's punishment, Pierre stood up, stared into the terrified and perhaps repentant Colonel's eyes and said to Rollo. “You take care of him, I'll take care of the fort.”

With that, Rollo grabbed hold of the British Colonel's thick, healthy mane that he so proudly wore, having never donned a powdered wig, and sliced it off, an inch below the scalp. Pierre commanded his men to kill one man at a time in the main yard of the fort, pledging not to stop till one of them revealed the whereabouts of Marie's body, or the name of the savages they sold her to. Within an hour's time, three men remained. Along with a scalped Colonel. Pierre allowed each of them a horse, and the opportunity to escape with their underwear and necks intact, informing them to go to Albany with a note for Governor Johnson. His personal declaration of War against the British Empire in North America, soon to be joined by his French Comrades unless they all left America within the month.

“So, now what?” Rollo asked his Commander in Chief, and friend as 'Noir's Raiders' took what they needed, then wanted, from the stores of the fort. One of them lighted a

torch, prepared to send into ashes what had been just a few weeks ago, their favorite trading post and watering hole.

“I have a better idea,” Noir said. He pulled out a French flag, put it on the flagpost and hoisted it up to full mast. He saluted it, requiring by example, everyone else to do so, which they all did, behind his back.

Rollo could see that half of the men saluting the flag they once mocked were doing it out of respect for Pierre. “The others will come around, to MY way of thinking,” he told himself. “As will their leader,” he thought to himself as he recalled what he had said to Father LeFevre during his Confession. And what he didn't say.

## CHAPTER 8

“It really isn't as bad as it looks,” Marie heard as her stare was held by the woman on the other side of the mirror whose shorn hair made all the features of her head look distorted. “Besides, God values beauty on the inside more than He does on the outside.”

“And that's why you're asking me to wear a black cloth over my head, and a habit over my eyes,” Marie said to the pale-faced woman covered in black behind her.

“INVITING you to wear the shawl and habit,” said Mother Superior Henry, who Marie had noticed envying the Filles du le roi when they got off the ship, showing off their womanly wares to men who seemed to value them. “But if you don't wish to cover your head with religious garb, we do have other items that may interest you,” the old Nun continued, pulling into the small windowed chamber a burlap sac, from which she pulled out an assortment of hair for Marie to try on. “Wigs,” the Mother Superior Henry continued, trying to raise the lowered spirits of her depressed and angry unwilling guest.

“Scalps,” Marie said regarding the dark brown and black assortment of hair. “Which were taken off the heads of Indians.”

“After they died, and their relatives, or enemies, sold them to us, for a very good price, so that girls like you and innocent pioneer women who lost their hair and their scalp could be feminine again,” she spat out, the heavenly smile on her pale white faces turning into an angry frown surrounded by beet red cheeks. “The best we can do, you spoiled....well, you know what I mean.”

“'Fallen woman', 'whore', 'jessabelle'? ” Marie replied. She got up and looked outside the narrow window of her 3<sup>rd</sup> story cell which disallowed anyone on the ground to see into it from the thorn-covered gated 'garden' below, and certainly from the small village five stone throws down the hill. “Or more accurately, I'm a 'captive' brought here by a man who you still won't name. A pawn, in a chess game played by someone else, just like, my mother,” Marie observed herself realizing, and putting into voice.

“A very valuable pawn, I might add,” the Mother Superior Henry replied.

“Who was put in here by someone who paid you a lot to not tell me who he was. AND, according to what I KNOW he told you, through sources who are too afraid to be found out, I should get anything I want here, you self-righteous, bitter old hag,” Marie smirked back at her. “And I was not completely unconscious when I was brought in here in a burlap bag. You DID agree to give me anything I want,”

“And to keep you safe, my child.,” the Old Nun admitted with down-turned and worried eyes.

“I am not your child, and I'm in more goddamn fucking danger going insane in here than being out there on the street, or in the woods!” Marie barked back.

“Not with the War with the English that just started! Officially!” the old hag in black blasted at the young girl in tattered Parisian finery in the room containing more books, clothes and culinary comforts than any all of the protected guests who had been at her Cloister combined. “And that savaged you married---”

“---Is my husband!” Marie yelled into the Nun's face. “The man I love!”

“Who did things to you that are...unspeakable, which is NOT love,” the wrinkled old Nun said with pity in her face. The Mother Superior turned abruptly into the Mother who Marie had lost in France, approaching her with outstretched arms and an open heart, both of which Marie allowed into her. “I heard how Pierre Noir put those bruises on your face, and arms. And made you cut off your own hair. He made you cry in so many ways. Then made you think that it love. Drugged you into thinking that you loved him too. And now he wants you back, so he can 'love' you some more.”

Somehow, Marie started to believe the story she had been told after her benefactor dropped her off at the isolated Nunnery. She had to believe someone. It made no sense to put stock into the Old Nun's tales about Rollo confessing that he watched Marie getting beaten, pissed on, shat on, and shouted at, while under drug induced states. And that there were eyewitnesses to it. And that the confession was true because Father LeFevre said it was. And that while the men were going to war, one man was trying to protect Marie from being an expandable pawn in a conflict which was as much about Frenchmen fighting each other as fighting their traditional foes, the English. But, Marie finally saw some sense in all of that.

“So, the safest place for me is here,” Marie conceded. “Under that,” she continued, pointing to the black shawl, habit and heavy crucifix that would hang over her neck, on a body which he noticed now was very, very bruised.

“Yes, it would be, Sister...hmmm,” the Mother Superior said, sizing Marie up from head to toe, and back again.

“Johan Sebastian,” Marie said as she put on the white habit, black hood and heavy wooden crucifix. “Sister Johan Sebastian, who requests, no demands, one thing from the fund my 'anonymous protector' set up before you spend it on more Missels to convert orphans, wine to help you sleep with yourselves, alone, each night, or coat hangers to get rid of accidents your fellow sisters get because of spending too much time in the confessional with the Priests, or anybody else.”

“And that is what, Sister Johan Sebastian?” the Mother Superior pushed out of a forced smile, while no doubt praying for help from every saint on the roster to prevent her from throwing her new addition to the Order out the window.

“A piano, harpsicord, or organ. And if not that, a violin,” Marie requested as she looked up to the Mother Superior from behind the robes that made her feel like someone else, who she didn't even recognize in the mirror. “If I didn't have a way to speak from, and to God, with music,” she continued, from the depth of her soul, with humility, trying to find out again who she was, or could be.

“That will be...difficult,” the Mother Superior replied. “We are a poor Order, dedicated to solemn prayer.”

“Who is being prevented from being a broke Order who has just been bailed out by a chess-master who does not want to find out that the pawn he seems to need goes mad or does ir-repairable harm to herself because she cannot play the music that she is,” Marie smiled back from under the large brim of her new 'bonnet'.

“I'll see what I can do,” Mother Superior Henry replied. As if she meant it. And with that, she left the room, closing the door behind her, leaving 'Sister Johan Sebastian' alone with books about the world outside the walls of the Nunnery which she would maybe get to see again, the 'when' of such depending on how quickly the War against the English would be won, or lost.

## CHAPTER 9

As a Catholic Priest with more experience with, and respect for, wild Indians and hand-to-mouth farmers and indentured servants than Cardinals or Marquis, LeFevre was requested by Major Barriere to join the French Army as a Chaplin Captain. Bishop Pontbriand made it an order. As such, LeFevre was entitled to the perks afforded officers in the field, including permission and requirement to spend more time reading newspapers and dispatches than digging trenches or latreens. And as a man of the cloth, LeFevre was required to have a tent to himself. Such allowed officers, enlisted men, and camp women (who were unofficially employed to keep the prior two from missing home too much and deserting to it) to have private access for confessions. And for LeFevre to read what he wanted to, without being watched. Such was a Tuesday morning in October of 1754 in a camp pitched two days hard march South West of Lake George.

The site of a new fort which would be constructed, with no visible enemy on the horizon except for bears, coyotes and the inevitable onset of winter.

Having been brought up in British America as a child who had to tell half-truths to his abusive father and psychotic mother to avoid being beaten, LeFevre's knowledge of the King's English was beyond any of his fellow officers. As such, he could more easily translate the truth behind the elegantly printed words in the English newspapers, as well as the French publications which saw no sin or dishonor in telling pensive men lies so they would become effective and courageous ones. Like the accounts of what started the War in the first place.

What DID come to print in the King George's English was that a smart, young Virginia Militia Colonel named George Washington discovered a French expeditionary force that was intent on torching Philadelphia, and brilliantly routed them all in the woods. The French newspapers of course reported, through the accounts of the sole French survivor of the 'battle', that it was an ambush on an unsuspecting trying to arrange a peace treaty. And that Washington's thrill of his first baptism by fire soon resulted in him having to surrender his weapons and honor a month later to the French at Fort Necessity, a structure which he built in the wrong way and in the wrong location.

What LeFevre did not see in any newspaper article, or military dispatch, was what Pierre Noir and his 'free revolutionary rangers' did to the English Colonel with whom he had been doing pre-War illegal trading that Britain declared that its army never engaged in. Stories in the taverns and around the campfires that LeFevre attended but never spoke at embellished the tale to say that Noir faced an armed force that outnumbered him four to one, and against all odds, was victorious, without losing a single man. Of course, any soldier who had really been in any real battle knew that the only time that your side had no casualties is if there was a massacre, or ambush. Such as Washington's 'brilliant attack' against the French 'invasion' force. But the newspapers from the British press did report one English Colonial casualty at that 'battle' at which Colonel Washington distinguished himself. Either the editor was smart enough to put that in there, or said casualty didn't take kindly to being part of Colonel Washington's first flirtation with real life glory.

But, no matter what the cause for the War, it was now a real fact. A fact that LeFevre helped make possible, God help him. "No well intended deed goes unpunished, I suppose," he told himself as he sipped his morning tea, a concoction of wild roots and berries which usually gave him muscular strength and clear perspective. The latter was missing today, as he dreamed about Marie last night, more intensely than he had ever done before. He tried to erase the picture of her in his mind, but the more he attempted such, the darker and more distinctive the brushstrokes of the portrait imprinted in his mind became.

As if feeling his thoughts, Major Barriere marched into the tent. He removed his hat, adjusted his powdered wig and helped himself to a seat on LeFevres cot. He reached into his pouch, loaded his pipe with a generous pinch of tobacco, inhaled two puffs, and

found it to his liking. “Fantastic. Nothing like good Virginia grown tobacco,” he commented with a wide smile. He then offered it to LeFevre.

“No thank you, Sir. Smoking peace pipes with collaborators I worked with to start a war is bad for my health, Sir,” LeFevre smirked back at his very well armed, and now very short tempered superior. “But if you want to scalp me because I made you shave your goddamn head to look like a fucking Indian,” the once-courteous, elegantly-spoken self-taught scholar continued as he bowed his neck down and handed Barriere a buffalo knife. “Please feel free to do so. But be sure to give me a haircut not only an inch below the scalp, but six inches below the skull. Or better still, three inches below the chin.”

LeFevre waited for Barriere's reply. The young Captain-Priest had, to be fair, made his superior Gentleman-Major's life harder than it had to be since leaving Montreal with the 'volunteers' he enlisted into his ranks. Indentured servants abruptly found guilty of the smallest civil offenses on the books, who were offered ten years in jail or one year in the army. Free farmers who had severe debt by having the prices of their crops regulated by urban gentlemen, now promised free land in the British colonies 'when' the war is won. And of course men and boys who had never seen combat who were made to look like cowards to their wives and sweethearts if they didn't take musket in hand and do right by their country.

According to Barriere's claims, every man in New France was eager and willing to fight for his country, his honor and, with the blessing of the Church, his God. Yet another lie that LeFevre now saw through all too easily, even without his morning tea. But this time, Barriere saw the need to explain the 'whys' behind the 'whats'. And he did so in the friendliest manner possible, Such made LeFevre suspicious, but intrigued enough to hear him out.

“Look, Jean,” Barriere began, leaning in towards LeFevre, being careful to keep his head three inches below the Priest's eyeline, instead of his usual posture of being six inches above it. “As long as Pierre Noir believes that his beloved wife, or perhaps his most prized cultural property, was killed by the British, he will fight against them. God help us if he ever finds out that it was us who took her from him so we could wake him up to his patriotic duty and get this war with England started, on OUR terms. And according to what Rollo said about how Noir treated Marie, and other women like her, we should keep Noir fighting the British. Sic the rabid Revolutionay dog on the English wolf that's about to eat us, so that rabid dog doesn't kill our families and burn down our farms, or churches”

“And when the War is over? Or sooner, if Marie realizes that she was drugged into doubting any memory she had of Noir, and me?” LeFevre barked back. “Using drugs you stole from ME!”

“For the common good, and ultimate benefit of New France,” Barriere gently explained.

“You mean Old France...Maybe those of us born on this side of the pond ARE better off with British, ‘Sir’.”

“Not if you speak French and are Catholic, ‘Father’,” the Major fired straight into LeFevre’s smart-assed face.

“So, all I have to do to make myself likable to the British is to stop speaking French?” LeFevre smiled back.

“That isn’t funny,” Barriere replied waving his finger at LeFevre like a schoolmaster who has lost control of his students, his composure and his bladder.

“I know it isn’t...as is conscripting MY people into YOUR Army!” LeFevre blasted back, standing tall, and defiantly. More than he had against any authority figure in recent memory. “Tricked by lies into becoming ‘honorable’ soldiers! Not like the Indians, who-  
--

“----fight with whoever they wish, when it suits them,” Barriere interjected. “They can leave the fight whenever they want. Go back into the woods and become dishonorable savage again,” he explained.

“And White French Canadians who decided that fighting for their families on their farms instead of starving in the ranks for low pay, or no pay, under glory-seeking generals from France who have no idea how hard these men have worked for their homes and families here!”

“Desertion in War is unacceptable, and we all have to do what we must,” the Major replied, eyes turned downward, guilt overcoming him suddenly and completely.

“Which is why you came to me to help you do what YOU must,” LeFevre spit out. “You want me to bless more guns? Bless more battle plans? Bless more trenches?”

“Bless a man who has to die, so we all can live, Father.”

“A deserter, ‘Sir’?. ”

“My nephew, Father.” Barriere confessed. He looked up at LeFevre with welled up eyes. The Major dared not let the tears fall down his cheeks. He held it in, like a man. An experience that LeFevre had seen, and felt, so many times when one is on the giving, watching, or receiving end of death. “He knew what he was signing up for.”

“Yes, but did we?” LeFevre felt, and did not give voice to.

## CHAPTER 10

It was a special privilege for Marie to be allowed to accompany her fellow Nuns to Montreal to pick up supplies, according to Mother Superior Henry. An even more special privilege to wait in the street for her fellow Nuns to attend Mass in the Church while Marie was charged with guarding the wares they unloaded from their wagon, which they used to proceed onward to the church, just around the corner. Wares that were not to be touched or looked at or Marie would be denied not only conversation for a month when she returned to the Nunnery, but any kind of food that entered her Marie's mouth which suited her palate.

“We will not be watching you, and will not be long till we return, and when we do, if you obey my instructions, life will be far better for you when we go home,” Mother Superior Henry had said to Marie over an hour ago. Appended by, “Beware, the world is an evil place. Cast your eyes upon it and they will be plucked out! And those eyes are being watched all the time by Heavenly Father.”

“Heavenly Father” when the talkative muscular Mother Superior Henry with a hairy upper lip and even more muscular, non-talkative women in black that accompanied her usually meant that one way or another Marie was being watched, and by whom, she didn't know. As such, Marie kept her head bowed, her eyes fixed on the ground. A requirement for all Nuns who were allowed to visit the world they had renounced. For Marie, it was perhaps a necessity to not be seen by men who wished to to her harm in other ways, Pierre Noir being maybe just one of them.

Marie could hear the city but intentionally did not look at it. For an hour, then two, then three, it felt like. Being denied access to any mechanical indication of the passage of time, except for the rising and setting of the sun, and the four times ringing of the call to prayer, Marie's sense of time was all but gone.

Marie wondered why no one dared try to take the goods dumped to her side that she was supposed to protect. Indeed, maybe Mother Superior Henry was right. Catholics, even when they became ex-Catholics, feared retribution of God. And attacking or stealing from a Nun was one of the worst offenses against The Almighty. And in New France, no one was allowed to enter or stay if they were not Catholic. And Catholics would always defend Nuns against Pagan Indians or infiltrating British Protestants.

Marie stared at the dirt between the cobblestones, keeping her mind on the insects' movements as today's method of keeping herself sane. Yet she could feel herself being watched. By something in White. Which approached slowly, walking around her, then pulling off the canvas over the goods Marie was supposed to guard, but not see.

“So, it is a piano,” a woman clad in White said as she unfurled the covering over the five foot high pile of 'forbidden to see' goods. She turned around, revealing a Cross around her neck, a sad smile on her face, and finally a habit around her head which she wore like a bonnet rather than a shackle.

“The more beautifully or joyous I play, the more they frown. The more enthusiastically I embrace the notes, the more they stay away from me like I'm the devil incarnate,” Marie noted sadly, and defiantly.

“Those would be the Benedictine Nuns under Mother Superior Henry's 'protection',” the Nun in White replied, a wealth of experience behind her old, down-turned eyes.

“Protection from what?” Marie inquired.

“Life I suppose,” the reply. “The 'happy' of it because it could be considered a temptation to stop working for a place in Heaven. The 'grief' of it because of what you can't do to make the hell that is earth workable for those required to live on it, particularly after the English Navy around Louisburg and is getting better each day at enforcing this blockade on us,” she went on, looking at the people milling around the streets, inviting Marie to do so, if she dared. Then ordering Marie to do so, in a voice sounded both official and powerful.

Marie beheld the streets that she had been ordered and conditioned to ignore by Mother Superior Henry. The port that normally brought in ships loaded with supplies from Old France, and new people to live in it or fight to keep it, was empty. As were the bellies of those milling around the streets, the few who were still in this once overpopulated city. Officers now as well as soldiers seemed thinner than they had been before. Gentlemen and their indentured servants looked nearly equally gaunt. The clothing worn by both ladies and laundry mistresses hung loosely around their apparently thinner bodies. White children with dirt stained faces asked adults for food, receiving sometimes a morcel, often times an apologetic smile appended by tears running down their cheeks after those cherubs departed again for the alleys. Alleys which contained no stray dogs, no wandering cats, and rats eating the flesh of butchered horses.

“So, what do we have here?” the Nun in White asked as she uncovered the large, manure-stained cloth covering Marie's piano.

“A piano,” replied from the corner of her mouth as she wandered over to the community bulletin board to assess for herself what had been happening outside the Nunnery which was 'protecting' her from the wrath of Pierre Noir, and, as she was informed anyway, men who wanted to do more harm to her than any scalp-hungry, sex-craving Indian.

“Along with some other things as well,” the Nun in White said as she went through the valet containing Marie's violin, ensemble of fine Parisian clothing and items far more personal and irreplaceable.”

“Those are mine!” Marie blasted out, grabbing hold of her belongings brought in from Abime du les Hardi which were initially allowed to her in the Nunnery, items that went missing every time she wanted to share them with one of the junior Sisters. The books were the items which went missing first, followed by the dress she wore when first

arriving in Montreal violin to meet Pierre interested the Nun in White most. “Those are mine!!!” Marie growled as she grabbed them back.

“I see, 'Lady' whoever you used to be,” smiled the Nun in White. “I must compliment you on your taste in literature,” she continued. “Your skill in writing,” she went on, perusing Marie's newest novel. “And your skill in sewing,” she continued, feeling the stitchery on the dress Marie wore upon her arrival in the New World.

“A skill by necessity, Sister,” Marie commented regarding the stitchery that she had done to repair the holes and tears made by walking through the woods, doing light chores at the cabin, cleaning up after drunken trappers, and befriending half-wolf dogs whose manners were often crude but whose eyes were always kind. As well the stitches she had done on in Old France on clothing to hide what was inside the lining.

“I see,” the Nun in White noted as her fingers felt the locations where there were small coins and paper currency from Old France. She then pulled out a jewel-containing broach from one of those decorative lumps.

“That was my mother's,” Marie protested.

“And will remain in your family, along with the other items of sentimental value in here,” the Nun in White growled, after which she threw the dress into Marie's arms. Then looked at Marie with disappointment. The way Marie's mother would look at her when she had denied a beggar who wandered into her brothel a small portion of her large loaf of bread. Or said regarding the masses of hungry people in Paris who had no bread to eat, “they should eat cake.”

Marie felt caught between making amends with her wealth, and looking after her own survival. Intercepting that decision, the Nun smiled, saying with warmth, and understanding, “I am not judging you, since when one person judges another, it is a downward process of non-thinking and over-reacting that happens to everyone around you.”

Never before had Marie heard 'do not judge lest you be judged' explained in such practical and intellectually expansive terms, even by Father, and as she knew him, in the distant past, Jean LeFevre.

The woman in White went on. “Each does give according to his or her abilities, and takes according to his or her needs, and who am I to judge what your needs really are,” she smiled. “Wouldn't you agree, Sister...?”

As for what those needs were, survival jolted to the top of the list as Marie saw a likeness of herself on the bulletin board. A sketch that could not be more accurate with regard to her face, her once long hair, and her long gone alluring musical smile. On top of it, “Missing: Reward Offered for Finding Her”. As for the name on the poster it was Marie LeBlanc, the one Marie had been given by her Mother and used while in Old France, and

buried as soon as she got on the ship to the New World. Or so she thought she had buried.

“Blood. How much of it have you seen?” the Nun in White inquired.

“Too much,” Marie replied, recalling what hard men did to soft women under her mother's employee in Old France, and ragged experiences between wilderness men and Indians in New France.

“And your attempts to stop the bleeding?” inquired the Sage in White who could read Marie's soul, but thankfully not yet her mind.

“You bring torn flesh together the best you can, Nature does the rest, on a good day anyway,” Marie related, recalling her unexpected successes and demoralizing failures with regard to fixing up bodies that fists, bullets and self-induced cuts had inflicted.

“Right answer,” the Nun smiled with gratitude, and pride as another group of White clad Nuns pulled a wagon up, distributing whatever goods they had to poor who gathered around it. “Mademoiselle,” the apparently Mother Superior replied to Marie with a bow.

“...No! Ah....Sister,” Marie replied, passing up on the chance to become herself again, yet another 'exploration' based out of necessity. “Sister...eh...eh... Jean-Pierre,” she replied, pulling the names of the two men who she loved and hated most from behind her eyes, appended by the one her cursed brothel-owning grandmother gave to her dedicated and misunderstood mother.

“A new name for a new Order.” the Nun in White smiled. “As, it would appear, you've been dumped on us by Mother Superior Henry. Her favorite trick, and test of faith,” she noted. “The others she dumped on us fainted while they were on 'guard duty.’”

Marie self-observed her mind reacquiring its ability to figure out how people manipulated others. Her inner eye looked at the black she was clad in, feeling its darkness intensely, for the first time in weeks, months or maybe years.

“We Augustines may not pray as much as the Benedictines. But we do on earth the the angels, or Saints, can't, or won't, do,” the Nun in White smiled from a tired face with defiant eyes. Marie hastily stuffed her books, clothes and violin onto the wagon, hiding her face from an overly-fed Gentleman who spoke Parisian French leading a well-armed officer and his two aids to community bulliten board.

“What about this, Sister Marie Joseph?” one of the junior Nuns asked her Mother Superior regarding the piano.

“It will be good medicine for our patients, and us,,” she commented. “In the hands of the right doctor that is,” she smiled at Marie.

## CHAPTER 11

The British surrender of Fort William Henry to the French, unlike the siege of that strategic stronghold, was civilized. Anyone in uniform who could walk, ride, or be carried were permitted to go East to Philadelphia, and pledged that they would go back home to England. Most of the battle-weary, emaciated and scared Redcoats eagerly accepted the terms. As did the civilians whose safety they were entrusted with.

Pierre Noir, Rollo Meunier and Jacque looked at the column of soldiers, civilians and slaves wearily trudging back to British held territory from behind a thicket birch, and a cloud of blood hungry misquitos and other flying parasites.

“We're a lot like these bugs, don't ya think,” Jacque the wagon driver, who did a lot of other things too, commented to Pierre and Rollo as he swatted another five hovering insects on his arm, missing the mark, but noting the places where they had indulged in another snack of blood at his expense. “They hit, take what they can get, then bugger off...bugs bugging off!” he smiled, easing into a cordial chuckle he wanted to share with his Comrades.

But by the look on Rollo's pre-occupied face and the way Pierre stared at the beautiful British Ladies accompanied by the defeated English Officers, the wagon driver who had no need of a last name was wasting his breath. “So, what do we do about them?” he inquired of Pierre and Rollo, not sure who had the authority to answer, and who would

“We do what we've been doing all along,” Rollo said. “Terrorize the English Soldiers so they'll stop stealing from and killing our French Comrades. That's what the King of France is paying us for. To do his dirty work. That is necessary for all of us to have our lives working again.”

“But the British left Fort William Henry under a flag of truce,” Jacque pointed out to Rollo. “We saw it with our own eyes!”

“From the woods, where we told to stay, under orders of the French General. Who doesn't make us wear uniforms, march in formation, or call anyone “Sir”,” Rollo replied.

“But makes us dress up as Indians,” Jacque replied, stroking his freshly-shaven face. “Which be an insult to the allies we got who ARE Indians,” he continued, pointing to a collection of Redskins taking positions in the woods on the other side of the wide, meadow the column of Palefaces and some Blackfaces were approaching. He looked at his red-painted skin and mocassined feet, considering what to say next. Knowing that it had to be worded to suit the reason in one man, and the heart still perhaps left in the other. “Before we give the signal to them Indians who, you say are working for us, to attack, ya might wanna consider that there's women with the Redcoats. Innocent women.”

“Pawns,” Pierre sneered, his stare remaining on a woman with light brown hair who resembled Marie riding next to an officer at least twice her age. “Pawns in a game which is ours.”

“Ya mind telling me what this game is now?” Jacque asked. “King to bishop, knight, rook or...maybe other pawn?” he continued. “This was supposed to be about fighting for what's rightfully ours.”

“And was taken from me,” Pierre growled. “That woman, and the ones that looks like her sisters, who will we take alive.”

“For what purpose, Chief Pierre?” Jacque the Native-looking Paleface asked the man who he followed everywhere, by his own choosing. First out of friendship. Then out of loyalty. And now, because of habit. “Are you gonna ransom her? Carve off her skin and send it to her loved ones as 'revenge robe'? Or fuck enough of your yearnings into her so she answers to Marie's name, learns to play the piano like Marie, and then---”

Jacque's very real imaginings were kept inside his throat by a blow from the handle of pistol, held by Rollo.

“Pierre can speak for himself,” Jacque asserted after getting enough breaths into his aching windpipe. “He always has,” he pointed out.

“And will,” Pierre replied, looking at Jacque as he handed him a note, and still valued, friend. “With this,” he continued, pulling a war lance from his saddle pack. “The White wench in the blue dress is my mine!” he yelled out in Iroquois as his final command.

With that, Pierre quickly shouted out the command to attack in three other Indian languages, after which kicked his horse onward and galloped into the column of musketless British soldiers. Pierre was joined by Iroquois coming from every direction, converging on the entire column as it finally entered the woodland-surrounded meadow.

Jacque noted that the Chief of the Iroquois tribe, across the meadow, was trying to cancel the attack. A shot from Rollo's musket silenced him, hitting Migua straight between the eyes.

“Migua was our friend! Yours too!” Jacque screamed at Rollo.

“But not our ally,” Rollo countered, pointing his pistol at Jacque. “Which one are you?”

Jacque remained silent, held hostage by Rollo as the renegade band of Iroquois and the secretly-sanctioned guerilla troops known as Noir's Rangers made mince meat of every British Redcoat in the column. Then they proceeded to capture or kill every one of the civilians under their protection, including the black slaves. Most of those who died, did so painfully during the ten minute 'battle'. Very much including the woman in whose eyes Pierre saw Marie, and every other female who could be considered a valuable

hostage. Pierre rushed to the lifeless corpse of the light-brown haired 'Marie', and her two sisters. "You were supposed to look after her! I'll kill the man who did this to her!" he screamed out at his Iroquois allies, and friends in their own native language, then his own. "We need her to avenge Marie's death, or ransom for her if she is still alive! Like some of you have been murmuring behind my back!"

Though there was no one better at telling a convincing lie in the service of making a profit than Jacque, he did value the truth. Among friends and allies particularly. "The history books will know what really happened here," Jacque warned Rollo.

"But the newspapers will say something different now, my old, former friend," Rollo answered, followed by a shot into Jacque's head. The head of a friend who had become an expendable pawn in his own game. As for the explanation for it, he addressed it to the spirit about to rise up from Jacque's now breathless body. "Pardone moi, mon ami. C'est la guerre."

Yes, 'that's war' was rapidly becoming an explanation for everything. The only one that was affordable anyone. Or bearable.

## CHAPTER 12

Captain-Chaplin LeFevre looked down the hill from behind a thicket of pine trees to a village on his left. He could clearly see, hear and smell a village of Acadian civilians doing something he had not seen since the War officially had started. Men of mixed European and Indian ancestry carted around sacs of grain, plows and harnesses on their strong shoulders while boasting to their fellow citizens about what they did with the muscles between their legs the night before. The bonneted women pushed wheelbarrels filled with tin plates, hot pea soup and freshly baked bread to a communal table, gossiping no doubt about the men as they set a place for each of them. The children used every inanimate object in their grasp and played a game with them, converting those sticks, stones and animal hides into magical instruments which took each to a place of blissful imaginations.

"Those are the Acadians, alright, Captain," Major Barriere noted with bitter disappointment bordering on pity to LeFevre. "Half-breeds thinking that if they leave the world around them alone, the world will leave them alone."

"And will we leave them alone, Francois?" LeFerve said to his commanding officer using his first name. "And will you let them be who they are instead of making them into what you think they should be?" he continued, using the familiar term of 'you'.

"I wish I could, Father," Barriere replied. He retrieved the folded map from his pocket then gently opened it. "But this village has strategic importance to us, and them," he continued, pointing LeFevre's attention to another gathering down the hill to the right.

“Five of them to each one of us,” the French Major commented regarding the camp of Redcoats cleaning their muskets, sharpening their bayonets and polishing their boots.

“Ten of them to every one of us,” LeFevre added. “And none of the Indians with us are stupid enough to fight with those odds.

“And none of our enlisted men are brave or lucky enough to survive those odds. God bless them for our transgressions,” Barriere said, crossing himself to give a silent prayer for those who had given their lives already for the Cause. He muttered a prayer in Latin, then turned LeFevre's attention to two junior officers around a senior one describing something on the map. The guilt-ridden French officer chuckled. “I suppose that we should be honored. That small army below us taking the time and trouble to devise a battle plan and look spiffy so that they can surround, capture and kill our humble detachment.”

“They probably don't know where's here,” LeFevre commented. “Or how few we really are. And fear that we have a hundred rounds of shot per man instead of only four.”

“I heard that lying, even to make dying men more comfortable before dying, is a sin, Father,” he said. “Except of course for the fact that all brave, honorable or recently-confessed men go to Heaven, right Father?”

LeFevre's clergy collar required that he assure Barriere of God's love for those who seek his protection. But his being a man, charged with doing the best he could on earth with heavenly tools that seldom worked required another strategy. One that had been cooking for a long time and, like the bread being shared around the communal table of Acadian villagers, was ready to be taken out of the oven.

“After we routed the English patrols back in Cape Breton, I found some bushes which contained what I needed to make more Huron happy juice,” LeFevre said as he pulled out a leather medicine bag from under his blue French tunic. “A few sprinkles into their lunch will have those well-munitioned and better armed English invaders seeing dragons and demons that will make them crap in their clean, white britches and run for the hills.”

“I don't know,” Barriere replied.

“It worked in Abime du les Hardi,” LeFevre commented.

“After which so much more didn't,” Barriere lamented. He pondered the issue, again. “It's too risky.”

“We're dealing here with Redcoat soldiers, who work for money. Not French Canadian wilderness men who work for themselves or, by necessity, each other,” LeFevre offered, leaning in to the Old Man. “You take our men down the mountain, hide where the riverbank forks. I'll invite myself into the British Camp as a guest, cook them a dinner, and invite you to dine on their boots while they're sleeping.”

“I thought you said this elixir will make them crap in their britches and run for the hills,” Barriere pointed out.

“A modification in the mixtures of the seeds to the roots that I just thought of,” LeFevre replied with a wide smile.

“I know that smile, Jean,” Barriere replied. “You're hiding something from me again.”

“You're right,” LeFevre confessed. “It's the mixture or the flowers to the roots that determines if you see angels in your sleep or demons with your eyes wide open.”

“Fine then,” Barriere grumbled as he gathered up his musket, pistol and sword. He then motioned for the men behind him to do the same with their weapons, food and other belongings they needed for mobile survival, and success. He rose up, addressing the Priest's secretive, smiling face. “You keep this confidential secret Huron medicine recipe, and don't share it with anyone else. And in exchange I won't have you reported to the Bishop for things you said about Marie in your sleep.”

With that, Major Barriere departed with his White soldiers and Indian warriors. LeFevre looked up to the sky, asking forgiveness from God for what he was about to do. As well as what he had done to Marie. He appended his prayer with the mention of 'sin'. “The Greek and Aramaic word for sin, is miscalculation,” he said in this most recent discourse with the Lord. “Moral miscalculation based on miscalculating means and ends, and their relative importance. Please guide me in this present calculation so it will not be a miscalculation.”

The bright, hot noon-day sun above became covered with cooling clouds. Jean LeFevre allowed himself to believe that it was a sign from God that whatever he was about to do was a virtuous calculation, the means to get their not being taken note of by either heaven or earth.

LeFevre discarded his blue French tunic, replacing it with the buckskin coat which provided protection from the rain and snow, as well as being spotted by British patrols and the few Indians who were loyal to them. With each step of his horse towards the British Army Camp he rehearsed his English, in voice and song, attempting to recall what he sounded like as a lad of 6 raised by an Irish mother and pushed back down again by a more-often-than-not drunk Scottish father. By the time he reached the Camp, he felt like a bonefied Colonial civilian, dedicated to serving King George and himself, not necessarily in that order. Which, of course, was his plan all along. Part of it anyway.

“Who goes there!” a British sentry barked out from behind a helmet which hid his eyes and face. Upon closer examination of such LeFevre saw a terrified boy rather than a fear-inducing man. By the lack of wrinkles on his peach-fuzzed face this corporal was no more than 18, fitting as poorly into his over-sized uniform as the stripes on his shoulder. Stripes no doubt put there because others more bold, or unlucky, had died at the hands of

a French musketball or Indian tomahawk. "Who goes there!" the scared lad barked out. "Dismount and declare yourself!"

"John," LeFevre replied, dismounting his horse in accord with the sentry's request. "John McIntyre" he continued in what he hoped was accent-less English, deciding for reasons of irony to use the name he was born into. "One less lie to have to explain my way around, or worry about hiding," he pondered to himself. "I come bearing this!" he said, holding up a jug of wine generously laced with Huron mind altering spices. "French wine," he boasted.

"We are not interested in receiving Communion, Father," an old seargent with a five day old beard grumbled in Welsh Cockney from behind the scared corporal, pushing the young Corporal aside. He pointed to the Cross on the moonshine jug.

"Father?" the Corporal exclaimed, still holding the gun at LeFevre, but this time with shaking hands.

"Look at the collar, boy," the old veteran said to the young recruit regarding the collar still around LeFevre's neck. Which he thought he had hidden, but was about to reveal anyway once in camp, to a higher authority. "And you, visitor who comes into camp speaking the King's English while wearing the Pope's dog collar. State your business!"

"Those people in the village, assigned to me by the Bishop," LeFevre replied with a mixture of Irish and Scotch in his diction. "I was on my way to meet them."

"Well, it seems co-incidence determined that you encounter us first, Father," a Lieutenant in a spotless uniform added with flawlessly sharp Oxfordian English as he appeared behind LeFevre, accompanied by two well armed aides, whose hold on their muskets was far more resolute than the hastily-promoted young corporal. "Or maybe it wasn't coincidence?"

"Nothing under God's sky is coincidence, and everything that happens here does so by his Will," LeFevre said, holding yet another lie behind his trademark compliant smile. "Including you coming in to liberate this town of Acadians from the French. As you know, they have been fighting the King of France, on and off, over the last hundred and fifty years. They are grateful for your protection, and I speak for them when I say that they bid you well wherever you have to go next."

"Which is into their village, Father." A Scottish Captain added, as he came in behind the Lieutenant, bringing most of the camp with him.

"Which is our village now, Sir," the Lieutenant continued. "Which we need for strategic purposes."

"Along with a portion of them joining our ranks, as proof of their pledge to stay neutral, my boy" the old Sargent grumbled.

“You'll never convince these Acadians to fight for anybody except themselves,” LeFevre said. “But, maybe if me, as one of their own, can convince some of them to give you...something other than their mother's sons, or their wives' husbands, I could----”

“---It's too late for that now, Father,” The Captain interjected, lamentingly. “We've come to relocate them. They pose a danger to all British soldiers and civilians.”

“As does this Priest who coincidently wandered into our Camp, Sir.” the Sargent said, motioning for his men to take everything from LeFevre, except his collar. The Sargent opened the jug of wine and sampled it. “Though if he tells us where he brewed this special communion wine, maybe I'll convert to being a Papist, and get communion fives times a day,” he continued as he put the jug up to his mouth, about to take a swallow to compliment his sip.

Imbibing of that elixor-spiked wine was halted by a bullet. Delivered from the Captain's pistol, shattering the jar, all of its contents spilling onto the ground. “There will be no drinking of spirits in this Company!” he barked out. “The King expects you to act as gentlemen, and gentlemen do not become intoxicated with the devil's brew. Isn't that right, Father?”

“Yes, it is,” LeFevre said as he put on his clothes, said items returned to him by the Captain motioning to his toothless, grubby handed troops to surrender his wares back to him. “Now, if I may take leave from you to go to my assigned destination, Sir?” LeFevre said.

“Which is where?” the Captain asked.

“If it isn't that village of half-breed Acadians, then the bishop has assigned me to go to a Clositered Nunnery run by Benedictine Monks. Which I was to go to after introducing myself to my new parishioners here, Sir.”

“A Priest assigned to go Nunnery?” The Sargent chuckled. “Sounds like a rooster being assigned by a farmer to go to the hen-house.”

“Or a fox,” the Lieutenant contemplated.

“A fox who, I'm afraid, I'll have to enlist into the service of the King,” the Captain replied. “At the rank of...whatever uniform that will fit him, I suppose,” he continued, pointing to a wagon filled with fresh uniforms.

Before LeFevre could figure out what was going on, he found himself wearing a British Redcoat. He had planned to inactivate the English Company with spiked communal wine he would share with them, enable his French Canadian Comrades to capture them. Then he would disappear into the woods. Then he would retrieve Marie from the Nunnery and bring her, by force or persuasion, to this Acadian town where the War didn't

exist. A Town where the citizens defended themselves from French Army recruiters as well as British Invaders.

LeFevre watched the company of Redcoats slowly encircle, then rapidly invade the village. They seized everything walking or hobbling on two legs into covered wagons, whisking them away as soon as they were on board before any of the villagers could reach for or accurately aim their weapons. No one went quietly or passively, most particularly the women and children who were snatched first. Orders in English were countered by curses in French. Curses which even LeFevre had never heard.

“Where are you taking them, Captain,” LeFevre demanded to know. “As a lieutenant in your army, I do have the right to know what we are doing.”

“Louisiana. Or Georgia. A place where these good hard working misfits don't have to ever deal with winter,” he smiled. “As for them coming back to their homes and with supervision taking permitted items with them, perhaps you could intercede on our behalf, as translator, since there is a lot of French in your English. And as you are the representative of God, they will see the Lord's sense in leaving Nova Scotia to those who can make something of it.”

“New Scotland?” LaFevre commented. “Put a Latin twist on the name, and it feels like a noble venture rather than greedy theft,” he continued, between his ears. He put his brain to work trying to figure out why God had laid yet another set of challenges his way. Maybe those challenges were opportunities, as he so often re-labeled hardships when being presented with them at the confessional. But opportunities which would require his escape from the British Army, as well as his own past as one of the key people who started the war that brought them to the shores of New France in the first place.

## CHAPTER 12

Mother Superior Henry didn't start out life as an ugly, triple-chinned, hook-nosed old hag who was only listened to when she pushed her weight around, or threatened anyone who stood against her with eternal damnation. She was born as the most beautiful of five sisters to a Filles du le roi in Quebec City. She grew into a stunning young woman who was beloved by all for her charm, wit and angelic features. Every man in Quebec City begged for the chance to father her baby. Unfortunately, the man who did father her child was her biological father. Fortunately, he died of dysentery before she could sneak a knife into his back in retribution for pushing his sperm ejector into her vagina. Unfortunately, she considered every man who wanted to protect her as another 'Papa' with a hungry penis. Fortunately, the her father's child died in a miscarriage four months into the pregnancy, a month before a soul could enter fetus.

Unfortunately, the exit of the demon seed from her womb poisoned the soil for any more flowering children to be conceived. Or, maybe that was fortunate.

Such is what went through Mother Superior Henry's mind when the newest round of 'temporary residents' to her Nunnery sat down for their first meal. Generous portions of what they thought was peasant food which Sister Henry gently explained were necessary for the children to come out of their wombs in the next few months. Explanations which would have to be turned into orders with two out of the three of them, by the way those two actively did not look at their bellies. One of them would undoubtedly ask for that 'special cocktail' which would abort them, but the barren-wombed Mother Superior who took her father's Christian name as her own, out of spite, was determined to allow these women to have the opportunity to father a child with the right man, somehow. Even though Sister Henry had never set eyes on a 'right man' for anyone since she shed her corsettes and lace and adopted the habit and cross.

One of those 'right men', according to one of the temporary residents who wanted to eat her 'peasant gruel' without Sister Henry's ranting, rang the doorbell to the Nunnery. Sister Henry walked to the only window in the dining hall and opened it, sizing up the man three stories below. Below his wide-brimmed brown hat he wore a large sac over his shoulders which jingled as he paced up and down, waiting for a reply at the windowless, triple re-enforced oak door.

“Should I see who it is?” asked Sister Bridget, a Nun not much older than the three new ladies at the dining room. “I have stronger legs than you do, Sister.”

“But I'm a better shot,” Sister Henry replied, reaching for the double barrel pistol she had strapped to her leg under her black robes. “I can smell trouble with this one,” she replied, noting that the visitor's breaches were stained with blood, and both of his hips were bulging out with something he clearly wanted to conceal before allowed entry into the Nunnery.

The Mother Superior with the steady trigger finger and arthritic knees descended the stairs to the main entrance slowly, yelling out angrily delivered commands for the visitor to wait. Though the words she used were those permitted in mixed, religious company, her tone was as threatening as any foul mouthed French sailor on the docks in Montreal. And twice as scary the English Sea Captains who made it their duty, then sport, to seize French booty for their pockets and live bodies as indentured sailors if they were unlucky in their attempts to run the British blockade.

After cursing the devil for making her knees so painful, and thanking God for allowing her to still use them, Sister Henry finally reached the ground floor. She opened a small porthole in the wood and looked at the man's face. It was as she suspected...trouble. And of course, responsibility. But there was something she wanted to say to this frequent visitor for a long time.

“Princess Marie is gone, Monsiuer Rollo. And I don't know where she is. And if you brought that money to pay me to tell you where she might be, you can insert it up your anal cavity,” she blasted out.

“Is Marie dead, or alive?” the man in the hat with three bullet holes and breaches stained with blood asked with desperation in his eyes.

“Alive, by the Grace of God,” Sister Henry replied, eyes facing downward.

“Then that means you know where she is!” the reply from Rollo, the business end of his pistol pointed at Sister Henry's head. “Or you know where you think she is. Which I need to know.”

“Why?” she challenged.

“A dangerous madman's sanity is at stake,” he growled.

“Yours, General Pierre Noir, Captain-Father Lefevre, or Major Barriere?” she countered, growing cooler and calmer with each angry breath fired out by the visitor. “Or any of the other gentlemen in your circle who give Marie all the creature comforts, books and musical toys you think she needs here, but never the satisfaction of having a conversation with her face to face. Which of course would require you telling her the truth about what she really means to you.”

“Listen! Money has been brought here for to buy Marie whatever she wanted. And I have more of it with me!” Rollo growled at Sister Henry. “Money which I am sure you have used to get what you think YOU want!”

“Only for what we needed,” Sister Henry calmly replied. “To keep this Nunnery safe from thieves, British bounty hunters, French deserters, and men like you.”

“Who, yes, is not afraid of the wrath of God if I shoot a Nun in the knee, or eye, till she tells me what I need to know!” he continued. He pulled out another pistol, demonstrating his ability to use up to four shots to convince Sister Henry to reveal where she deposited the most annoying and dangerous guest ever to be sheltered at her Convent. “Tell me where Marie is! Now! Or I'll---”

Rollo's four unreleased shots were countered by eight musket barrels aimed from above by as many Nuns. Along with five bows loaded up with Ottawa, Huron and Iroquois War feathers.

“Like I said, we spent some of Princess Marie's expense account money you and your minions brought to us on what we needed to protect her from you, and protect others from 'men' like you,” Sister Henry replied with a wide smile. “Now, if you excuse me, it's time for afternoon prayers. During which I will pray for your safe passage to wherever you are going. And that you will be spared the wrath of the Bishop when he finds out that you drew a pistol on a bride of Christ.”

“Bride of the devil,” Rollo growled back. He put away his pistols, then backed away from the wall of soldier Nuns who seemed to have no problem sending him to whatever awaited him after soul leaves arrow and bullet-infused body.

As Rollo rode away, Sister Henry self-observed herself on the edge of the abyss, the safe side this time. She thanked God for delivery from death, as well as delivery from Marie. And all of the chess-masters who seemed to need her as a pawn, each in their own game. She had only one regret regarding it all. That she didn't take Rollo's gold to buy more guns, bows and buckshot.

## CHAPTER 13

As LeFevre saw the War now, it was a losing proposition. Outnumbered and outgunned, the French would soon be either decimated or encouraged to go elsewhere by the British. Ironically, such was the same fate which the French had inflicted on the Indians in New France. Some of them anyway. Enough of them to convince LeFevre that the best way to preserve whatever was still French in New France was to work with the British to minimize harm.

As such, LeFevre consented to translate British orders to the Acadians, often telling the very homegrown French-speaking isolationists what they wanted to hear so that they would not mount futile and self-destructive assaults against the Redcoats. And given that fact that there was as much Indian blood as White in the Acadian's veins, the orderly evacuation of 15,000 Acadians from 'Nova Scotia', as it was to be called now, could easily turn out to be a suicidal massacre.

The stories about Louisiana being a paradise where there is no winter and the grass grows green year round were necessary. The Acadians of course would find out that those snowless paradises were misquito infested swamps when they got there. But at least they would be alive. Not caught up in the War that had spread everywhere in New France as well as New England, New York, Pennsylvania and as far West as the Mississippi.

As the fourth boat that morning left for the 'Promised Land' at the mouth of that mighty river, Lefevre's thoughts came once again to one passenger who had to be on it. One who he would escort there himself. To a place where he and Marie could both start a new life, unburdened by their pasts.

“Captain, I need leave to go to the Cloister at Saint Michel de Blanc,” LeFevre asked the Scottish Officer who so generously gave him a commission in the British Army rather than a set of shackles in a prisoner of war camp. “To retrieve someone very special there who would be a great asset to this relocation process,” he continued as the Captain checked over his manifest at the dock.

“The Cloister where?” the Army Captain inquired, looking at four lines of refugees awaiting permission of the Naval Captains to load them on their boats. “I have not heard of such a place.”

“Saint Michel de Blanc,” LeFevre replied.

“Otherwise known as Fort Sister Henry,” LeFevre heard from behind him from a Metis woman with short black hair in the line of passengers bound for Louisiana. “A dumping ground for women who men are embarrassed by, run by a battleaxe incarnation of the devil who dismisses anyone in the Order who wants to bring any joy of life into her castle.”

“Dismissing them to go back home to their kin, here, Sister...” the Captain said, surmising that the woman had endured more than a fortnight at the institution she was describing so fervently.

“After Mother Superior Henry dumps them off on the streets of Montreal, telling them to guard precious supplies with their lives, then getting out of town, leaving them to fend for themselves,” the half-breed ex-Nun on her way back to connecting to her Pagan roots continued.. “Me, she left with nothing. Others, such as Princess Marie, she left with her books, her Parisian finery, a violin, and a piano which---”

“---Marie! You know where Marie is?” LeFevre interjected, pulling the woman out of the line. “Take me to her!”

“I'd love to, but the Captain here has his orders to take me and what's left of my Acadian half-bred family to a Paradise far far away where we would be spared the hardships of winter so the British Redcoats can bring over their wives to sleep in our cabins, and their whores to fuck them in our longhouses,” she sneered at the Army Officer. “Or in your case, maybe your male school-chum from the Highlands and a Welsh cabin boy who you caught stowed away on your---”

“---You hold your tongue or I'll be tearing it out of your throat!” The Scottish Captain growled with one hand grabbing the woman's three inch 'mane' with one hand, the handle of his riding crop with the other.

“So, me thinks the bugger protests too much?” the half Huron half White ex-Nun smiled at the red-faced, smooth shaved, immaculately dressed Scottish Captain.

“Captain, please. She doesn't know what she is saying,” LeFevre said as he put his outstretched hand on his shoulder, calming him down. “Do you?” he directed to the woman.

“I suppose I don't,” the woman smiled.

The Captain pushed her into another line. "This one goes to Georgia!" he barked as she was taken away. Her brothers, sisters and parents were pushed forward into the boat bound for the Gulf of Mexico. "And as for you!" the Captain barked out at LeFevre.

The Captain found himself throwing his most assertive Scottish curses to empty air. His mind armed with the greatest sense of urgency, LeFevre somehow found a way to avoid the Captain's stare, as well as the bayonettes of every British soldier at the port. Several quick darts between the flood of refugees and their meager belongings later, LeFevre found himself at the village Church which was now being used as a livery stable. With horse stealing skills learned from his Pagan Huron stepfather, LeFevre stole what looked like the fastest horse in the lot, creating a stampede with the others. But he didn't leave his brief commission in the British Army without souvenirs. One bullet tore through the muscles of his left arm, another found a home in his right leg. Both were accompanied by vows from the Captain that he would be hunted down and hung as a deserter if he didn't turn around and come back to his post.

## CHAPTER 14

Noir's Rangers were becoming a bigger source of fear for British soldiers than wild Indians, to-the-Manor-born English officers, or the 'new and improved' brands of venereal disease passed on by loose women who reminded them of their sweethearts or mothers back home. A Redcoat corporal who was the sole survivor of the most recent Noir raid on a small outpost which was too small and remote to be mentioned in the history books gave voice of something even more feared to his buckskin-clad French Canadian captors. "Si vous plait, Monsiuer Noir, if you and your wolves are going to eat me, please kill me first," the young Irish conscript pleaded with his hands tied behind a tree in on a windblown summit of a hill which flatlanders would call a mountain, his breaches wet with fresh urine and now feces. "Do not let me die like the others."

"The others, who kidnapped, raped, scalped and tortured OUR woman?" Rollo commented with a vicious smile as he strolled up beside Pierre, a blood covered buffalo knife in his hand.

"Your woman? ONE woman?" the Irishmen in the English uniform replied, having intuited something that he was not supposed to. "Is that what this is all about, Monsieur Noir?" he said, looking into the anger-possessed eyes of the man who commanded the unit rather than the underling who spoke for him. "For God's sake, Troy was destroyed because it valued the life of one woman more than the lives of thousands of men, women and children who inhabited that once fair city, which---"

"---Enough history lessons!" Rollo growled, ending the scholarly discourse by pistol-whipping the soldier across the jaw.

Noir stared into the space in air in front of him, absorbing himself in matters of strategy. Strategy he shared with his men on a need to know basis. And as Noir felt it now, the

only 'need' his band of nineteen Rangers was required to know was that they would be joining their dead comrades if they continued to devise their own strategies for surviving. Particularly that Noir and his Rangers were outnumbered five to one in most of the skirmishes with the British Army now. British who were becoming better armed every day.

“All of this ain't right,” the Irish Corporal said after spitting out another ball of blood, and two more teeth. “French Catholics killing Irish Catholics like myself, who was brought to this country in this uniform by force, don't ya know!”

“Serving an English Protestant King, who wants to force us out of OUR land!” Prince Rollo barked back in defense of King Pierre. “Land that we explored. We cultivated. We cleared. We farmed. We built houses on for our Catholic children. We turned into a place where Red Man and White can live in peace. We converted from a wilderness where Nature rules everyone to a place where every man can rule himself...”

With one ear, Pierre Noir heard Rollo proclaim the ideals of French Liberty and French Canadian Self-Rule. Ideals that he once believed in, and needed to believe in again. With the other ear, he heard two of his Rangers get on their horses and ride down the hill.

“Come back here!” Rollo yelled out at the pair, pointing his double barrel pistol at them. “No one deserts this cause! The penalty for desertion is---”

“---Survival,” Noir interjected, lowering the barrel of Rollo's pistol with his hand. “And dishonor! Charles. Paul.” the once-beloved and now tolerated Revolutionary leader yelled at the two men, anger in his voice, tears of grief about to flow down from his eyes.

One of the two men who had been Pierre's first Comrades in his social experiment of carving a Freedom and Enlightenment Empire out of a wilderness legally owned by a Monarch gave Pierre a fond farewell with his hand. The other gave him the finger. Both showed him nothing but their backs as they disappeared from Pierre's view, and his life.

“Does anyone else want to leave? You can do so now!” Pierre blasted out to the remaining me.

The men looked at each other, then into themselves. The silent discourse about ideals and dialogues about what the battle-weary Rangers had gone through resulted in eight more men leaving, each one of them badly wounded in body or spirit.

“Our families, Pierre. I hope you understand,” the self-elected leader of the group said en route. A group in which only four had families. Families that Pierre knew about anyway.

“You don't shoot deserters?” the Irish conscript in the English Uniform said to a mournful and still vengeance-possessed Pierre. “I wish I knew that. Maybe I woulda

joined yer Army instead of lettin meself get enlisted into the English Army after I landed in---.”

“----We want one thing from you! And one thing only! The same thing we want from them!” Rollo barked back at the Irishman as he pointed to three other British soldiers. Officers propped up to look like they were still alive. Sitting on chairs around a table on the adjacent outlook. “You are nothing but bait!” he yelled into the still alive Irish conscript.

“Bait for big fish who will pay for what they did to our woman! And to us!” Pierre added as his keen sense of hearing picked up on something approaching up the hill from the thickets to the North, the South, the East, then the West. Pierre counted the men who were still with him, then motioned them to duck down behind whatever cover they could find. He then saw spots of Red sneaking in from the woods turn into waves of Redcoats. They were armed with two small cannons as well as the common sense to fight from behind trees rather than on the open field.

“It's not too late to call this off, Monsieur Noir,” the Irish conscript offered. “Let me go, and I'll and put in a good word for you. And maybe I forgot to tell you, that I'm engaged to the Major's daughter. In exchange for saving the life of his new son in law, I'm sure he'll not only give you fair quarter, but maybe even parole you to Old France, so ya can start a Real Revolution where it Matters. Hey,even on the Emerald Isle! Catholics fighting for their freedom from Protestant and their King, Queens, and---”

The Irish soldier's blarney bullcrap was halted by a bullet that landed into his head. From a source that Pierre Noir could not identify. The only thing that the Philosopher-King-Comrade Pierre knew now was that the British Army wanted him and his men dead. And the time had come when no British Commanders would bargain with him so that the lives of Irish Conscripts or even blue-blood English officers would be saved.

Noir looked at those officers, their dead bodies seated on chairs around a table. Officers who maybe he had tortured and killed as payback for the Crown of England doing the same to his 'beloved' Marie. A woman he loved, in his own way, determined to kill any man, God or man of God who said that what he did for, and to Marie was wrong, or unjustified.

## CHAPTER 15

There were three things about the New World that Marie did not know when she decided to build a life there. The first was how cold the winters were, and how long the snow lingered on the ground. The second was how hot the summers were, and how long the sun lingered in the sky. The third was that the hotter the summer, the stronger the stench of infections, made worse with the help of three times as many flying and crawling insects which bigger the further North you went.

The medical expressions of summer permeated Marie's nostrils during her sleeping as well as waking hours at the Hotel of God, as named by its operator, manager and dedicated mother, Sister Marie-Joseph Legarduer de Repentigny, who never allowed anyone at the hospital to call her Mother Superior, especially the patients. Those patients came in wearing French Blue Coats, British Red Coats, fringe buckskin coats or sometimes no coats at all. For purposes of maintaining good relations between Church and State, the Bishop strongly requested that wounded French officers be given top priority, followed by those of French soldiers, then everybody else according to the current circumstances at hand. Sister Marie-Joseph, who knew the importance of hygiene far more than any of the doctors she had to 'assist', found a way to treat each according their needs, irrespective of rank, political affiliation or even race. All of them had equal access to at least one medicine that Sister Marie-Joseph insisted be administered to patients, nurses and doctors alike.

Marie felt that it was not appropriate to be playing the piano while soldiers and civilians afflicted with wounds or diseases lay in their hospital beds, or on stretchers awaiting the next available doctor, or Nun-turned doctor. Indeed, Marie had as much talent for treating wounds and alleviating diseases than any Nun in the hospital and most of the doctors. But, Sister Marie-Joseph insisted that the formulation of music from Maestros Bach, Clementi and Handel was just as important as the formularies in the latest editions of *Journale Medicin du Paris* and *Proceedings of the Royal British Surgical Society*. And those musical formulas were given special effectiveness in the hands of Doctor Marie. So Marie was told by Sister Marie-Joseph after the Mother Superior heard, then felt, the Passion and Genius in her fingers. And so Marie allowed herself to believe on this business as usual Wednesday afternoon during which there were four business as usual skirmishes outside the walls of Montreal, the city still under French control, as long as the inhabitants could hold up against the British Naval blockade on the high seas.

Still cloaked in the white, blood-stained Augustine Nun garb on the three and a half-legged piano bench, Marie focused her eyes on the an obscure composition by Bach to infuse joy and hope into the air, as the odor of burnt skin, rotten intestines, gangrenous wounds, and fresh blood filled her nostrils. Her piano was situated at the intersection of four rooms in the Hotel of God, the acoustics affording her to be heard by everyone on the main floor as well as two floors up. Through the windows, open at Sister Marie-Joseph to allow for healthy air for her patients, she could be heard by passers by on the cobblestone streets. Marie tried to listen to the notes, and the intentions of Johan Sebastian Bach with regard to the improvisations of tone, tempo and variations on the theme which was now possible on a piano, Old Johan having been shackled by having to compose for the harpsicord, an instrument which didn't allow for any note to be extended in length nor volume relative to the others. Marie found herself feeling what the recently-departed, soon to be forgotten composer wanted to say with this new instrument, the piano. She found herself hearing him chat, discourse and laugh with her in ways more intimate than ever possible with any man from the Old world, nor from the New one, including Jean LeFevre or Pierre Noir.

But there were things from the world of the 'mentally sensible' that (as she was still known as by all concerned at the Hotel of God, anyway) Sister Jean-Pierre, could also hear a man screaming as her leg was being sawed off. A woman crying over the death of her son. An old woman who blasted out very legitimate accusations at God with a death rattle in her voice, followed by begging the Almighty for forgiveness. And the ghosts of the departed spirits of patients who still chose to linger in the hospital rather than go on to their final resting place. In comprehensible mutterings which Sister Marie-Joseph warned all of her Nuns, and doctors, to not try to figure out, as they would be pulled into a state of Purgatory too. Or at the very least, a condition of madness which would require being placed in the asylum for the insane. So many who had survived wounds of the body had joined the walking dead in that cloistered building where even the Priests were afraid to enter. But there was something else that Marie heard from the operating room in the North corner of God's Hotel which she could not ignore.

“Sister Monique, unless I proceed with blood letting to remove the excess sanguenous fluid, the patient will die from fluid humoral congestion,” Doctor Vert admonished in a tone as crude as a bear, and as pretentious as a Duke.

“But....the patient is already very pale,” the petite Nun who did the work of three men and five muscular women on even her slowest days replied.

“And we have to make him paler before we have a chance of bringing real color to his cheeks,” the physician with more letters in the titles surrounding his name than in his name itself continued in even more pretentiously-delivered Parisian French. “Now, hand me that knife.”

“So you can weaken another patient even more and then blame Nature or God for him dying on your operating table!” Maria grunted to herself within clenched teeth from the next room while seated at the piano bench. “Not again!”

Marie bid a quick but heartfelt farewell to the Spirit of Johan Sebastian Bach, then the piano, and proceeded at the fastest walk possible to the operating room. Past two French citizen-soldiers who were concerned if she was alright, who thanks to her surgical skills and force of will when arguing with doctors, still had two intact legs each. And an English Lieutenant with broken ribs and thankfully one still functioning eye who she had converted from a fan of London-smash composer George Fredrick Handel to a devotee of Bach, an obscure German musician who never left home and was about to be forgotten by history.

“Professor Doctor Marquie du Vert! Did the most recent article in Das Manual von die Artz Gelleschaft von Berlin not suggest that circulatory shock due to hypovolemia and blood letting is a far greater risk during surgery than congestive humoral syndrome?” Marie stated, in even crisper Parisian French to the doctor whose boasts about being the most valued physician in Bordeaux was never evident when treating patients in the 'outback trading post' of Montreal.

“Congestive humoral syndrome does exist, Sister Pierre-Jean,” Vert blasted out through gritted teeth, as he wiped the blood from the last patient off a sharpened rod to be inserted into his present one.

“I’m sure it does, but not in this patient, who...” Marie’s words got stuck in her mouth. She grabbed the sharpened rod from Doctor Vert’s hands, then looked again the face of the patient who now would have a fighting chance of being saved from the grave. Or a visit to the carpentry shop down the street where wooden arms and legs were being manufactured at record rates. Her stare got caught into his eyes, those eyes caught between the world of the living and the dead, or as she was supposed to tell everyone after receiving last rights confessions, ‘heaven bound’.

“You know him?” Sister Monique asked Marie, speaking from her always open heart.

“Or someone who knows you, perhaps?” Vert inquired from a less caring and dark place.

“Someone who I always talked to, who seemed to listen more than he talked,” Marie muttered, but didn’t give voice to regarding the man whose clothes seemed like they were something he stole rather than owned, as his coat didn’t match his breeches, everything on him either too big or too small. “Someone who maybe understood my soul, or wanted to protect it. And did, well beyond the call of duty or personal responsibility, to the extent that he could.”

“And the name of this man who was found outside of the city walls, out of any kind of uniform?” Vert insisted on knowing.

“Rollo,” Marie replied, self-observing herself recalling how Pierre Noir’s best friend saved her from starving and freezing during her first winter in New France. And how he made her feel less alone when husband Pierre was out on business with the fur traders, the smugglers, and other anti-Monarch Free French Revolutionaries. And when her ‘Platonic lover’ Father LeFevre was out doing business with the Bishop, the poor, and the Indians.

“Yes, Rollo,” she continued, eyes seeing yet again the day when he, the only one of her bodyguards who didn’t drink, put his life on the line to save her from being captured by the British Army, and their new ‘recruit’, Father LeFevre. “Rollo,” she fondly recalled regarding the man who told her tales about the beatings Pierre Noir inflicted on her body when she was in a drugged sleep, and sadistically dreamed about doing to her when she was awake. “Rollo,” she repeated, stroking the pale face of the man who God delivered to her though means she was too thankful to question.

“Rollo what?” Doctor Vert inquired.

“Rollo the man who I will bring back to life!” Marie blasted at Doctor Vert. “With Sister Monique’s help and NO one else’s!”

“This is against the rules of the hospital when a doctor is on staff, and available,” Vert spat back. “Particularly a doctor such as myself who volunteered to be seven days a week and most nights!”

“So that your wife could be spared your company in bed, and you could enjoy the company of Sisters in White and, so I have heard and seen, Brothers in Arms?” Marie smiled at Vert.

Some of the those accusations were true. But by the way Vert left the room and hid his eyes from the likeness of Christ on the cross posted on the wall in front of him, all of them were certainly true. As the door closed, leaving her alone with Sister Monique and Rollo, Marie looked up at the tortured likeness of a man who she knew looked nothing like Jesus actually did and thanked him. She then asked the God with whom her relationship was even more complex than any man for help in bringing Rollo back to the land of the living. Then she relied on more earthbound interventions.

Marie released the tourniquits around his arm and leg, feeling the pulses in those extremities. She instructed Sister Monique to take over that job while she placed her ear against Rollo's chest to listen to his heart and lungs. “They need some help,” she said. “Four pinches of elixir B3, under his tongue, please,” she continued.

Four death rattles after application of the elixir formulated with a combination of French science, Indian herbology and Augustine prayer, Marie could hear regular breathing. Then, after Sister Monique said five hail Mary's in thanks for such, Rollo started to mutter groans of awareness. Then, actual words. Something which Marie was thankful for, until they started to become formed into sentences.

“Ah Marie, sweet Marie!” Rollo muttered. “Is that you?”

“Yes, it is me, here to protect YOU, from...” Marie found herself saying, then unable to finish.

“...from the the Grim Reaper? The Devil? Or the Abyss of the Brave?” he said, followed by a laugh. “Ah Marie, Marie. Who I had stolen from Comrade Revolutionary Pierre. And kept from Father Jean. And put you in a Cloister which I went back to and MADE them tell me where you were. Sent three of those Sisters of Mercy to graves before one of them talked. And talked. Because I will have for myself, my sweet, vulnerable and petite Marie. Just me. To make you mine. You are mine, and will be mine. Or NO one will have you,” he said. His eyes opened, then color came to his cheeks. An angry red hue as he lifted himself up off the table, then with his bad hand grabbed hold of a dissection knife, and with his unwounded one grabbed her by the collar. “No one will have you besides me! Me, who” he screamed with a voice possessed by the devil him, or itself. “Me! Not your 'loving' bastard husband Pierre who bought you as a toy who complimented you on your beauty but never your mind. Not the way I did, or wanted to anyway.”

Marie ran all of the conversations between herself and Pierre through her head. Indeed, Rollo was more right than wrong. Pierre, insecure within his own skin, needed someone to tell him he was a brilliant revolutionary, and seldom complimented Marie on her revolutionary ideas about politics, music or life. Just as the images of the past became even more imprinted on Marie's mind, she found herself looking at her own legs, arms and then face in the mirror, all of which were bruised on more than a few mornings after making love to Pierre the evening before. After which he insisted on ending the mutually-shared expression of carnal bliss with a sip of wine which put Marie into a deep slumber. A sip that she turned into several gulps after she retired afterwards to her own room, with a full glass of wine waiting for her on her night table next to a rose. Just as Marie finally figured out the reasons why nights were so joyful and mornings were so painful with regard to matters of the flesh, the reasons for such were spoken to her by the demon possessed man holding a knife to her throat.

“Yes, it was me who gave you that wine containing special ingredients so you could get to sleep. And the rose,” Rollo explained, easing the hold on her collar, laying aside the knife. And it was me who bruised your slumbering body so that everyone would think it was him who hit you as an expression of his 'love' because it IS! He was constantly hitting you on the inside, and I had to show you that on the outside! And show everyone else!”

“No one except ME will have you!” he screamed into Marie's terrified eyes, grabbing hold of her collar, then taking sharp knife into his energy infused shaking fist. “Your protector. Who was the one who gave you those bruises in your sleep that I had to blame on Pierre Noir I WILL take you from this place and...”

Before Rollo could pledge the paradise location brewing in his head, that head was made unconscious by a slug on the jaw, delivered by Sister Monique. “I was the sister of an Irish barmaid before I became a Sister of the French Augustines,” she said by way of explanation as her hand felt the pain of the first blow she had delivered into human flesh in a long, long time, by the look in her self-astonished face. Then she looked into the face that she had punched out. “I knocked the wind and maybe the life out of him, permanently. What are you going to do with him?”

“The question is, what are YOU going to do with him,” Marie said as she whipped off the habit from her head, then the cross from her neck, handing it to Sister Monique. “If he wakes up, stick this through his heart. If you can find one in him.”

“But...you, Sister Jean Pierre?”

“Marie, just Marie now,” Marie said. “A soul without any heart. With a past in Old France who has been used as a pawn in New France. Who is leaving everyone's game,” she continued as she pulled off five jars of elixors from the shelves.”

“You aren't going to do any harm to yourself, are you Sister Jean Pierre, I mean, Marie?” Sister Monique inquired. “Please don't do anything to yourself?”

“Why not?” Marie replied. “It will spoil everyone else's fun.”

“Because the bastards will have won,” Sister Monique replied, in Irish-accented English, as the girl who no doubt had many proposals from men serving the devil before she became a Bride of Christ. “Including Rollo.”

“Who you could give some of this to ease his delivery into the next world,” Marie said. “Without confessing what he did in this one first!” she continued as she removed her Augustine attire. “And let's force Rollo to face his Creator naked,” she said as she stripped off his clothing, and put it on.

“Where will you go, Marie?” Sister Monique asked.

“Migua had some Mohawk friends he talked about, five days North of here.”

“Or one days ride,” the reply, appended by a sac of coins Sister Monique pulled out of her robes. “Take this to the livry stable on Rue du Michel and give it to the owner, not the manager. For a one franc he lets me ride any horse in the stable while the owner is doing business in town. For twenty he says he'll tell the owner the horse bolted and ran away. My favorite is the bay with three white socks and a blaze that looks like the Star of David.”

“Doctor Vert's horse,” Marie noted.

“Which I on more than one day enduring men like him here, was going to use to ride away from this 'life' to endure lie elsewhere,” Sister Monique replied.

“To endure with me, if you ever want to,” Marie said, pushing the lioness' share of the coins back into Sister Monique's pocket, then conveying the sincerity of that promise with a hug. One that had more love in it going both ways than any caress or embrace Marie had experienced with any man. Or mother. A special kind of love that Marie felt liberated by somehow.

The moment of discovery between Marie and Monique was ended quickly by a knock on the door, then pounding. “Sisters, I demand entry!” Doctor Vert screamed out.

“And I request it,” Sister Marie-Joseph added, as a Mother Superior.

After another caress, and a kiss on the lips, Marie slithered out the window, leaving behind left her life as an Augustine Nun, and a pawn in men's chess games. As she left, Sister Marie-Joseph entered. Doctor Vert quickly took charge of the patient he was denied access to, requesting a Novice walking by outside to assist him in draining him of blood before proceeding any further.

“Where is Sister Jean Pierre, Sister Monique?” the Mother Superior requested of the startled in more than one ways petite Nun.

“She went somewhere North, and she is long gone, I do not know where she is,” Monique replied, with quivering lips but steady eyes.

“I do hope that Marie comes back,” the Mother Superior said as she looked out the window. Addressing Monique's newest reason to live by the name of Marie. “She has someone who has come a long way to see her,” she continued. “Who you think is here because of why Monsieur LeFevre?” she asked the man clad in Acadian buckskins.

“These,” the armed to the teeth wilderness trapper replied, pointing to his ears. “That heard the music from the piano...and violin. And recognized the player,” he continued as he looked around the room, then out the window.

“There are others who play violin and piano in Montreal, Monsieur LeFevre,” Sister Marie Joseph said.

“Not one who plays Handel like a lion, Clementi like a lady, and Bach like someone whose beauty and wisdom is beyond both genders,” the trapper whose belt of scalps, and torso overloaded with firearms didn't match his eyes, or voice, replied. “Which I heard as I was passing by these streets. Using these scalps and guns to scare off anyone who may confuse me for what and who I am,” he confessed. “The most powerful weapon we have is the muscle between our ears,” he said. “And the kindest as well,” he continued.

“So, you are the one who Marie has been dreaming about,” Monique replied with a smile regarding the woman who had slept next to her so many nights, but never with her.

“Yes,” the trapper with the scholar-priest eyes replied. “I am honored, and thankful my dreams of being with Marie is reciprocated by Marie has been seeing me in her dreams too,”

“And in her nightmares, when she wakes up screaming,” Monique added, her angelic smile turned into a porthole of a fire-spitting dragon.

The guilt-ridden trapper retrieved a stack of letters from his satchel, giving half of them to Mother Superior Marie Joseph, and half to Sister Monique. “If either of you see her, please give her these,” he said with head bowed “She can answer them if she wishes. But I will understand if she doesn't.”

“And where can she find you, Father?” Monique asked.

“I never said I was a Priest,” LeFevre commented, to the Mother Superior, who seemed to not be surprised by the identification, and accusation. “How did you know?”

“Just because I wear this Angel suit, that doesn't mean I don't have ears that hear what happens on earth, especially during times of War when people confess much at the time of dying, or in those rare instances when we can save them from that fate,” the Mother Superior replied. “Which I am sure you know very well, Captain LeFevre,” she continued with a reassuring smile.

“Such makes logical sense,” the found out Priest replied to the Mother Superior. “But how did this young Nun find me out?”

The old Mother Superior looked at the Young Nun. The old before his time Priest was thankfully able to feel the emotions and accusations going between them but unable to understand the unspoken words. Finally, after several moments that felt like hours, the Mother Superior smiled at the Young Nun with kind and envious approval. “Her eyes have been opened to much today,” the Mother Superior noted, with smiling lips and worried eyes.

“Like that she should listen to me when I say that this patient needs to be drained of blood so I can have any chance of saving his life?” Professor Doctor Marquis de Vert pronounced as he began to drain the blood from Rollo. “We need to make him paler before we can make him better, is that not true?” he barked at the Priest, Mother Superior and Nun.

Each looked at each other, and came up with the same conclusion, but different routes. “Yes, you are the doctor, you know what is best,” LeFevre said, having been elected to voice the lie which would allow the good doctor to deliver the Rollo to the afterlife, giving Marie a chance to have shot at living her own life in peace, and, God willing, happiness.

“So get out of her and fetch me a saw, so I can take this man's leg and arm, IF the congestion in his blood hasn't gone beyond what anyone can do!” With that, the Mother Superior led the Priest and the young Nun to let Doctor Vert, otherwise known as 'Doctor Death' be used as the Good Lord's instrument to eliminate or otherwise inactivate evil from the realm of living.

## CHAPTER 16

Indeed, Jean LeFevre had worn many hats since the War began. A war he helped start, in his own way. Circumstance had cast him as a hero and a turncoat to the Church, the French, and the British. Such was the case with Marie as well, who was still alive, somewhere. A fact that he intuited every time he was lied to by Mother Superior Marie-Joseph, and confirmed whenever he played mind games with Sister Monique, a naive soul who was new to the art and science of effective lying. Realizing that he had done more harm to Marie than he could ever make up for, Jean wanted out of 'life'. But there was no Monastic Order that would take him and no theology he could believe in

anymore. He had become too White to ever live with the Indians again. And his believe in God was at this point more theoretical than felt. Still, LeFevre did believe in humanity.

LeFerve thought about spending some time at and around the hospital doing what he could, under an assumed name, and sometimes an assumed gender (given the ability of a habit to hide a face), hiding from the French authorities and the English bounty hunters. It would be a matter of time till wrath would be brought upon Sister Marie-Joseph's experiment in human kindness and innovative medicine for what LeFevre had done, or miscalculated. But before he wandered off into the woods to bury himself in a cabin somewhere or at the bottom of a deep abyss after a heroic fall, there was one thing LeFevre had to do.

According to the accounts of wounded French patriots, British prisoners of War, and civilians caught in between, Noir's Rangers had been killed or captured. But Noir himself was still on the warpath, killing British officers and scalping their mistresses, wives, or daughters, having not yet extracted revenge for Marie being abducted and killed. Clearly, the only way the elusive, un-killable and demonically-protected Noir could be stopped was if he stopped himself. If Noir was told that Marie was alive, and he believed it. And maybe if he was reunited with her. So he could love her in way that really was kind, despite the lies that his trusted friend Rollo had initiated. Initiated so that Rollo could possess the woman who Noir perhaps really did love. And LeFevre thought that maybe one day he could again.

The most reliable clue as to Marie's whereabouts came from Sister Monique, who told LeFevre one on occasion that she was five days hard walk to the South, then to the West, then to the East. And that she had some non-Indian cousins there. Obviously, that meant Marie had buggered off one day's fast ride North, to Red-skinned hosts. The only Indian Marie knew, and on most days trusted, was Migua. Migua's family would take care of Marie for a little while. They were music lovers. It was rumored that they even had a fiddle or two among their collections of flutes and drums. And they knew that as long as they pretended to like Marie's music and more than occasional lecturing regarding that it is more important know what to read than what to say, she wouldn't do anything stupid like try to build her own village in the middle of a war-torn or Nature-challenging wilderness.

As for finding the whereabouts of Pierre Noir, that was easier. Though not for the unfortunate British soldier who informed LeFevre of such, from behind a blood-soaked band wrapped around one bad eye and another that could only see shadows from his hospital bed at 'God's Hotel'. "None of us saw him coming! We were camped out on the West shore of Lake Champlain, a day's march from Albany, eating a deer we had shot after a wolf took most of the rest of it. The wolf watched us put the deer out of its misery, then the leader of the wolf pack, a demon on two legs ran into our Camp and..."

The soldier's words got stuck in his mouth. He reached up his hand to the sky. "Mother, forgive me! I tried to save my brother, who you said was too young to enlist in the

militia. And the others. But I failed! He's with you now, right?" he asked. "Right?" he pleaded. "Right?"

"Right," LeFevre said as he took the soldier's hand.

"Are you sure, Pastor Jones?" the soldier asked. "As a man of the cloth, you aren't supposed to lie. Right?"

"Your mother and brother are both at peace now," LeFevre assured the grief-stricken Sargent in English, in the most convincing Scottish accent he could muster. "And if you are thinking of joining them, don't. Though I understand if you want to. You'll see them soon enough."

"Pastor Jones! How did these French animals capture you?" the soldier asked LeFevre, looking towards where he thought the "Pastor's" kind face was. "Don't these French and the Indians who sides with them know that this War is lost? And that it gives us no pleasure to starve them out with the blockade that will eventually make them surrender?"

"The French are a tenacious and self-destructive race, as are their Indian allies, don't ya know," LeFevre said, patting the soldier's hand. "But we Brits are even more tenacious."

"So that means that if I will it hard enough, I'll be able to see again, like I used to?"

"Aye, lad. Aye," LeFevre assured the man who fell into being a boy again. "As sure as God is in Heaven, His Will will be done on earth."

It was another link in a long chain of lies, but such were necessary. Certainly by now, LeFevre realized that telling the truth came with a much higher price. Particularly as he formulated what he would say to Pierre when he met him face to face. And Marie, if either Pierre or Lefevre survived their necessary meeting, and exchange of half-truths.

## CHAPTER 17

Pierre Noir gave to many people, but he seldom shared his thoughts with anyone. Such was required for a Revolutionary Visionary, whose Vision was often more blurred than sharp. Even with Marie, he kept secret more than what he revealed to her. Such was the requirement for a leader. But every leader needed a confident. Someone who he could trust to tell him the truth about the world, and himself. With Rollo gone, captured by the British while Pierre was asleep, according to his best accounts of it, there was only set of ears that would hear what he had to say and not throw any judgments his way.

"So, it really is you and me against the world," Noir said to his half-wolf half dog, at his private evening campground nestled in the woods. He reached over to the rabbit roasting over the pit. "I know that it was me who snared this one, but you smelled it out, so that means that you should get the bigger part of it," he said as he fed the half-breed mutt who

he still had not found a name that lived up to his various attributes. "Go on, eat it," Pierre said. "It's your favorite."

But the canine was more concerned with smelling something beyond the bush. Something that Pierre's eyes could barely make out, the thick evening clouds above converting what had been a bright full moon into a dull beacon that shed light on nothing except itself. The wolf-mutt roamed walked over to the bushes, sniffing his way around it.

"So, what do you smell? Another ghost?" Noir commented, stroking overgrown beard, which, combined with the battle-scars on his face and arms, made him as frightening to look at by a ghost as disembodied spirits were scary to those still in the land of the 'living'. Pierre reached for his rifle with his disfigured left hand, a double barreled pistol with his right. He let the business end of each of those weapons 'look for' the location of the visitor, or visitors.

The wolf-mutt growled, moving its head from one direction to another, as the wind decided to blow in firmly from the East, then even more strongly from the South.

"Yeah, it must be a ghost," Pierre said, turning his back on the intruder, putting down his musket, then holstering his pistol. "There certainly are enough of them wanting to share what's left of my mind. But they won't share any of our rabbit, no matter how much they try to scare me away. Or you? "

The wolf-mutt barked a few times to the North, then to the South, then to the West. But it stood its ground.

"It's probably just a raccoon," Noir said to the hound, petting its head. Then looking into his kind and assuring eyes. "Or possum. Or maybe one of your ancestors calling you to the realm of the dead, who maybe really are more alive than any of us on this side of the line," he went on. "Someplace where Marie is right now. Maybe..." he pondered the idea, then after a few hard moments of reflection, continued. "I can hear her playing her piano. Can't you?" he said to the now confused canine. "I'll sing along to the tune she's playing and you can howl to it."

Pierre did his best to hum, then sing 'Jesu Joy of Man's Desire', one of the simple Bach tunes that the old Master wrote on paper, and Marie gave life to with sound. The wolf-mutt joined in with howls that were more on key than his master-Comrade's. Man and hound walked, then strolled, then danced around the thicket of wind blown trees. Suddenly, Pierre's joyful singing turned into a growl, accompanied by whipping out his pistol, and grabbing hold of the ghost's coat. This time, the coat was real. As was the body of the man who had put it on the trees. And the affection Noir's canine confidant showed to the intruder, licking his out-stretched hand.

"What are YOU doing here?" Noir growled at the intruder, his pistol aimed at his head.

“Feeding Ulyssess some of my beef jerky,” LeFevre smiled back.

“Who else is with you!” Noir demanded to know, grabbing hold of LeFevre's collar, seeing that it was that of a layman rather than a Priest, and that not one article of clothing on him was military. “And what is your business here, now that you've left the Priesthood. Abandoned the French Army. Deserted the British Army.”

“And left Marie,” LeFevre confessed, eyes downward. “Who is still alive,” he continued, just like Ulyssess there, thank God.”

“You have a lot of nerve naming my dog!” Noir blasted back, envying the connection the hound had with his rival in love, and war. “And as for thanking God,” he continued, releasing LeFevre, throwing him onto the ground, then looking up to the sky. “He doesn't exist for us anymore.”

“Maybe you didn't hear me,” LeFevre repeated. “Marie is alive.”

“I heard you well enough,” Noir continued.

“But you don't believe me,” LeFevre said, pulling himself up off the hard ground, his vulnerable bones thankfully bruised rather than broken. “Or are afraid to believe me?”

Noir self observed himself smiling, then laughing. A man laughter based in the deepest shade of black imaginable.

“She's been having dreams about you, as you probably have had dreams about her,” La Fevre said.

Noir came back to the realm of the 'living', awakened by the 'co-incidence' of it all. “You are an interesting ghost,” he said to the image of LeFevre in front of his bloodshot eyes. “Intelligence sources I have said you are dead. Which means I must be dead too. And yes, in my dreams, Marie is alive. And she wants to talk to me.”

“What do you say to her?” LeFevre asked, sitting down on a rock, inviting Pierre to rest his weary ass on the log in front of him.

“That I'm the one who understands her heart, and all you were able to do was understand her mind. What she thought was her mind anyway.” Pierre replied.

“You said that you're the only one who understands her heart, not the one who underSTOOD her mind, which means that you still want to believe that she is alive, Pierre,” LeFevre continued. “Which you can.”

“I can understand her mind, or I still want to believe she is alive?” Pierre replied. “If you want to do this ghost confession thing, you should be more clear about what you are saying, 'Father' LeFevre.”

“Then let me be even more clear,” LeFevre asserted, standing up on his feet. Standing firm on them, even though he was still a very significant 6 inches shorter than Pierre.

“Tell me another fable or riddle, and I'll see that you become a ghost right now!” Pierre countered, pointing his pistol at LeFevre's head.

“One more story, and if you don't believe me, I'll put a musketball into my own head,” LeFevre said. “And let you and your wolf-hound eat me, like the rest of the British soldiers and civilians you kill in the attempt to get Marie back somehow, or avenge her death.”

“Those stories aren't true,” Pierre replied. “Most of them anyway,” he continued, lowering his pistol and his eyes. “Here, ghost. You sit on this rock, and tell me your story. And if I believe it, I won't shoot you or myself.”

LeFevre accepted Pierre's offer. The ghost-priest related the truth about Rollo. How he probably voluntarily left Pierre's ranks so that he could be with Marie. A woman who Rollo had bruised and beaten, attempting to blame Pierre for it. A woman who was tricked into believing that Pierre Noir really did have her worst interests at heart. A woman who was hiding from Pierre because of the lies about him drugging, beating and raping her. Lies that Rollo made very believable, and untracable. Lies from Rollo that enabled him to turn Pierre into a raging madman.

Pierre considered the logic of it all, and it made sense to him. But he still able to smell a part of the puzzle that was missing. That piece lay behind LeFevre's heartfelt, and tearful eyes. “So, is there something else about Marie's capture by 'the British' that I should know?” he inquired. “Something that maybe you and Major Barriere had something to do with? Turning Marie's capture and death into something that would turn me into an animal that would get us into a War with the British faster, and make me one of the most powerful weapons against the English?”

The look in LeFevre's eyes told Pierre that he had figured it out. His first instinct was to kill his rival in love, who got him pulled into a War. But then something else from his own experience came into plain, and painful consciousness. “One more than one occasion I burnt town a French farm, blaming it on the Redcoats, so I could encourage neutral pacifists to join in the Fight for Freedom,” he said, reviewing events that plagued his waking and 'sleeping' hours.

“Yes, it is an effective strategy,” LeFevre realized, and confessed.

“But if whatever strategy you have for finding Marie doesn't materialize, I will kill you in ways that go far beyond my current reputation,” Pierre blasted at LeFevre with no more than a sadistic smile, and a certainty in his eyes. Ulysses appended Pierre's claim with a growl at the ex-Priest. Who was unable to make the dog stop, with any amount of complimentary beef jerky.

“So, what happened between you and Rollo, Pierre?” Jean LeFevre asked the only member of Noir's Rangers not dead or deserted, as the horses took the two loners North along the bank of the river that flowed Southward. A river that once took Rollo and Pierre down into British America to trade furs, moonshine, hides, scalps but never slaves.

Pierre responded yet again with silence, his eyes fixed on the river and the memories of when he was the talkative one in the canoe with Rollo.

“Alright then,” LeFevre continued. “What happened between you and---”

“---Marie?” Pierre barked out.

“No,” LeFevre said. “Between you and me? Why did we have so many ideological differences about how to make New France free and enlightened that we couldn't resolve?”

“God knows,” Pierre replied, having dived deeper into his soul than he had since LeFevre's reunion with him. “Yes, God knows.”

“If He still exists, that is,” LeFevre muttered, self observing his belief system changing before his blood-shot eyes. “So, now you believe in God, and I'm the one who doesn't,” he noted.

“I don't know what I believe,” Pierre spat out. “But you have to believe in something.”

“And if you don't?” LeFevre inquired, begging for an answer to be related or channeled to him. Perhaps inviting God to speak one last time to him through the voice of the man who denied His existence the hardest before the War. “What if you don't believe in anything?”

“That's not possible, thank God, Great Spirit, or whatever else is keeping us Alive.”

“Or WHO is keeping us Alive, and purposeful, like---”

“---Marie,” Pierre interjected, after which he looked at LeFevre for the first time in ten miles, and with a smile of agreement.

“Which of us do you think she'll choose?” LeFevre thought, but dared not ask. He could see the same question in Pierre's eyes as well. Besides, other matters were more important in this game of chess where every piece on the board was the player, and every player expendable. “Are you sure this is the shortest way to Migua's sister's longhouse?” he asked.

“As sure as you told me that Marie is there,” he replied. “”Playing violin, cooking banuk, and reading books to Muqua's family and they are pretending to like it,” the ever

elusive but always determined Revolutionary Wilderness man said with a smile, picturing the image of such. Or seeming to.

## CHAPTER 19

LeFevre and Noir finally reached the approach to Migua's sister's long-house nestled among the trees in the high country between Quebec City and Montreal. Migua had found the place ten years earlier, noting it had lots of water year round, little wind and an abundance of rocks that recorded no footprints of those who walked or rode over them. On a path that could be seen from the small village on top of the hidden hill that could be covered up with a man (or woman)-made avalanche long before any un-welcomed visitor knew what had happened.

Noir scouted the route with his eyes, his wolf-hound with his nose. But it was an easy path to follow. "Too easy," Marie noted as she looked down below at the two riders, their identity recognized by the mangy hound with them long before she could see their faces.

"How does dog-meat stew and banuck for supper sound?" the voice behind her said, appended by the barrel of a Kentucky long rifle pointing at the hound.

With all the strength Marie had, she rammed the rifle upward with her shoulder, causing the shot to go up into the air, while tightening every bit of rope confining her to the observation post on the hard ground.

"Now look at what you made me do!" Rollo barked at Marie. "After you made me do what I had to do to them," he continued, pointing to the lifeless bodies of Migua's sister, litter brother who chose to live as a sister, a distant cousin who lost of his kin fighting the English, and three Iroquois children who lost all of their blood relations in skirmishes with the Hurons and the Miami. "Because you thought you were so smart!" Rollo barked. "And because you wouldn't love me that way I know you really do," he continued, tenderly stroking her beet red, tear and blood soaked cheeks.

"Why did you come here?" she asked, noting that the riders below had figured out where the gunshot came from, and were heading directly toward the approach to the longhouse. Something that made Rollo smile with delight. "And what are you going to say to them when they kill you? They've outsmarted you!"

"I outsmarted all of YOU!" Rollo sneered. "Starting with pretending to be unconscious while you were talking to Sister Monique about where you would go to hide from me. And pretending to be thankful to Doctor Vert for saving enough of my leg so I could make a run for it," he continued, looking at the stump that now occupied the space between his knee and what had been his foot. A stump that was sharp enough to penetrate into Migua's sister's pregnant belly when she tried to protect Marie from being impregnated with Rollo's sperm. A stump in which he also hid the pistol that shot

Migua's 'person of two spirits' effeminate brother who was hiding from his own people as well as the French Missionaries. And a stump that lay across Marie's throat. "As you saw, see and now feel, I can do more with this metal hook than I could with my leg. And carved myself a special knife from bone of the doctor who sawed off my leg, that you could have saved," Rollo continued as he pulled a sharpened bone from under his belt. "The legacy of Doctor Vert, cut off more savable legs and lost more savable lives than anyone in that hospital. I was the angel who finally gave him a dose of his own medicine!" he laughed.

"What do you want?" Marie begged.

"For them to see what I'm about to do to you, and for you," Rollo replied, tenderness in his voice. "As I hear them approach, right now," he repeated, placing the Vert Knife against Marie's throat.

"Let her go, you manipulative turncoat!" Pierre Noir grunted while pointing the business end of his gun at Rollo.

"Please, you don't have to do this," LeFevre offered. "It's not too late to make this right. What's left of it anyway."

"Which is exactly what I have in mind, and soul," Rollo replied. "By being sure that I live on, through her. The woman I loved more than both of you. In ways that SHE needed. Not the ways you wanted!" he continued, sounding to Marie more sincere than any man she had met, or imagined possible. A man who with his non-knife holding hand ripped open her dress and underlying breaches. A man who penetrated into the most private part of her womanhood the portion of his manhood that he had, apparently, been saving for the right woman. "The woman who will bear my child, as you watch it be conceived!" he yelled out as he 'Passioned' himself into Marie's vagina. "A child that as French Catholics you will never kill, or remove! A child who will know that my last dying wish was to be with Marie and show her how much I care about her," he continued with a warped but sincere mind. As if the devil had repented his sins and making love to his secret lover, Jesus. Or, paradoxially 'Mary'. "This is the most magnificent moment of my---"

Before Rollo could say 'life', a shot killed him from behind. Holding the gun in her shaking hand was a small framed woman in colored robes that had been stained red. Rollo fell to the ground, half dead. The woman walked up to him, took the knife-bone from his bloody hand and stabbed it into him, cursing him, his God, and the doctor whose bone he removed after he took his life on the way out the door.

Pierre and Jean cut Marie loose. She accepted help from both of them equally, then asked them to allow the woman to continue her butchery, commenting on her skill to do so. "Sister Monique knows more about anatomy than Mother Superior Joseph Marie, I do," Marie said by way of explanation.

“And more about cruelty,” Pierre commented regarding the manner in which she was making every stab and cut as painful as possible. “Even more than I did.”

“And I wanted to,” Jean replied. “How did she get here?”

“Following you, I suppose,” Marie replied. “So she could better find me, and after she is finished her own morality experiments, herself,” she continued. With that Marie pulled herself up off the ground, staggered over to Monique, and hugged her. The dissection stopped, as did the hopes of Pierre or Jean to win Marie's hand as their own.

“I guess all of you will have to share me now,” she said to the two men looking at each other with ironic stares. And the young Nun with whom had discovered the kind of love that is not possible between a man and a woman, or a woman and God.

## CHAPTER 20

After burying the dead at Migua's familial revolutionary village, Marie and Monique took it upon themselves to convert it into something that contained the best elements of Noir's Albime de les hardi, Sister Marie-Joseph's Hotel du Dieu hospital, LeFevre's Utopian Interfaith church, and bits of Mother Superior Henry's Benedictine Cloistered fortress. Due to a series of biological postponements and moral mishaps, the embryo in Marie's womb grew into a fetus, then a life. By the time that life was ready to come out into the world, Pierre Noir and Jean LeFevre were called to duty in the service of General Montcalm, a brilliant French General who over-estimated the power of Will, and underestimated the inevitability of numbers. Both he and the British General who met for the final battle to decide who would own North America, ironically, outside the walls of Quebec City, died on the battlefields at the Plains of Abraham as the 1750s came to a close.

British Rule over all of the Canadas and the Ohio country came next, though no more French were exported. English non-Catholics flooded into Canada, where they met stiff cultural opposition from French Catholics, who were finally allowed rights speak their own language, own their own land, and express their religion without penalty Lethal penalties anyway. Particularly with the Quebec Act of 1774, which the British thought would cool down the anti-English fires which were about to explode in the 13 colonies to the South. French Canadians, due to their knowledge of the land, their ability to use it, and their skill in fighting to keep it, were being courted by American Rebels as well as Tory Loyalists. Both had convincing cases to lure to their side the French Canadians, whose language and cultural identity became even more firmly Quebequa.

“All we wanted from you European English and you American English was to be left alone, General Montgomery,” Marie commented to the man behind her in the front of the Rebel camp surrounding Quebec City as the late December winter sky finally provided those under it with a view of blue air, rather than blowing snow.

“And all I needed was for someone behind those walls to be reasonable and accept my fair and merciful terms for their surrender,” the rebel leader replied behind a coat caked with ice, his arms shivering with cold. “And for someone in there to have read the letters I sent in with you. You being on our side of this conflict, of course.”

“I am for any side that will end this conflict,” Marie replied.

“Which is ours of course,” the General answered. “Unless of course you...” he gave thought to something, daring not to give voice to it.

“Informed them how few men, cannons, guns, ammunition and sacs of flour that you have?” Marie replied with a coy smile. “I would never do that, since I have friends in your camp,” she replied.

“And, maybe some friends behind those walls, Madame,” the General answered, staring accusingly into her angry eyes. “But the way you treated our wounded. And kept them from starving and freezing. That is enough to tell me that you really do have our interests, and the interests of our new young Nation at heart.”

“And soul,” Marie smiled back.

An aide came to inform the general of something, showing him a map. Montgomery excused himself with gentlemanly courtesy, saying and inferring that the fairer sex should not have to be concerned with matters of war. How Marie wanted to tell him that women, and their children, are affected by war in ways that men will never know. And could not handle. But such matters would have to wait, with the arrival of a lad of 15 clad in an over-sized coat, floppy breeches, and a replacement for the footwear he had been issued at Ticondoga.

“So, now are you thankful for those Indian moccasins I gave you for your birthday that you were too 'American' to want to wear?” Marie said to the boy.

“Mama, you said that I should think for myself, and I think that we are better off fighting for the Americans who will give us the right to own more land, instead of the British who just last year gave us the right to speak our own language, operate our own businesses and worship God as Catholics instead of Protestants.”

“Maybe we should see who gives us the right to be Pagans?” Marie proposed. “Or the right to be neutral.”

“Like the Acadians, who the British sent away from their homeland here. As you, Aunt Monique and Uncle Jean know all too well,” he pointed out. “And speaking of such, how is Uncle Pierre?”

“Safe, alive, fed and...sleeping with a roof over his head instead of a tent flap, or a teepee,” she said looking at the walls of the City arming itself with more cannon and

musket power by the hour on its ramparts. “Irony, that the revolutionary anarchist who hated all Kings, especially the English one, more than the devil himself, is now siding with King George. Because he thinks that real Freedom can be won through law and order first.”

“And Uncle Jean, who you said used to be a Priest, who claimed that Catholic law and doctrine was the only thing that could keep Revolutions moral, and kind, is now...” the lad said, turning his and his mother's attention to a buckskin-clad man putting on warpaint, saying a Huron prayer to the Great Spirit, daring the American Christians and the few Iroquois Americans to stop him. “...Yes, Uncle Jean is now determined to defy all laws, and order.”

“Yes, we never do really know what we believe until the time comes to put theory into practice,” Marie commented.

“And speaking of practice,” the lad noted, turning to face his mother more directly than he had done since his enlistment. “If I am to die fighting for beliefs tomorrow, or if this weather gives us cover, today, I would like to know who my real father was. And my real family.”

“Why, it is us!” Marie asserted with a wide smile. “Me, and your aunts and uncles.”

“Aunts and uncles who look nothing like me,” the lad replied. “And who tell me nothing about the man you scream about in your nightmares,” he continued, as the sun shone in his face, clarifying all of its features. “A man who maybe you see in me now?” the lad added, this time demanding to know the horror in Marie's eyes that she so often showed when looking at him for too long.

Marie offered him nothing but silence. He gave her nothing in return, except his back as he strolled then marched back to camp. “Wait!” she pleaded, desperately grabbing hold of his big, broad shoulders. “There is something I have to tell you. That you should tell no one except Jean and Aunt Monique.”

“Jean who you didn't call Uncle this time. 'Sister' Marie?” he answered.

Marie was waiting for the day when her biological son would figure out who had been in her past. Some of who she was anyway. She yearned for the day when she could tell him more, or let him reveal to her face what he had discovered about her. Maybe they would be discoveries which she could use to finally turn her life around. For such things to happen, she would have to tell him things, and make him believe them.

“There are three very important things I have to tell you, son,” she said. “First, when I went looking for healing herbs in the woods, I ran into General Benedict Arnold's Army which is half a day's march from here. He wants to promote you to Sergeant. And requests that you join him. General Montgomery has given his blessing to it and wants you and only to inform Arnold about our own forces here, and our plans for the attack.”

“That is...fantastic!” the 15 year old boy who sought to be a man in the eyes of his mother and to please the ghost of his departed father, whoever he was.

“And!” Marie replied. “Your uncle, Captain LeFevre, has been promoted to Colonel, requested to join Arnold now as well. For a geurella attack on the Redcoats who are on their way to reinforce Quebec City.”

“So why didn't General Montgomery tell me himself?” the lad asked.

“He didn't want to alarm our men here,” she said. “And as proof of such, he gave me this to give to you, and Uncle Jean,” she continued, sneaking a rolled piece of paper from her garter. “In his own handwriting, as you can see. For your and Uncle Jean's eyes only, as only you two have been en-trusted with the battle plan. There is no telling who in this Camp is working for the British, or working against us.”

Marie prayed to whatever God she still could believe in for her son, and LeFevre, to believe that her forgery skills were up to snuff. By the impressed look in her glory-seeking son's eyes, it was. She pushed her luck for one more lie, knowing that service to God often required violating that one of the Ten Commandments, and was the most effective way to avoid violating the other ten. But, no, it was time to tell him the truth, as she intuited it, and heard it from the American officers and enlisted men, when the 200 French Canadian recruits were not in listening range. “If this American attempt to liberate Canada fails, Americans will look after themselves before they will do anything for French or English Canadians,” Marie said to her son. “I heard it from the American rebels' mouths, and saw it in their eyes.”

“I don't believe it,” the lad spat back, folding his arms..

“Then just...consider it,” she continued, gently unlocking his arms, after which she hugged him farewell. LeFevre and the bastard but beloved son of the man who raped Marie conferred, then disappeared into the snowy woods to the South, mounting two horses discretely tethered there, according to the orders that were on the forged documents bearing the General's signature. Montgomery emerged from his tent, after which a bugler called the army into a quick, and hasty assembly. With freezing hands and half-starved bodies, the expeditionary force prepared for the assault that had been delayed for nearly a month. To the North, Marie heard a nightingale call. On the ramparts of the City walls, a Redcoat Major stood up, took off his hat, and pointed to his left hip while looking in her direction. When out of view from the rest of the camp, Marie pulled out the spy glass from her left garter which he had given to her when she had been in the fort delivering Montgomery's message to the Commandant. She used it to not look at guns, cannons or movement of troops, but people. Two special people on horseback. Her son and almost husband, Jean, who were now well on their way to join General Arnold to the South, while the General was actually making his way from the East. Then she turned the glass to the Redcoat Officer, who showed her his eyes. He apologetically showed her the large mass of well fed and well armed troops behind him.

The Officer mouthed something to her, in Quebequa French.

“Yes, I know, Pierre, we may not be able to save our country and culture, but today, at least we can save our family. Thank you for that and more,” she mouthed back.

Marie could feel Pierre hear her. He bowed to her just as the first American cannons blasted at the fort. Then the British cannons blasted back.

With that, Marie slipped into the woods, got on her horse, and rode away from the War, hoping that whatever she did to provide support for and sabotage of the American 'liberation' of French Canada would save American, British, and French lives. Praying to God that those who survived this War would not engage in another one. And begging the Great Spirit that the other French Canadians who would be left behind by the retreating Americans would escape the wrath of the British Army. Or find their way to the jurisdiction of Major Noir, whose addiction to cruelty had been replaced by a love for justice, and mercy. And, along with a very few special others, his love for her. Which was now shared rather than owned. Finally.

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