



Chapter 1

Late one summer afternoon in 1757, General Webb received disturbing intelligence. He was told that Montcalm, a French general, had been seen moving south on Lake Horicon with an army as “numerous as the leaves on the trees.” The Indian runner who brought this information also brought a request from Colonel Munro, the British commander of Fort William Henry on Lake Horicon. Munro had only a small number of soldiers at Fort William Henry and could not possibly hope to stop the large French army that was advancing with Montcalm. He urgently requested that General Webb send him a large number of reinforcements—3,000 or more if possible.

At Fort Edward, on the banks of the Hudson River, General Webb had more than 5,000 men at his command. Fort William Henry lay fifteen miles to the north. Webb knew that he could get reinforcements to Munro in a day’s time.

Shortly after General Webb received the request, he issued orders that a detachment of 1,500 men was to depart at dawn for Fort William Henry. Soon the noises of the troops preparing to march the next morning filled the air, covering the bubbling sounds of the Hudson River. The less experienced soldiers rushed anxiously about while the more experienced soldiers appeared calm as they got ready. But their eyes showed that they did not look forward to the dreaded warfare of the wilderness. As darkness settled over the area, the sounds of preparation faded. The trees cast their deep shadows over the rippling waters of the river. Soon the camp was as silent as the deep forest that surrounded it.

Just as day began to reveal the shaggy outlines of the tall pines by the river, the rattling echoes of the warning drums broke the silence of the night. The heavy sleep of the army was broken. In an instant the whole camp was in motion. Every soldier in the encampment was hurrying back and forth. Some were preparing to march into the wilderness toward Fort William Henry. Those not going were rushing to witness the departure of their comrades and to share in the excitement of the hour.

Before the rays of the sun softened the gray light of morning, the column of 1,500 soldiers, along with the horse-drawn wagons carrying

their equipment, began its march. The drums rolled, and the fifes played. Many of the soldiers had not been in battle before. But their fears and uncertainties were masked in the show of high military bearing. Those who remained behind watched with admiration as the column was swallowed up by the dark forest.

Tranquility settled over the camp again. But in front of General Webb's quarters, there were signs of preparation for another, much smaller departure. Six horses waited patiently in front of the cabin. One of the horses was an impressive military steed belonging to an officer.

A small group of soldiers, having nothing better to do, stood at a distance admiring the horses. One man in this group seemed different from the rest. He was not a soldier. He wore a sky-blue coat and close-fitting yellow trousers. He wore a spur on one of his boots. His physical appearance made him look awkward – his head was large but his shoulders narrow, his arms long and dangling but his hands small and almost delicate. He wore a hat with the brim turned up in three places. It gave his good-natured face a sense of dignity and trust.

This oddly dressed man was also different from the rest of the group in that he did not keep his distance while admiring the horses. He walked boldly to the officer's horse. After examining it, he exclaimed, "I have seen a lot of hors-

es, both in England and here in the Colonies, but I've never seen a horse like this before. He reminds me of the Biblical verse: 'He paws in the valley, and rejoices in his strength.... He smells the battle far off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.' This horse would seem to be descended from that horse described in the Bible, wouldn't you say?"

Receiving no reply, he turned and found himself face to face with a silent figure. It was the "Indian runner" who had brought the news of the French army the afternoon before. There was something frightening in his silent appearance. He had a knife and a tomahawk. His eyes glistened like fiery stars amid lowering clouds. But there was also an air of neglect about him. The colors of his war paint had blended in dark confusion about his fierce face, making him look even more savage.

The two men looked at each other silently. Then their attention was drawn to the door of General Webb's cabin. From the door a young officer and two young women emerged, along with the general.

The General turned to the young officer and said, "Major Heyward, make sure that these two women get safely to their father. Colonel Munro is expecting them before nightfall."

"I will, Sir," replied Heyward.

Duncan Heyward then proceeded to help

Alice, the younger of the two women, onto her horse. As she mounted, the morning breeze blew her green veil aside. This revealed a glimpse of her dazzling complexion, her golden hair, and her bright blue eyes. She gave Heyward a lively smile that lit up her face like the gentle glow of the morning sun that hung low above the trees.

Heyward then turned to help Cora, the other young woman, onto her horse. Cora was four or five years older than her sister. She was graceful and of the same exquisite proportions as Alice. Because of her greater maturity and sense of modesty, Cora was careful not to let the breeze brush her veil aside.

Mounting his military steed, Heyward saluted General Webb. The three then turned their horses toward the northern entrance to the encampment and proceeded at a slow pace. Three soldiers on horseback accompanied them. As the small group approached the camp entrance, the Indian runner glided past them on foot to lead the way along the military road ahead. His swift and silent movements startled the two young women. Alice let out a slight gasp. Cora made no sound. But in the moment of surprise, her veil fell open. Her face showed a look of pity, admiration, and horror as her dark eye followed the easy motions of the Indian runner. Cora's hair was shining and black, like

the feathers of a raven. Her complexion, darker than that of her sister, appeared charged with rich blood. Her face was flawlessly regular, dignified, and extremely beautiful. Before replacing her veil, she smiled to herself, revealing teeth whiter than the purest ivory. She bowed her head and rode on in silence, seemingly lost in her own thoughts.