

*Between
Two Shores*



JOCELYN GREEN



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To Ann-Margret

*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

—Mark 10:45

PROLOGUE

Kahnawake, Quebec
August 1744

“I told you, I’m not staying.” Catherine Stands-Apart drew back from her sister’s touch and planted her feet wide at the edge of their mother’s grave. The freshly turned soil pushed between her toes. “I only came to say good-bye.”

Bright Star put her fists on her hips and frowned. She had thirteen summers to Catherine’s ten but acted as though she held all the wisdom and authority of a council full of clan mothers. “You can’t leave. This is our home.”

Catherine’s gaze traveled across the burial ground and past cornfields to the rows of shaggy birchbark longhouses. The Mohawk village of Kahnawake was tucked between wooded hills and the southwest bank of the St. Lawrence River, opposite the island of Montreal. Beside the village was the French fort of St. Louis, where a black robe baptized Mohawks into the Catholic faith and a garrison of soldiers watched for any British who might try to attack Montreal by coming up the river.

“*Yah. It was my home.*” Catherine and her sister had been born here, along with their little brother, and had lived in one of the few European-style homes suited to just one family. They

had stayed there even after the divorce that sent their French-Canadian father away. He had lived nearly two miles from the village ever since.

“You know we can’t stay alone in the house without Mother,” Bright Star said. “We must move into the longhouse with our clan. They are our family, too. We have many mothers.”

Defiance swelled in Catherine, and she shook her head, beaded strands of hair clinking together. She had one true mother, named Strong Wind, and Strong Wind was buried here in the earth as of two sleeps ago. Despite all their efforts to revive her, she had died of the spotting sickness, along with four others from the Wolf Clan. They had caught the illness from the soldiers at the fort. *Smallpox*, the French called it.

Catherine rubbed the burning from her eyelids, then peered up at her sister. “You are my family, but you will marry within a year and start your own.”

“What about our brother?” Bright Star asked. Joseph Many Feathers, who preferred to be called by his Christian name, had only four summers and ran wild in the village.

“He will stay with you in the longhouse with everyone else.” Catherine was fond of Joseph, but in only one or two more years, he would follow after his uncles and learn to be both hunter and warrior, gone from Kahnawake for months at a time. “He won’t miss me.”

Bright Star’s heart-shaped face drew to a sharp point at her chin. “He will. You are his sister.”

But Catherine felt like she couldn’t breathe every time she thought of living with five or six other families under one roof. She wasn’t used to the closeness, or the noise, or the smoke from so many fires. “I told you, I am going to live with our father. He needs me.”

“He chose his path.”

A sigh rose and fell in Catherine’s chest. “He did not choose

for that steel trap to take off his hand.” If he had both hands, he would have been able to hunt and trap for his family, and maybe Strong Wind would not have divorced him. “You have all these people, Bright Star. Papa has no one. If you had seen him today when I told him the news about our mother—”

“You should not have done that.”

“He deserved to know. And I miss him.”

He missed her too, he’d said. He needed her. She was old enough now to help him with cooking and laundry and anything else. “*Come live with me again,*” he’d pleaded. “*You’re as much my daughter as you were Strong Wind’s, aren’t you? You have just as much French blood in your veins as Mohawk. I would never take you away from your mother, ma chère, but now—must I live alone to the end of my days?*” That didn’t seem fair.

“His blood runs in my veins, and I choose to live with him. *Awiyo*. It is good.” Her eyes were the same blue as her father’s, a sign they belonged together. Once Catherine was there to help, he wouldn’t drink so much anymore. Life wouldn’t be nearly as hard for him.

Beyond Bright Star, women stooped in the fields, black heads shining in the sun as they harvested corn. Children ran shrieking through the stalks to chase away the crows that swooped and squawked overhead. Catherine would never do that again if she lived with Papa. He had a different idea of how to live. He said she could help him run his trading post. She could help him with so many things! She would not forget Strong Wind by living with him, but perhaps she could forget this twisting pain of looking for her mother around every corner and never finding her.

Sweat beaded on Bright Star’s brow, and her dark eyes glittered. Bits of corn silk stuck to the fringe of her buckskin dress from her own labor in the fields. “Your place is here, with your

mother's people. Don't you remember what our mother said about that man you want to live with? He is selfish. He cares only for himself."

"*Totek!* Be quiet!" Catherine clapped her hands over her ears. She did not remember Strong Wind saying those words and did not want to. If she could bring any memories back, it would be of her mother singing to her or telling her stories. But all she could recall of her mother right now was the way she had looked with those blisters all over her skin. They had been everywhere. Her arms, her hands, her face. It was horrible and terrifying. Catherine had to leave this place, or she would go mad with seeing the sickness in her mind every time she thought of Strong Wind.

Bright Star pulled Catherine's arms down to her sides. "You are who your *mother* is, not your father. This is the way of things. What you want to do, it is not done."

Catherine turned away, weary of her sister's constant disapproval. It was a weight that bowed her head like a tumpline attached to a bundle of furs. She would be glad to shed this burden by moving away from here. But she could not convince her feet to leave the spot where her mother's body rested. Not yet.

The noise from the fields grew shrill and gleeful with children's voices. Women laughed and sang. Joseph burst from between two rows of cornstalks, a gourd rattle in his fist. Catherine waved at him.

He ran to her, his brown body naked save for a breechclout. Damp black hair clung to his neck. "We are supposed to chase the crows! I am very good at scaring them away. See?" He shook his rattle and shouted at the sky. "I am fierce, yes?" He grabbed her hand, and the dirt from his palm rubbed hers.

"*Tohske' wahi*. Very fierce," Catherine said. "I need to tell you something. You and Bright Star are going to live in the longhouse from now on, and I am going to live in a different house. With Papa."

Joseph wrinkled his nose. “Where? Why?”

He was too young to remember much of Papa, and Papa never took pride in him, which Catherine could not explain. Fathers prized their sons. But her father wanted *her*, though she was neither male nor firstborn. She was special somehow. That was why Strong Wind had named her Stands-Apart. But Papa preferred her Christian name, Catherine. So did she.

Joseph tugged her hand. “Where are you going?”

A gust of wind swept over her, smelling of cooking fish. “It’s not far. I can come back to visit you. *Hen’en*, everything is fine.”

He looked at her with large black eyes that seemed to measure what she’d said. Then a shadow flickered over his face, and he squinted into the sky. “Crows!” he shouted, releasing her hand. He scrambled back into the field, shaking his rattle. “*Wahs!* Go away, crows! *Wahs!* No corn for you!”

Bright Star crossed her arms and bent her head toward Catherine, her thick braids swinging. They were many shades of brown, like walnut shells, the same as Catherine’s hair. Porcupine quills fanned tall and straight from the back of her head. “You say you will visit? Maybe I will not want to see you, a sister who rejects her people.” Her voice quivered like a bowstring pulled too taut. She used her words like arrows. “Well were you named Stands-Apart, for you stand too far apart from us. Go away, then, and stay there.”

Something ripped inside Catherine. She stared at the mound of dirt that covered Strong Wind and wanted to fling herself upon it, arms open wide to soak in the summer sun baked into the earth. She wanted, one last time, to pretend that warmth was her mother’s embrace. She wanted to feel loved again. Right now, she felt alone and shamed.

So she pointed her toes away from the grave to put Bright Star, and that pain, behind her.



PART ONE

Here is Canada, surrounded on all sides. . . .

Only peace can save the colony now.

—Major General Louis-Joseph de Montcalm,
senior field commander for the French and
Canadian forces in North America
during the Seven Years' War

Of all our enemies, famine is the most fearsome.

—Pierre de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil,
governor-general of New France

Chapter One

Lachine, Island of Montreal, Quebec
Late August 1759

Catherine Duval was used to waiting.

Outside the old settlement called Lachine on the south bank of the Island of Montreal, she sat on the end of the dock, her empty *bateau* bumping the pilings beside her. With her petticoats and silk skirts pooling at her knees, she dangled her bare feet in the river and looked across its mile-wide expanse toward Kahnawake. Clouds hung low and full in the sky, a lid on the simmering humidity. She unpinned her straw hat from the mass of hair piled upon her head and fanned herself, cicadas ticking away the time.

They would come. Bright Star had brought the news to Catherine's trading post yesterday that clan brothers who had just returned from fishing on the Ottawa River had seen the *coureurs des bois*. The trappers, untethered to any official fur company, were nearby and would be in Lachine today. Her sister could be as prickly as porcupine quills, but she was reliable.

The first strains of boisterous singing floated down the river, signaling the trappers' approach. Shaking the water from her feet, Catherine stepped back into her moccasins and retied the

satin ribbons of her hat beneath her chin as she stood. She arranged herself into a posture of confidence and authority. Hands folded, chin high, back straight. With five and twenty summers behind her, she knew how to manage these men even without her father at her side. In truth, it would be easier without him. His gruff manner tended to impact profit.

After waiting with her for merely an hour this morning, Gabriel had declared that the men weren't coming, for he gave Bright Star's report little credit. "*I'll find my own way home,*" he'd told Catherine, and ambled toward Montreal's city gates, nine miles away, on an errand he did not divulge. When he was finished, he'd hire someone to row him back across the river.

No matter. Catherine had been acting on his behalf for years, for he had no head for market rates and no talent for negotiation whatsoever. She knew that, deep down, he was grateful for her help. That she meant more to him than he admitted. This was the truth she circled back to when she longed for a family of her own. She'd been engaged once but was abandoned. There had been other suitors, and she'd even thought she'd loved one of them, but nothing came of it. So she had bound up her dreams of a family into hard knots and cast them into the river to be stepping-stones to the other side of disappointment.

A chirping bank swallow became a blur of black and white as it fluttered out of a burrow in the riverbank, briefly claiming Catherine's attention. One bateau headed toward her. At roughly twenty-four feet long, it was bigger than a canoe and built for carrying heavy loads. But it was only a single vessel, when before the war it would have been the first in a line of one hundred or more, returning from months spent in the west trapping beaver, muskrat, fox, and wolf. Lachine would have been teeming with merchants vying for their wares.

"*Bonjour, mademoiselle!*" the steersman called out when he

spied her. She recognized Denis and Emile from years gone by, but not the two other men with them.

“Bonjour, welcome!” She returned their smiles. “I see you have left all the other trappers behind!”

The bateau cut through the river, the blue-grey water ruffling as it parted. A dragonfly perched on the bow. “*Oui, ma belle*, and where is all your competition?” Emile laughed as he drew close and threw her a line, which she tied to the pilings while all four men climbed onto the dock.

Catherine lifted her hands. “In the militia, *monsieur*, fighting a war. Some might say you ought to do the same, unless you are younger than sixteen or older than sixty and very good at hiding it.”

“Ah!” Creases fanned from Emile’s eyes and framed the grin on his leathered face, though she knew he was no more than five years her senior. “Some might. Some might. But then who would be left to bring you furs each year? Who are we to allow a little war to interrupt your business?” He winked, for this war was far from little.

What had begun as a squabble between English and French governors over who controlled the Ohio River Valley had since blown into a full-scale war for much more than that. Now all of New France and New England hung in the balance. The battles had spread beyond this continent, too, to Europe, Africa, the Philippines, and South America. The whole world, it seemed, was at war for a chance for empires to gain new lands.

“Come, then,” Catherine said after learning the other two men were named Stephen and Philippe. “You must eat.”

Ignoring the ache in her empty stomach, she led the men onto the grassy shore, where she had a basket of food waiting. They were made from one mold, these burly men, the same mold that had formed her father. About five feet six inches tall, muscled and stocky, ruddy-faced, independent, carefree—and thirsty.

She knew they had been living on dried peas and corn, hard biscuits, and if they'd been lucky, a little salt pork. The corn cakes she offered from her own kitchen came dear, but if she had learned one thing from the famine of the last two years, it was that hunger was a distracting and irritating companion. Business was best done without it.

While Philippe and Stephen traded ribald jokes, Emile said nothing as he ate. Denis tipped his canteen to his lips, then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Swiping his toque from his mud-brown hair, he swept an appraising glance over Catherine. She wondered if he noticed that her gown hung looser this year over stays that cinched ever smaller about her waist.

“Not eating?” he asked.

“This is for you,” she assured them.

For the last two years, the fields around Montreal had been blighted black. This year, the grain was ripe but the barns were still empty, as all the farmers held muskets, not scythes. So while she had no desire to deal with hungry men, she had learned to keep her own wits and composure whether the emptiness in her gut scraped dull or sharp.

“The forts along the Great Lakes must still be in French control,” she ventured once the men had eaten.

Emile mopped his face with the end of his faded red sash. “As far as we know. If the British take them, we’ll just go farther north or west to trap.”

“In that case, you won’t bring your furs here anymore. You’ll need a closer outlet. In fact, I’m surprised you came this summer at all, since you must have known Louisbourg was taken by the British and Quebec is under siege.” New France was hemmed in from the east. Even if the Montreal merchants were not serving in the militia, they may not have come to Lachine for the annual fur trade anyway, because they had no way to

export their furs from the coastal cities to Europe. No doubt this was why only Denis's team of *coureurs des bois* had come.

"But here you are, just the same," he said. "Still trading with the Dutch in Albany? Isn't that the headquarters of the British army now?"

"It is. So we trade with the merchants at Schenectady, on the Mohawk River, twenty miles north of Albany." Even during times of peace, trade with Albany was forbidden for French-Canadian citizens, but the government turned a blind eye to Kahnawake Mohawks engaged in it. Since Catherine was half of each, arrest seemed half a risk, depending on how authorities wanted to view her. The three French sisters who ran the post before Catherine's father took it over had been deported back to France.

"And how do the French soldiers at Fort St. Louis feel about your smuggling goods to and from the enemy?" Emile asked.

She smiled. "The soldiers garrisoned at the edge of Kahnawake wouldn't agree with me, I'm afraid, but I don't consider the British, and certainly not my business partners in New York, the enemy."

Emile's laughter suggested he didn't agree with her either, but these men would not report her, for they were also breaking the law by not fighting.

Just as Catherine lived between Kahnawake and Montreal, between Mohawk culture and French, she lived and worked between two sides of a war. She remained neutral, uninterested in choosing sides. Successful trades happened because they needed each other. She sent fur to New England, and her porters returned with British trade goods: linens and kettles in peacetime, good rope and muskets in war. Ironic, perhaps, but a good trade nonetheless.

A sticky breeze that smelled of coming rain stirred the lace at Catherine's elbows. "This is not the first war my trade has

weathered, and it won't be the last. My porters are very discreet and adjust their routes to avoid the dangerous areas along the way. They are the best."

"Better than us?" Denis teased.

She laughed. "You are the *very* best for coming this far when you must have known there would be few merchants left in the market."

"All I need is one merchant, ma chère, to make it worth my while. And that one merchant is you. Come now, mademoiselle, and make me glad we came to see you."

She could afford to, and proved it with rum and coin.

Denis and Emile were happy with the payment, and Stephen and Philippe did not mask their surprise. They didn't know, she guessed, that the Dutch merchants paid twice as much for her furs than what she could get anywhere else.

Catherine smiled at the confusion on their faces. "You haven't fleeced me, I assure you. The British have given up their own trapping, content to obtain furs through trade with New France. The war only makes them scarce and thus more valuable."

Thunder rumbled in the distance as the men loaded a dozen ninety-pound bales of fur into her flat-bottomed bateau. Satisfaction brimmed just beneath her calm. She was sure her father would be pleased. That was, whenever he decided to come home.



By the time Catherine arrived at her own dock, the threat of rain had blown past with no more than a few sprinkles escaping the clouds. The air was a thick, damp blanket about her as she secured the bateau. Their other vessel, a birchbark canoe, remained tethered on the opposite side of the dock.

The chemise beneath her bodice stuck to her skin as she

climbed onto the dock and eyed the bales of fur in the bateau. They would need to be taken into the storeroom of the trading post before nightfall. If Gabriel returned by then, he could manage the task. With a tumpline strapped around his brow, the weight of the bale would be carried on his back. If he didn't do it, she would wait until the cool of the evening and take care of it herself.

Purple pickerelweed waved to her where the river met the shore. She snapped seeds from the blooms and ate them as she passed, walking up the riverbank toward their two-story fieldstone house. Behind it was a smokehouse, long empty, and a wooden shed full of tools grown rusty with age. The trading post stood apart from the house by twenty yards or so, a one-story building with two rooms: a public room in front for trading, and a storeroom in the back. A wide creek flowed behind it. Bees hummed among goldenrod and black-eyed Susans, which added sunshine to the grey stones.

Stepping inside the post, which smelled of animal skins and pipe tobacco, Catherine found Thankful at a puncheon table at the back of the trading room, driving an awl into leather for a pair of moccasins. Bright Star sat across from her, sorting beads by color into glass jars. The two women were bent over their work, one head crowned with a plain white cap, the other uncovered, dark hair parted neatly down the middle of her scalp and plaited into braids that shone with bear grease.

Catherine's pleasure at seeing Bright Star turned to caution as she gauged the weather in the room, for Bright Star was one who brought it with her. Removing her hat, Catherine inhaled the smell of her sister's presence and the uncertainty that always came with it.

"What is it like in New York?" The question from Thankful stayed Catherine where she stood. As Bright Star talked about her trading trips, Thankful's hands slowed in her work.

The young woman had never asked to return to the British colonies herself, content with stories of the land that had once been her home. Her blond hair, blue eyes, and fair skin hinted at Dutch ancestry, but none of her blood family was alive to ask.

Catherine approached them. “Time for another trip to Schenectady,” she announced with a smile. “You were right, Bright Star. The *coureurs des bois* came to Lachine.”

Bright Star’s countenance clouded. “You are surprised?”

“Not at all.” Catherine waved her sister’s defensiveness away with forced nonchalance.

“You have pelts, then.” Thankful’s voice lilted as she pulled sinew through the soft leather, binding a tight seam. The young woman had seen sixteen summers, and she’d been sewing for at least half of them. Her long tapered fingers seemed made for needle and thread.

“A dozen bales of them. If the porters are ready soon, we have time to make one last trip for the season.” It would take nearly a month to complete the journey.

Bright Star rose from the table. “I need some time to prepare. After three sleeps, I’ll be ready and will return with help.” She paused. “Gabriel was pleased, I assume.”

“I’m sure he will be, yes.” Catherine smoothed a wrinkle from her skirt, feeling like a child again beneath her sister’s stony gaze.

“He was not with you,” Bright Star said. “He left you alone to deal with four rough men.”

“He didn’t think they were com—”

“He didn’t believe me.” Bright Star spoke low. “He never believes me. No wonder you doubt me, too.”

“I don’t doubt you.”

Bright Star held her tongue until the silence between them crackled with tension. At length, Bright Star broke it. “So what

did he do instead, while you waited and then made the trade for him?”

Thankful bent over her work with greater concentration.

“I’m not his keeper, Bright Star. As you are not mine.” Catherine had meant the statement to be a release, but as soon as the words slipped out, she could see she had chosen them poorly. Frustrated, she made an awkward attempt to close the matter. “Thank you for your help here today.” She hung her hat on a peg on the wall.

Feeling Bright Star watching her, Catherine moved to the secretary that held the ledger book to record the day’s transaction. As she flipped to the correct page, her thumb grazed over records of previous items traded to and from Mohawk, French, and British agents. When she spotted entries for scalps, she swallowed hard and thanked God that practice had grown rare. Enemies were more valuable alive now, except to the Mohawk warriors who prized the scalps and kept them as proof of their victories.

Movement caught her eye, and she looked up to peer out the window. Through leaded panes, she watched two blurry figures lash their canoe to a piling at the dock opposite her bateau full of fur. Her pulse quickened. They’d followed her from Lachine. They knew she was without a male chaperone and had come to steal the small fortune she’d left unguarded. Her father would—

They didn’t even peek inside her bateau. Forms small in the distance, they marched from the riverbank toward the post, though it had already closed for the day. Slowly, Catherine exhaled.

“Soldiers?” Thankful guessed. “Do they know? Are they here to arrest you?” Though Thankful was now a grown woman, sometimes Catherine wondered if she was still prone to her childhood fear of being abandoned.

“More likely they need something we have, which puts us at an advantage,” Catherine responded. “Any problem can be solved with fairness, neutrality to all parties, and the right transaction. True in trade, true in life. And true in war.”

Bright Star’s molasses eyes sparked. “They do not walk like men who have come to accuse.” Her hand went to the hunting knife that hung around her neck, its beaded leather sheath a burst of color against the stroud tunic she wore layered over a deerskin skirt. “No one is getting arrested today.”

Catherine adjusted her fichu. “We’ve nothing to hide. You don’t need to stay,” she told Bright Star. “You may go home if you’d rather.”

Bright Star shook her head, and the shining silver hoops dangling from her ears bounced against her jaw. “Not yet. Your father hasn’t returned from Montreal.” She spoke as if Gabriel Duval were not her father, too. As if Bright Star had not been born of the same union between a French trapper and a Mohawk beauty.

The door banged open, and the two men clomped through it, bringing the sharp odor of sweat and damp wool with them. A warm gust of wind swirled in, a maple leaf scraping across the floor before they wedged the door shut again.

“Here to trade, *messieurs*?” Catherine’s tone was even as she appraised them. The younger man was clearly Canadian militia, wearing his own clothes from the toque slouched on his head to his moccasins. The elder, a professional soldier, wore a grey-white *justaucorps* with blue turnback cuffs adorned with six buttons each. Beneath that, his jacket was blue and his breeches grey-white. White stockings and the silver buckles on his shoes caught what little light there was in the post. In both men, their eyes looked too large for their faces.

They were hungry. So was she. So was nearly everyone in the whole of New France.

The elder soldier removed his black tricorne hat trimmed with gold braid, revealing black hair fading to grey and queued in the back. “Bonjour. Do you live in that house?” He pointed to the home she shared with Thankful and Gabriel.

Her eyes narrowed as she observed the bedrolls and packs on the soldiers’ backs. “If you have something to trade, let us do business. Otherwise I suggest you take your leave before night falls.” She crossed her arms. An unladylike gesture, to be sure, but she’d rather be seen as the proprietor than a lady just now.

“You misunderstand,” the officer replied. His lips were thin beyond detection, his mouth a moving slit in his face as he spoke. “I’m Captain Pierre Moreau, Régiment Royal-Roussillon, and this is Private Gaspard Fontaine, militia. And you are?”

“Marie-Catherine Duval. This is Bright Star.”

Private Fontaine removed his hat and brushed a hand over his rusty hair. Younger than Moreau by at least twenty years, his upturned nose lent an even more childish air. “And the blond beauty?” His straight, small teeth could not quite be called white. “What’s the matter, too shy?”

“I’m Thankful Winslet.” Crossing her ankles, she offered a polite nod. “Pleased to meet you.”

Moreau’s eyebrow flicked. “Thankful. That’s a Puritan name, isn’t it? British. Do you know what the penalty is for harboring the enemy?”

Speaking in flawless French, Thankful’s voice remained steady as she pulled her needle through the soft leather. “I am no enemy, Captain. My family was taken from our New Hampshire home by Abenaki Indians when I was seven years old. My parents did not survive the march.”

Moreau frowned. “The Abenaki are French allies, as are the Mohawk. So you have more reason to resent us than most, *n’est-ce pas?*”

“I was ransomed.”

“I don’t understand.” Impatience strained the officer’s voice.

Catherine lifted a rumpled bolt of British stroud from a shelf and unwound a few yards of fabric before smoothing it. “The government in New France has inspired many raids on British colonies. The Indians capture any number of British civilians to bring back north with them. Many times, they will keep women and children to adopt into their own families, usually to replace loved ones they recently lost to battle or disease.”

She paused, rewrapping the fabric around the bolt and tucking it back onto the shelf. With a tug, she pulled another bolt free and repeated the process. “But some captives are sold to Frenchmen or -women. This is what we call ‘ransom.’ Once a captive is ransomed, he or she stays and works in that location like an indentured servant for several years, until the money spent on the ransom is considered paid off by labor. At the end of that time, the ransomed captive is usually free to leave New France.” With a shove, she wedged the bolt back onto the shelf.

Moreau looked down his hawklike nose at Thankful. “You’ve been here for more than six years. Why are you still here, when you could go?”

“There is nothing for me in the British colonies now,” the young woman answered.

Fontaine hooked his thumbs through the straps on his shoulders. “But—were you not christened with a Catholic name once you were baptized into the Catholic faith?”

Catherine bit the inside of her cheek. The truth was that the girl remained Protestant, though that was illegal in New France, and Thankful’s conscience did not allow her to lie.

“We have many names,” Bright Star said, likely surprising the Frenchmen with her mastery of their language. All three women spoke English just as well, but there was no need to divulge that right now. “I was named Thérèse when I was baptized by the

Jesuits, but I prefer the name my mother gave me on the night of my birth: Bright Star.”

“What does it matter what we are called, when God alone can judge the heart?” Catherine asked. “So she wishes to be called Thankful, the name her parents gave her. It is all she has left of them. It is a good name. Show me the man who would deny her that, and I will show you one who grasps for what is not his to take.”

The quiet that followed her speech stretched into a long, airless moment. Fontaine’s mouth pulled to one side, and Moreau thrust his chin forward, but neither proved willing to speak his mind.

Finally, Thankful cleared her throat, a smile on her lips. “Call me Mademoiselle Winslet, if it please you. That is, should you have need to call me at all, which I don’t suppose you will.”

Captain Moreau’s chest lifted as he pushed his shoulders back. “That all depends on who lives in that house.” He fished a limp document from his waistcoat and marched to the counter, where he dropped it on one side of a scale. “We’re here under orders. We are to be billeted here.”

Glancing at Thankful, Catherine moved to the counter and parsed the script on the paper. “Why here?” she asked. “If it’s Montreal you wish to defend, you’d be better off crossing the river again to stay within its walls.” It was a city of women, children, and old men now, for every able-bodied man had been called away to defend Quebec.

Moreau drummed his fingers on the counter, a signet ring catching the light. “Our objective is not to defend the city.”

“The river, then,” Catherine guessed, though the rapids between here and Montreal’s main port were too dangerous for most British vessels to attempt. “The St. Lawrence is already guarded by the garrison at Fort St. Louis, not two miles from here, adjacent to Kahnawake. Surely those barracks would better suit you.”

“Already full,” the private replied, his attention drifting to the muskets and powder horns hanging on the wall behind the counter. He carried no weapon of his own. Militiamen never did. They were handed what they needed just before an expedition and gave it back right after.

Captain Moreau cleared his throat. “There are three hundred of us recently detached from our units to come here, and the fort is overcrowded as it is. We’re here to oversee the wheat harvest on the farms of the Montreal Plain. It is said it will amount to more than one and a half million *minots* of wheat.” That was almost two and a half million bushels.

“And who is to harvest the wheat?” Bright Star asked. “All the Canadian farmers are serving in the militia and are miles away from their crops.” The only people who had no trouble bringing in their harvests were the Indian villagers, where the women tended the crops.

“You see the problem.” Fontaine scratched the side of his nose. “Quebec has farmers but no food. Montreal has food but no farmers. So we must—you must—harvest the wheat yourselves. All women, children, and elderly. We are here to supervise the harvest in the neighboring farms. And we are to be billeted at that house for as long as it takes to send the wheat up to Quebec.”

Catherine tilted her head, considering this. “What about the wheat brought from France this spring by the purveyor general? We heard Monsieur Cadet brought fifteen transports full for the army.” It had been an astonishing feat, bringing them across an ocean dominated by the British Royal Navy. More so, since Joseph-Michel Cadet was a butcher from Quebec who had risen to the challenge of provisioning New France’s colonial government.

“Those transports carried enough for twenty thousand rations for two months. But there are thirty thousand soldiers,

sailors, warriors, and civilians to feed.” Moreau’s voice was low and matter-of-fact. “Monsieur Cadet’s provisions barely lasted until the end of July. Your soldiers are starving, mademoiselles. Civilians, too. This harvest has always been part of Cadet’s plan. The situation is critical, but you can help. In fact, we must insist. Resisting would be breaking the law.”

Bright Star looked to Catherine, but it was Thankful who laid her moccasin aside and stood. “If it is help you need, you shall have it. You don’t need to threaten us.”

Moreau plucked the weightless orders from the scale and returned the paper to his waistcoat. “A wise response, mademoiselle. Now, you will take us to the house at once.”

Defiance rose up in Catherine. She was as willing to help feed the hungry as Thankful, and yet she chafed at the demand for her house. “The house is otherwise occupied. Pitch tents if you must, but you will not evict us from our home.”

Fontaine shrugged his arms out of their straps and set his pack on the floor. Reaching into an outer pocket, he pulled a plug of tobacco from a paper bag and tucked it into his cheek. Sitting on a barrel of rum, he stretched out one leg and crossed his arms. “We may do whatever we say. How many live there now?”

“Three.”

Moreau laughed. “Bah! And here I thought you would tell me a family of ten slept within those walls. That’s plenty of room for everyone. We’ve suffered tighter quarters than that, by far. I won’t sleep outside when it rains every other day here. We’ll learn how to get along. Consider it proof of your patriotism, *ma chère*.”

Two strange men living with two women and a sixty-year-old, one-armed man? Catherine balked. Patriotism had nothing to do with it.

Bright Star pursed her lips and gave a tiny shake of her head. In Mohawk, she said, “I do not trust them.”

“You don’t trust anyone,” Catherine hissed, irritation edging her tone. “I can handle this.”

“Of course you can,” Bright Star lashed back. “You manage everything so well on your own.”

“You make it sound like a weakness to take care of one’s own affairs,” Catherine murmured.

“Weakness is dismissing good counsel because you’re so convinced of your own strength.”

“*Totek!*” Raising her palm, Catherine halted the conversation. This was not the time to air lingering grievances.

“If you are quite finished . . .” Moreau cleared his throat. “You really have no choice in the matter of our lodging.” He leaned on a display table, and it wobbled on its uneven legs, sending tallow tapers rolling to the floor. “We need a place to billet.”

Catherine scooped the fallen candles and stacked them like cordwood on a silver platter. “And I have one for you. Not our home, but another. It is smaller, but if you’re used to cramped quarters, you’ll do fine. You’ll be out of the rain, comfortable and dry, and you’ll have the place all to yourselves. Better for all of us, no? Collect yourselves, messieurs, and follow me.”

Thankful caught Catherine’s eye as Fontaine hoisted his pack onto his back once more. “Not your house, surely?”

“It was never my house.” She led the men outside.



Catherine escorted the soldiers through a thicket of oaks, maples, and pines. When they emerged, a small wooden house came into view.

Fontaine spit into the grass. “It’s a cabin.”

“It will do.” Moreau asked her to show them in.

How she had loved coming here the first few times. Visiting had been like trading secrets. “*You won’t be empty for long,*”

she had whispered into the barren rooms, filling them with expectation. In her imagination, she had fancied she heard the house whisper back, *“Oh, the joy you will find here, if you can only endure the wait.”*

Lies, both of them. But by now she’d grown used to the truth.

Two rockers swayed on the porch as she opened the front door and bade the soldiers enter. A breeze lifted the edges of the curtains inside before they hung limply once more at the windows. She had sewn them herself, and Thankful had embroidered flowering vines along the edges.

Fontaine’s footsteps echoed as he trudged from one room to the next and up the stairs before coming back again. “You’ll be wanting the bed, then,” he muttered to his superior.

Moreau eased his pack from his shoulders and lowered it into a corner. “Naturally. You have a bedroll, Fontaine, and a roof over your head. You’ve nothing to complain about.” He turned to Catherine and gave a small bow, then straightened. “This will serve, mademoiselle. Thank you.”

“Then I’ll take my leave. Good evening, messieurs.”

“What’s this?”

Catherine turned to find Fontaine pulling something white from between the windowsill and the wall. An envelope.

“Catie,” Fontaine read. “Is that you? You have mail. From the wall.” He chortled but held it out to her all the same.

She crossed the room to retrieve it, then bobbed in a curtsy and walked away, vaguely registering that Moreau was issuing instructions about beginning the harvest in the morning.

Closing the door on his voice, she tucked the envelope into her pocket. She’d seen the handwriting and recognized it. No good could come of reading the letter inside, this she knew. The sentiments it contained belonged to a different time, long buried. She had no business resurrecting them.

Catherine marched away, memories of the cabin and the

promises it represented trailing her like cobwebs. Stepping over a gnarled root, she steadied herself on a sugar maple trunk scarred from last winter's tapping. Light lanced through the leaves in spears until she broke free from the woods.

Bright Star, a bale of fur on her back, ducked into the trading post. She came out a few moments later, tumpine in hand.

Catherine intercepted her on the way to the dock. "I'll take over from here."

"In that?" Bright Star scoffed with a derision that seemed to go deeper than Catherine's tight bodice and burdensome skirts, down to the person she'd become to fit them. Catherine suspected that her sister would not spend time in her company at all were it not for the trading work that tied them together. "There are only three left. I will do this and then go. I'll return with the porters for the journey when they're ready."

Catherine nodded, and the sisters' paths diverged.

Her house loomed large as Catherine strode toward it. Made of oyster-grey fieldstone, with two chimneys thrusting from the roof, it was more reminiscent of Gabriel Duval's privileged roots than of the youthful rebellion and wanderlust that compelled him to forsake propriety for the adventure of trapping and trading.

Once inside, Catherine stepped out of her moccasins and climbed the stairs. The door to her chamber made no sound as she closed it.

A tread on the stair signaled Thankful's approach. "Catherine? Are you all right?"

"Yes," she replied. The envelope weighed nothing, and yet it was a burden to be rid of. She drew it from her pocket and tossed it onto the mahogany bureau.

"If you're certain . . ." Thankful said, still outside the door.

Catherine wiped her palms on the apron over her skirt.

“Quite, thank you. I’ll be down for supper in just a bit.” A breeze billowed the mosquito netting draping her canopied bed.

Retreating footsteps, then silence. Her hands did not tremble as she picked up the envelope and beheld the firm hand that had spelled her name. *Catie*.

Only one person had ever called her that.