

The next month was the most frightening I'd ever spent. There were a thousand things to know, and I didn't know one of them. I didn't know how to rub grease into fine leather to make it soft and rich, or starch a shirt until it crackled when you unfolded it. I couldn't saddle a horse. I couldn't prepare a bottle of wine for drinking—removing the cork, pouring the wine into a decanter, letting it sit for the proper length of time. I'd never even tasted wine. All these things and a thousand more I couldn't do but had to do, if I was to be a general's batman. So why didn't Brock get rid of me? Why didn't he send me back to my barracks and have me replaced with someⁿ one who knew *something*, at least, about how a general's batman behaves? I'm not sure of the answer, but I have an idea. For one thing, I learned quick. I didn't know much, but there wasn't much I had to be told twice. Although most of the

staff ignored me, there was a maid there, Maggie, who seemed to like me. She showed me how to cook and sew and take grass stains out of white trousers. 'Just be patient,' she told me once, when I fumed at not being able to make the general's brass buttons shine. 'You're learning, and as long as you're learning he'll put up with you.' He put up with an awful lot. Like the morning I prepared his bath and forgot to add the cold water. He stepped in, let out a howl that would send a regiment into retreat, and came storming into the hall stark naked. "I wanted to be bathed, not poached!" he shouted, and disappeared back inside. Maggie showed me how to draw a proper bath. And there was the day I cinched the general's saddle wrong and he solemnly slid off the back end of his horse, saddle and all. I was sure that was the end. But he just showed me how to properly saddle a horse. It was as though he liked to show me things. He taught me a lot about horses. Alfred was his horse—a big grey stallion that he'd had for years. He showed me how to feed him, and clean out his stable, and groom him and comb his mane. A lot of people thought it was strange that a general who should be preparing for war was spending time showing a boy how to care for a horse. But I think he wanted to do it. He worked late into every night on papers and letters and maps, and he was up every morning before dawn. I think showing me how to do simple things relaxed him, helped

him not to think too much. He also decided to educate me. Mostly this meant correcting how I spoke. He complained that I never said my "g' s" in words like "cleaning" or "thinking," and that my subjects never agreed with my verbs, whatever that meant. "You were born with the accent of your people, and sadly there's nothing we can do about it," he told me once. "But we do not have to tolerate that accent *and* shoddy speech as well." It was frightening, but it was exciting too. I was learning things—things I'd never learned on the farm, and never would have learned. Brock lived in a different world from mine, a world of officers and politicians and rich folk, where people were polite and ate fine food and talked about serious things as though they were unimportant, and unimportant things as though they were serious. I thought of my cousin Seth. *He'd never* learn how to decant a bottle of claret. It made me feel superior. I also spent a lot of time travelling. With the outbreak of war most of the troops in the garrison had been sent to the Niagara frontier. Brock often sailed across the end of the lake to Fort George to supervise the defences. Whenever he went, I went with him. The first time I sailed in the tiny ship my stomach felt like glass, but after that things got better. I started to look forward to the trips. When Brock was in York he would meet with local politicians and militia officers. The militia were local civilians who were given some training in soldiering and then told to stand ready in case a battle was coming up. But many

of the militia seemed unwilling to mobilize. There were crops to attend to, and families to protect. No one was really certain how many could be counted on if it came to a battle. But without more troops, how could Brock defend Upper Canada? The British had only 1,200 soldiers in uniform to defend a colony that stretched from Fort Maiden in the west to Lake Superior in the North to the Ottawa River in the east. There were other troops in Lower Canada, but the Governor General—Brock's superior— was in Quebec and wanted an army kept there. It should have been hopeless, and many people said it was. But rumour had it the Americans were having trouble with their soldiers, too. Farmers there didn't seem any more eager to go off to war than we did. Troops were complaining about bad food, bare feet, and no pay. It sounded familiar. Still, the Yankees had put together two armies, each one larger than all the British regulars put together. One had reached Detroit, and was preparing to cross the river to the Canadian side. The other was gathering on the Niagara River, and would be ready to cross, the officers figured, at any time. I think I knew more about what was going on than most soldiers. I could hear conversations coming through doors. It seemed to me things were coming to a head. I kept my mouth shut.

It was a grey morning in late July when the soldier, as

exhausted as the horse under him, rode up to Government House and demanded to see General Brock. Brock was shaving, but when he heard the message he came bounding to the front door, his face still half-covered in soap. "Are you from Amherstburg?" "Yes sir. I have a message from Colonel St. George at Fort Maiden." Brock tore open the envelope and began to read. The news was bad. You could tell when the news was bad by his face, which became frozen, expressionless, as though he was afraid of betraying his feelings. "Fields." He wheeled around to where I was standing. "Go to the garrison. See if Colonel Procter has arrived yet from Fort George. If he has, ask him to come here immediately." I rushed to the garrison. Procter was pouring water over his head to wash off the dust of the ride from Fort George when I burst in with the message. Procter stared, then stalked out of the room without bothering to dry himself and called for his horse. When I got back to Government House Procter and Brock were already in the library, talking. They'd forgotten to close the door completely. It was my duty to stand outside the door in case I was needed, so there was no way I could keep from overhearing. I strained to catch every word. Brock was speaking. "The Americans have crossed the Detroit River and are encamped at Sandwich. We can expect an attack on Fort Maiden any day." For a moment Procter was silent. Finally he spoke up.

"Sir, can Fort Maiden resist?" Someone in the room was pacing. It had to be Brock. "Colonel St. George doesn't think they can. He has only two hundred regular troops against an invading army of two thousand. The local militia seems reluctant to fight— they're desperate to return to their farms. Many are deserting. The Indians are accusing our soldiers of giving up before the battle. They may be right." "Can we get reinforcements to them?" "From where? Their army on the Niagara could strike us at any time. And we receive no reinforcements from Quebec. Governor-General Prevost refuses to send more men while there is a chance of ending the war by negotiation. He fears provoking the Americans. Since they have invaded Upper Canada, I would say they are already provoked." "Sir." Procter's voice was eager, even excited. "If we can turn the Americans back at Amherstburg it will be a great blow against them. Their volunteers will abandon their army. And the Americans might decide we're too strong for an attack across the Niagara." "I agree." This was Brock again. "We cannot afford to lose Amherstburg. If we do we will have armies against our back as well our front. But without more men, how can I?" "It could already be too late." Procter's mood became gloomy. "By the time our troops arrive, Fort Maiden could have fallen." "Nevertheless, we must act." I could imagine Brock running his hand through his hair. It was a habit with him when he was thinking hard.

"We will detach part of our force at Fort George on the Niagara, and send it to Fort Erie. It, at least, is closer to Detroit. The men there can reach either battle in time if they must. "We will also send several detachments down the valley of the Thames River. They will recruit as many militia as they can and be ready to repel the Americans, should they attempt to push eastward." He paused for a moment. "Colonel Procter." "Sir." "If it were my choice, I would leave for Amherstburg myself in the morning. But for now I must stay here. I am sending you to Amherstburg in my place, to relieve Colonel St. George. He is an able commander, but a cautious one. This is no time for caution." "I am honoured, sir." "Honour us all, Colonel, with a victory." Procter's face when he left the library was sombre. But the minute he was out the front door he raced toward his horse. Brock came out of the library. "Fields." He motioned me toward him. "Sir." "Pack a light kit for me. Two uniforms, other necessary clothing, and toiletries—three weeks' worth." "Yes sir." "Pack a kit for yourself," Brock added. "And be ready with food for the both of us." He turned, then paused and looked back at me. "Be very sure everything is ready for us to depart at any time. One way or another, we shall be

leaving this house soon." "Yes sir." He disappeared down the hall. I set to work, with Maggie's help. She made me pack, unpack, and repack the trunk over and over, "until you can do it in your sleep," she said. I soon knew every item in that trunk like it was my own. Brock was up even later that night. I stayed awake too, and brought him a sandwich at midnight, though he didn't ask for it. Sometimes, I noticed, he forgot he was hungry. He was happy to see the sandwich. The general loved roast beef with horseradish. "All packed?" he asked. "Yes sir. The trunk is in the closet in the main hall." "I'll look at it in the morning. That's all, Fields." I stepped back to the door. "Fields." He turned in his chair. "Let me ask you a question." "Yes sir?" "If a large animal, let us say a moose, appeared in the woods in front of you, how would you protect yourself?" I gazed at him blankly. "Sir?" "How would you protect yourself?" he repeated. "Would you run at him and try to frighten him off, or escape up a tree?" I had no idea what he was talking about. Why did he want to know about a moose? But he'd asked a question, and he was a general, and I had to give an answer. I thought for a moment. "I guess... I guess I would run at him sir. But I'd size up the nearest tree while I was doin' it." "*Do-ing*, 'Fields."

"Do-ing, sir." He nodded. "Thank you. Good night, Fields." "Good night, sir." I left him and went to my bed in the kitchen, to lie awake and wonder why a general would be interested in a moose.

The next two weeks seemed like a constant rush toward doing nothing. Brock returned to Fort George, and then came back again to Fort York. He spent endless hours with officers and merchants and politicians, meeting and organizing. But despite all the talk no one seemed to know what was going to happen. Two Yankee armies were on our door-step. We probably didn't have enough men to beat even one of them. We certainly didn't have enough men to fight both. Everyone said Fort Maiden was finished. Most predicted Fort George would be next. Everyone was waiting—for the Yankees to take Amherstburg, for the invasion at Niagara to begin, for the final battle. Not many people doubted how the battle would end. But I became convinced everyone was wrong. Brock was building to something. I didn't know what. But each day he seemed more determined to... to what? He had an idea. I couldn't tell you what it was, but it had formed in his mind. He would pause halfway to where he was going, and just

stare ahead, frozen motionless, maybe for a minute. Then he would shake his head, mutter something, and go on. I didn't know what his plan was, but it was coming together in moments like that. He couldn't see it himself perhaps, not fully. But once it was formed, he would act. How could I know this? I was just a servant, after all, in charge of running errands and pressing clothes and making roast beef sandwiches. I was the last person in the world to make predictions about this war. But I was getting to know Brock, maybe better than some others knew him. He was a distant man, reserved with his officers and men, positively cold to civilians. I don't think he had a single friend. I don't think he'd ever had one. But I saw him at night, when everyone else was in bed and he was alone in his study. Once I arrived with food he didn't know he wanted. I found him walking around a map, around and around, studying it from every angle. Suddenly he plunged at it, stabbed a finger at the middle and practically shouted, "There!" At that moment I felt certain a battle was about to be won. I caught glimpses of him—the way he would arrange his face the second before he stepped into a room to greet people, the way he would stop in mid-stride to watch a robin wrestle a worm out of the ground, as if the robin—or maybe the worm—held the secret to the war, the way he would ask Maggie if her daughter was over the croup and listen gravely while Maggie explained how you dealt with a sick child. One morning, while I was in the kitchen pressing his

uniform, he suddenly wandered in and sat down at the table. I asked him if he needed anything, but he just waved me away—"No, no, carry on." Sol went on pressing his coat, while he looked out the window at the clothes flapping on the line in the morning breeze. 'Jeremy?' he said suddenly. "How did you get here?" "Sir?" "How did you get into the army? Do your parents know you're here?" "My parents are dead, sir." "I'm sorry." There was no false grief in it, just a sort of acknowledgement. "I left the farm after my mother died, and walked here." "Did you want to become a soldier?" "No sir. I just wanted to see things. When Captain Stanton came along, I decided to join up." He leaned back in the kitchen chair and studied me. "Why didn't you stay on the farm?" he asked. I thought for a moment, and then answered with the truth. "I'm not a farmer, sir." He considered this for a moment. "No," he said finally, "I don't think you would make a good farmer. I must say, though, you have become a rather good batman." My face flushed. "Thank you, sir." "Watch how you press that collar." "Yes sir." And he left. If I'd known a hymn, I'd have sung it.

August fifth dawned grey and rainy. I was up with the sun,

but when I went to Brock's room he was already dressed and at work. I brought him some breakfast and a pot of coffee and got out of his way. He seemed different this morning, even more intense. Shortly after nine he came bounding out of his room, shouting my name. I ran out from the kitchen and met him at the front door. "Sir?" He handed me a note. "Fields, go to the garrison and give this message to Major Watson. Then come back here and make sure my kit is ready to be loaded onto a wagon. See to it you're packed as well." Before I could even reply he was out the door and on his horse. I sprinted from Government House to the garrison. Major Watson was still finishing his breakfast when I reached the officer's mess, panting. He read the note with his mouth full of bacon and eggs. Suddenly he stopped chewing and swallowed hard. "Cheevers!" A young officer ran up. "Sir!" "Take three men. Find the commanders of the militia and have them report here immediately. And muster the men. Have them ready to march on an hour's notice." "Yes, *sir*.» Weeks we had spent waiting, drilling, doing nothing. Now, in an instant, everything was action. Soldiers ran from one place to another. Even officers half jogged. Horses and mules were hitched to wagons. Men with lists called out numbers, while other men counted sacks of things and

shouted numbers back. It looked like complete confusion —to anyone who wasn't a soldier. I didn't have much time to watch. I went back to Government House and unpacked and repacked the trunk one more time. Then I went to Brock's bedroom. He had already packed a smaller trunk beside his bed with maps and papers and a set of pistols. I dragged it downstairs, and loaded it and the big trunk onto a wagon that had been brought around. Brock had left more instructions. He wanted a small table, chair, and cot loaded into the wagon as well. We would find them in the attic. Brock was at the legislature. He sent a note ordering all militia and garrison officers to a counsel at Government House at two in the afternoon. Most arrived early. They paced about, looked at each other, sent off notes to their troops, and paced some more. Brock was late getting back. He strode through the front door and into the library, motioning the other officers to follow. No one even thought to close the door. I took up my station outside, ready and listening. Brock wasted no time. "I have prorogued the legislature." He paused a moment, to let it sink in. I wasn't sure what it meant, but it sounded serious. "Since the civilian government is now temporarily suspended," Brock continued, "there is no need for me to attend to its needs. I have decided to move into the field. We are going to engage the enemy." Someone muttered, "Here, here." The rest were silent. There had been rumours that not all the officers were as eager to fight as Brock was.

"Do you plan to relieve Amherstburg, sir, or concentrate on the Niagara front?" one of them asked. "Both." "But sir—" "Here is what I intend to do. Gentlemen, if you will look at this map." Brock had made up his mind. "I plan to leave this evening for Port Dover. I have already sent word for the Norfolk militia to be ready for us when we arrive." An older man, with an accent like my own, spoke gravely. "If the Norfolk militia is to march with you sir, the York militia will not be denied." The news clearly pleased Brock. "It gladdens my heart to hear it, sir. Very well, then. My plans are to leave this evening by boat for Burlington Bay. I will take one hundred of the York militia with me. From Burlington Bay we will march to Dover, then sail to Amherstburg." "But sir," one of them interrupted. "If the Americans attack at Niagara, you will be hundreds of miles away." "I do not believe the Americans are ready to attack. They are as cautious there as in Detroit—everything must be perfect, the gods themselves must be visibly smiling, before they will move. We still have time. "As soon as we arrive at Amherstburg, I plan to combine our troops with the troops and Indians now there and attack the American army. Once it is defeated we will rush the troops back to Niagara, to be ready for the American attack there. "Well gentlemen, any questions?" For a while there was only silence. No one seemed to

know what to say. Finally, someone spoke up. I thought I noticed a slight tremble in his voice. "Sir, the Americans have more than two thousand troops in Detroit now. Even if the militia turns out and the Indians agree to fight, you will have barely half that. Surely we can only hope for victory by taking a defensive stance." "We have no time for defence. We must attack before the Americans realize what we've done." There was silence again. Even without being able to see them I could feel the doubt in the room. They didn't believe in their general's plan. Brock knew it too. "I understand your concern," he said. "We are taking a considerable risk. But we must take risks if we are to have even a hope of success. And I believe this plan will succeed. "Gentlemen, I have studied my enemy. I know the generals who command the Yankee armies. I have never met them, but I have gone over every battle they have fought, and they are both weak. Their General Hull, in Detroit, has had a week to attack Amherstburg, and he has not. Why? Because he is a timid man, and will not attack unless he can be certain, absolutely *certain*, of success. I would have thought success at Amherstburg would be as certain as one could hope for, but it seems it is not certain enough for General Hull. "The commander in the east, General Dearborn, is no better. Did you know he is so fat that he has to be lifted onto his horse? Fat generals are bad generals, gentlemen. They do not seize the moment. They are too busy getting onto their horses.

"And it seems certain now that we can count on the support of the Indian nations. The Shawnee leader Tecumseh has formed a large confederation, including the Wyandot, the Delaware, the Kickapoo, the Potawatomi, the Lake Indians, and others. The Americans are terrified that if they lose a battle the Indians will show no mercy. "So. I believe the Americans will not attack Niagara just as they have not attacked Amherstburg. They fear the consequences of battle. And armies that are full of fear can never gain victory." And that was that. There were more orders, more consultations, but the decision had been made. Brock had made it. There was nothing to do now but obey. The officers left Government House shaking their heads and muttering. But once out the door they practically broke into a run. There was much to do. They only had hours to get ready. These men may not have believed in Brock's plan, but they'd agreed to follow him, and there was nothing for it but to prepare. I was kept busy running messages, and in between stuffing as much food into a satchel as I could. I had no idea what we would be eating during the trip, and I wanted the general to enjoy Maggie's cooking for as long as possible. It was early evening when Brock rode up on Alfred. I was in the wagon, securing the trunks. He took a quick look at the luggage, and nodded his head in satisfaction. "Look after my trunks, Fields. I will win the war, if you will not lose my kit." "I won't sir." He galloped off toward the garrison, and we slowly

followed. Already the volunteer troops were streaming into the garrison and organizing themselves at the docks. A schooner rested at anchor, ready to sail. The men and supplies rowed out on boats. It seemed to take forever— getting Alfred to stand quietly on a barge during the ride out to the schooner was especially exciting—but it wasn't even midnight when the last of us clambered on deck. The night was dark, the stars hidden by clouds. A fine mist wet the skin and soaked through the clothes. The sailors scrambled up the masts and unfurled the sails. I stood amidships and looked back to see Brock standing on the deck above me, staring hard into the night. The wind caught the sails. The ship shuddered forward. We were on our way to war.

We sailed through the night, reaching the harbour of Burlington Bay as the sun rose from the flat waters of Lake Ontario. It took several hours to unload the boats and form up the men, but by noon we were on our way again. Now that we were finally on the move, every hour seemed to count. We marched at a quick step, and men who had never marched behind anything except a plough sweated and cursed the heavy kits on their backs. Every now and then Brock would leave the front of the column and ride down the line, examining the troops, calling for the men to close up, encouraging an exhausted soldier, reprimanding a sloppy sergeant. It seemed to help. The sun was low in the sky when we made camp outside a little village called Ancaster. Word came that I was to take the wagon to the general's tent, in the middle of the camp. The driver maneuvered us through the instant city of canvas being thrown up, and I found Brock pacing about impatiently. "I was wondering where you'd got to," he snapped. "I need another uniform, and this one must be cleaned."

I hurriedly unpacked his clothes and set to work with a damp sponge at getting the dust off his uniform. (Maggie had shown me how.) I was polishing his sword when he emerged from his tent. "Never mind that, Fields." He took his sword from my hands. "Go into the village and find some place with wine and cheese and bread. I will ride into the village in an hour. Have it ready for me then." "Sir." I scurried away toward the village, then wondered how I would find wine and cheese and bread without any money. It was too late to ask. I continued on. The village was packed with people. Dozens of men and women walked up and down its street, mostly in pairs. Little knots of half a dozen or so would form, then dissolve, then re-form. When I found the inn it was just as crowded. I had to squeeze through the men who gathered around the tables. The talk was about war. Riders from our column had spread out and ahead of us, calling the militia to arms and to meet here. Most of them had just arrived. There was plenty of argument. Many of these men wanted to fight. The people around here were the descendents of Loyalists, and they had no wish to become Yankees again. But the winter wheat was ripe and ready to harvest. This was no time to be leaving a farm. What would their wives do? The men argued back and forth among themselves, lowering their voices only when one of them noticed my uniform. I reached the bar, but had trouble getting anyone's attention. Finally I shouted at a big, fat man who stood at

the end and looked to be the owner. He scowled at me. "What do you want, boy?" I stiffened. "I am batman to General Brock. He sends his compliments, and requests the honour of your hospitality in the form of a light supper of wine and cheese and bread." Brock had taught me to talk like that when doing official things. I still wasn't very good at it. Other officers usually smiled when I tried. But the fat man was impressed. "Pleased, I'm sure, to serve His Excellency," he gushed. "Will His Excellency be dining here?" "No. He asks that I bring the supper to him. He is to arrive within the hour." But I was wrong. Minutes later there was a commotion outside and someone shouted, "There he is!" The inn emptied. I grabbed the food from the startled fat man and rushed outside. I didn't bother to ask how much it cost. Brock and several officers were talking with some important-looking men at one end of the street. I pushed through the crowd forming around them, and reached the general just as a tall man in a tall hat began addressing the crowd. "Fellow citizens, I beg your attention...." He was someone important in the village, which gave him the right to launch into a long speech. I caught Brock's eye, and raised the covered plate of food and flask of wine. He nodded his head to the side of the crowd. When I got there he stepped away from the soldiers and the speaker and took the plate. It was dark by now—the only light came

from two torches behind the important man. Most people there never knew the commander of all British forces in Upper Canada ate his supper standing up while they listened to a speech. The timing was good—Brock was just finishing the last of the cheese when the fellow reached the end. ". . . With the love of our King in our hearts and the strength of righteousness in our arms, we shall preserve our glorious land and repel the alien invaders. God save the King!" There was some polite applause, but little more. The men in the crowd knew the British were here to ask them to march away to war. They weren't at all sure they wanted to go. But they'd been promised that Brock would talk to them about his plans, and they had come to hear Brock. The other speeches were just something to put up with. The important man then introduced Brock, telling them the general needed no introduction, and then spent so much time introducing him anyway that Brock was able to finish off the wine. The introduction probably would have gone on longer, except that Brock stepped back into the light of the torches, and the important man's remarks were drowned in a chorus of "Let him speak!" "Let the general speak!" The man gave up and moved back, motioning Brock to take his place in the circle of light. Brock stepped forward, cleared his throat (a bit of bread caught in the gullet, maybe), put his hand on the handle of his sword, and began to talk. He spoke quietly, without fancy words. He would have

been impossible to hear, except for the dead silence that filled the street. "Gentlemen, ladies, I am grateful you are here tonight. My purpose in asking you here is to tell you of your government's plans to repel the American invaders, and to call for the militia to fight." He outlined the plan of the campaign. He left nothing out—if an American spy were in the crowd, the enemy would have known everything. But the crowd knew that too. They realized that Brock was showing how much he trusted them. "... Many of you are the descendents of those who came to this colony because of their loyalty to Great Britain. Many others are the descendents of British veterans who were given land in reward for their services to the King. Now *you*, gentlemen, are being called upon. I cannot promise you an easy time. There will be fighting. You will be away from your homes and fields until the snow arrives. It will be difficult for you and your families." He gazed at the dark faces that gazed back at him from the shadows outside the light. Were they loyal? Would they follow him? "... It will be difficult, but I believe the end will justify the difficulty. For I believe we shall defeat the invading armies. I cannot promise that we will. I can only promise you that I will give everything, even my life if need be, to protect you from your enemies and preserve this colony for your descendents and for the Empire." And that was it. He turned, nodded to his men, and stepped out of the light. But not before someone shouted,

"God save General Brock!" and the cry was taken up by every voice on the street. "God save General Brock!" "God save the King!" "God save Upper Canada!" Brock mounted Alfred and, nodding to the cheering crowd, disappeared into the darkness. I made my way back to the camp, to Brock's tent. He didn't want anything, ignored me really. He was bent over his maps again, measuring distances by the light of a sputtering candle. I found him a better candle, then retreated to the wagon a few feet away. I'd fallen asleep by the time the officers arrived, but I was soon awake and listening. "... Astonishing, sir. More than two hundred men have asked to join us, and we hear that more are proceeding directly to Port Dover. Sir, we won't have enough room in the boats. What are we going to do with them?" "Bless them," he said finally. "Bless them all. Well, pick the men you feel are best able to endure the campaign, and have them ready to march with us at dawn." All through the next day we marched farther south and farther west. There was something thrilling in the air. After all the months of waiting, now we were going to fight. The men sang songs as they marched. I'd never really sung before, but I found I liked it. All the while men kept appearing, muskets in hand, asking if they could join the fight. If we'd had more boats at Dover, we could have sent Amherstburg a thousand men. It was late afternoon of our second day of marching

when we reached Lake Erie. Brock had already ridden ahead. As we approached the beach I could see him marching up and down along the shoreline, stopping every now and then to wave his arms at a collection of wooden boats hauled up along the sand. By now I knew the routine. I threaded the wagon through the encamping troops until I reached the spot in the middle where they always put Brock's tent. I moved the small table, the chair and the cot inside, then got someone to help me with the trunk. Then I raced over to the canteen where they were already at work on supper, and made sure the general's meal was being looked after. When it was cooked, I took it back to the tent, and let it warm over the nearest fire. Brock came stalking toward his tent about an hour later. He was accompanied by some officers and a man in a rough woollen outfit with a battered cap plastered to his head. The man's face was pale as soap, and it seemed to get paler the more Brock spoke. "This is intolerable." Brock grabbed his supper from me, and for a moment I thought he was complaining about the food. But it was the pale-faced man who was getting the general's abuse. "This is absolutely intolerable. There are not nearly enough boats here to move this army. I may have to leave half the men here on the beach. You could have cost us this war, you fool!" "But general—" "And what boats there are aren't seaworthy. Most of them would sink before we were out of sight of this beach.

You would make me the only general in history who *drowned* his army!" "Sir, if you would only—" "We will have to delay. We will have to spend all of tonight caulking and repairing the boats. Every man will have to work at it." "Sir, there are local men who can repair—" "Then get them here! Tell them we will do everything we can to assist. If a shipwright has an order for me, / will serve him!" "Sir, I truly believe—" "Why are you standing here? Didn't you hear my orders? Get to it. All of you!" "Sir!" That night I found myself with a brush in my hand, painting tar over the gaping seams of one of the boats. I had plenty of company—every man in the militia. We were allowed only a couple of hours of rest, in shifts, and then we were called back to work. I was covered in a black, gooey mess of tar. It was all over my clothes and hands, and eventually my face. Every now and then the men would strip and throw themselves into the cold waves that rolled onto the beach. They would shiver and rub their skin, trying to get the tar off, but it never worked. They came back wet and miserable, and were sent straight back to work. All that night and through the next day we were at it. My back ached from carrying endless buckets from huge cauldrons that ceaselessly bubbled with the filthy stuff. If I'd known any more, I might have worked on caulking the

seams with pitch, just about as bad as tar, or nailing fresh wood into place where rotten planks had been before. But farm boys aren't sailors, and I did the worst jobs, because they were the only ones I could do. Brock was around us constantly. He inspected every boat, over and over again, looking for flaws, encouraging the men. I don't think he slept at all. If he got food, it wasn't from me. I groaned the next morning when the drums called us to rise and make ready. Brock was gone from his tent. I had already loaded the trunks and furniture onto one of the boats, and now it suddenly occurred to me that I might be left behind. We'd been told there was room for only 250 of the men in the boats; a hundred others were being sent back to their farms. I raced down the beach, and found Brock giving orders about which companies were going in which boats. I asked a lieutenant what boat the general had assigned himself, and he impatiently pointed to the one at the western end of the beach. I trotted along until I found it—Brock had already had his small trunk moved there. I climbed in and perched myself on top. The boats were packed, almost overflowing. Twenty-five men apiece shoved and jostled for space. Eight of them manned the four oars. In the middle of each boat a small sail hung from a mast. At the bow an officer stood ready, while at the stern whoever knew anything about sailing manned the rudder. Until we reached Detroit, he would be the one in charge; the officer was nothing more than an ornament.

Our boat was loaded and ready when Brock finally arrived with another officer. He started to climb in, then noticed me. "Fields, what are you doing here? I don't need you. I want you to return to Government House." No! This was impossible! I couldn't get this far, and then be sent back. It was strange. I shouldn't have cared. This war, this army, this man—they shouldn't mean that much. I hadn't wanted to become a soldier, it just happened. I hadn't wanted to serve Brock. Someone else had decided for me. And the war? What did I care whose flag waved where? But somehow, now, I was part of it. It's all anyone around me had thought about, talked about, for weeks. It was the reason we were here. I had to be part of it. I wanted to see how it turned out. And I didn't want to leave Brock. I'd gotten used to looking after him. Looking after him was my job, and it was a good job. "Sir—" I hesitated. "Sir, I want to go. Sir, you need me." He raised an eyebrow. "I *need* you?" "Yes sir. Without me . . . you'll forget to eat." A laugh rippled through the men in the boat. Brock cleared his throat and it stopped. "Well." I could have sworn I saw the ends of his mouth twitch, as though he were forcing back a smile. "We can hardly have the general starve, can we? I suppose you'd better come. But if we all drown, don't blame me." "I won't, sir." The men on the shore helped push the boats into the surf that rolled up onto the shallow beach. It seemed to take

forever until the sand stopped scraping against the wooden hull and the boat floated free in the waves. There was a lot of shouting and swearing as the oarsmen tried to figure out how to make their boats work and those manning the rudders could man oeuvre their crafts into place. But eventually we formed a ragged line. Slowly, we began to inch our way across the water. Our course was west, southwest. Our next port of call: Amherstburg.

The rain returned, and it was cold and we were wet. It only took an hour on the water to convince me that the army was better than the navy. We stayed within sight of shore. The boats were too small and too leaky to risk open water. The endless rolling lake stretching to the southern horizon made me feel glad the shore was near. After about an hour the breeze picked up and we unfurled the sails. The oarsmen stopped rowing and we clipped along at a good pace. The slowest vessel was a schooner called the *Chippawa*. It had been sent from Niagara to escort us, but mostly it just held us up. The wind was too light to fill her sails, and she limped along, the rest of us having to pause regularly to give her a chance to catch up. If it weren't for the fact that she was carrying a hundred troops from Fort Erie, we might have left her behind. For a while things went well. We sailed west, the wind fair, the waves gentle. Except for the rain, I might have enjoyed it. It was mid-afternoon when we came upon Long Point

peninsula. The narrow ridge of sand stretched out into the lake for miles. It would take hours to sail around it. The captain of the *Chippawa* said there was a channel through the peninsula that was sometimes deep enough for his ship to get through. We found the channel, and our boats made it fine, but the *Chippawa* struck bottom. We had to climb out of our boats into waist-deep water and pull the schooner through with ropes. It was exhausting, and we were already exhausted. No one had got any decent sleep in days. Back in the boat, the wind fresher now and our pace faster, I found the lake taking hold of me. The great, gentle waves we rolled over were green and grey and edged with foam. I fell into some kind of trance watching them. Gulls screeched at us overhead. No one seemed to think much of gulls, but to me they were magnificent. Brock ignored the gulls, ignored the water. He sat at the bow of the boat staring ahead, silent, as though if he thought hard enough he could push us to Amherstburg faster. What was happening there? Had the Americans attacked the fort? Had they captured it? Was there even any point to this mission? No one knew, not even Brock. Late that day the sky grew darker and the clouds got lower, and the wind died. The captain of the *Chippawawdi* certain a storm was approaching. We headed for an inlet, Brock scowling at the sky and the delay. We hauled our boats onto shore, turned them over, and huddled underneath as the rain came lashing down, each man tight up against the other. We tried not to think of how miserable we felt. Brock was wetter than any of us. He kept leaving our boat to walk along the beach, talking with the sentries,

encouraging the men. The officers warned him he'd fall ill, but he ignored them. The man was impossible to understand sometimes. In the boats he was impatient, brooding, silent. Now, stuck on the beach in the middle of a storm, he seemed cheerful, even excited. "I would not have believed it," he whispered to an officer beside me in the middle of the night. "These men are soaked to the skin, exhausted. But their spirits are high. They're anxious to get on. I would have expected grumbling, calls to turn back. But every man seems determined to see this through." "They want to fight, sir," the young officer replied. "The men are eager to fight." "I wonder..." Brock stared out into the rainy darkness. "I wonder if the Americans are eager to fight?"

The next day was still cloudy, and colder now. The wind had a September bite to it, which cut through our wet clothes miserably. But within an hour of sunrise we were back on the water, cursing the wind and thinking about hot tea. It was a mistake to curse the wind. Shortly before noon it died, and the life went out of the sails. Brock ordered us to the oars again, and we rowed. It was back-breaking work, and we crawled along. A soldier was only good on the oars for an hour at most, and then he had to be taken off and replaced. The troops were getting more and more tired, and we were still a long way from our destination. And a battle lay ahead. Late that afternoon another storm came up. The boats

headed to shore again. Brock ground his fist into his palm when he gave the order. The wind and rain lasted until almost midnight. Then suddenly, it stopped. A clear, fresh breeze took its place. The call from the officers echoed along the beach. "Prepare the boats! Prepare to get under way!" We were going to sail in the dark. The fleet sailed in a column, led by a lantern hanging from the stern of the lead boat, our boat. I didn't like sailing in the dark. It was impossible to tell water from sky, up from down. I began to think about drowning, disappearing into dark waters, lost forever to light. I shook myself. When we hit the rock I was sitting on Brock's trunk, and the impact sent me pitching forward. We were all entangled in each other's arms and legs, trying to get ourselves straightened out, frightened we were sinking. "Steady on, men, the boat's all right." Brock's voice calmed things down. We had ridden up on the rock. There hadn't been much damage, but the problem now was to get off. The other boats following us were closing fast, probably wondering why the light from our lantern wasn't moving. Suddenly Brock stood up, grabbed the side of the boat, and jumped overboard before anyone could even call out. There was a great splash, and then there he was beside us, up to his shoulders in water, pushing on the boat. "Come on, men," he called out. "This is no place to get stuck." Every man jumped out at once and started pushing. The boat was off the rock in less than a minute. We climbed back in, soaked and laughing.

"Carry on, Mr. Billings," Brock called out to the steersman. "And no more rocks, please." The men shook their heads and laughed, as though their commander were some crazy relative they all loved anyway. I think the men had started to love Brock.

We reached Point Pelee that morning. Brock called the boats to shore. Many of the men dropped onto the sand and fell asleep where they were. Others made fires and boiled water for tea. We were only a few hours from Amherstburg. And we were weary to the bone. The tea I was making for Brock was barely steeped when a soldier on horseback came riding along the beach. As soon as Brock saw the rider he began striding toward him. "General Brock!" The soldier dismounted and saluted. "I've been riding along the shoreline from Amherstburg, sir, in search of your fleet." "Fleet is a rather grand word for it. What news?" "Sir, the Americans have withdrawn from the British side of the Detroit River. They are back in their own fort." Brock said nothing for a moment, just stared at the soldier disbelieving. "They've *retreated*? Are you *sure*?" "Yes sir. They crossed the river yesterday. They never attacked Fort Maiden." Brock turned away from us and walked down the beach alone. The officers stood about, watching him. He stopped, ran his hand through his hair, then swung about and walked briskly back.

"Prepare the boats. We must not rest again. We will row all day and all night, if need be." The soldiers groaned in disbelief when they heard they were leaving, but they picked themselves up, brushed the sand from their wet clothes, and prepared the boats. Within an hour we were off. The wind was good, and before long we had cleared Point Pelee. Brock pulled several maps out of his trunk and bent over them, ignoring everything else. The sun set, the sky darkened, but we rowed on. I was the first to notice the black outline of the far shore dead ahead. It was my first sight of the United States. The enemy. We sailed into a narrow channel. It was getting dark. In the distance a light shone from the top of a cliff. "The fort," said Brock. The men broke out the oars. We were so close now, and everyone was desperate to end this journey. A line of torches began winding down a cliff. By the time we reached the wooden landing at the foot of the cliff we could make out their scarlet coats in the flickering light. The moment we docked Brock jumped out of the boat and exchanged hurried salutes with the officers at the landing. I recognized one of them—Procter. He was the one Brock had sent to take over command of the fort. I didn't recognize the man beside him, a short, rough-faced fellow—old, yet fierce-looking. "General Brock." Procter saluted. "May I introduce Matthew Elliott, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at Amherstburg."

"Mr. Elliott," Brock nodded, "I am pleased by the reports of support among the Indians for our cause, and you are in no small measure the man we have to thank for it." "Only my duty, sir." Elliott's voice was coarse but strong. "Duty or not—" Brock stopped suddenly. A volley of musket fire crackled in the distance. "What is that?" "The Indians, sir," replied Elliott. "They're celebrating your arrival." "Make them stop," Brock snapped. "We have too little ammunition as it is." Elliott scowled, but nodded and left the group. Brock turned to Procter. "Are there dispatches for me?" "Yes sir. Quite a number. From Fort George, and Niagara, and Governor-General Prevost in Montreal." "I'll read them now. Fields, where are you?" I stepped forward. "Here, sir." "Find where I'm to be put and have my trunks sent there." "Yes sir." Then back to Procter. "I want you to call a meeting of all senior officers at this fort for midnight." "Midnight, sir?" "Midnight. We have no time to lose." He strode away from us toward the steep path that led to the fort. We followed. "Gentlemen," he said quietly, as he climbed the path. "They had their opportunity, and they failed to pursue it. Now it is our turn. And we're not going to let it slip away. "We're going to attack."

I found Brock's quarters inside the fort, and had the trunks and furniture sent there. The first thing I had to do was get his other uniform in shape. He'd been wearing the same one ever since we set sail, and it was time for a change. I unfolded the jacket, trousers and shirt, and cleaned and pressed them as best I could. I had just about finished when a corporal pounded on the door. "Private Fields!" I ran to open it. "What is it?" "General Brock says you know where his maps are. He wants them." Of course I knew where his maps were—I'd already unpacked them and put them on his desk. I gathered them up and followed the corporal through the darkened yard of the fort to a small room. Brock was there, reading letters. "Ah, here they are. Everything in order, Fields?" "Yes sir. Have you eaten, sir?" "Not yet. Maybe later. Is my other uniform ready?" Before I could answer there was a knock, and Elliott entered, accompanied by an Indian.

I had seen Indians before, but none like this. He was tall—almost as tall as Brock—and dressed in a suit of deerskin, with fringes along the arms and legs. His moccasins were covered by porcupine quills. I'd heard that some sailors wore earrings. This man wore three rings—in his nose. A large silver medal hung from his neck on a necklace of coloured shells. But his face was more striking than anything he wore. His bones seem sculpted, the smooth bronze skin covering high cheekbones, a broad chin, and a strong hooked nose. His eyes were dark and unreadable. Elliott spoke. "General Brock, this is the Shawnee chief, Tecumseh." Brock rose swiftly and held out his hand. "I am honoured to meet my fellow commander in our alliance against the Long Knives." (This is what the Indians called the Americans, because of the hunting knives they often carried.) Tecumseh gave Brock his hand. The two looked so different. Even among Englishmen Brock was unusually fair, with his pale skin and blond hair. Tecumseh spoke. His voice was deep and rich. He spoke no English, and Elliott translated. "I have received your request for my people not to fire their muskets. It is well advised. Muskets should be fired only at the enemy." Brock nodded. "I am glad you agree. Your Indian force, I am told, numbers six hundred men." Tecumseh nodded. "Some come each day, some leave each day. Like your militia." Brock smiled ruefully. "Very much like our militia. But

we will need every man if we are to defeat the Americans." "Are you going to attack?" Tecumseh asked directly. "Yes. We must attack and soon." Tecumseh nodded. "It is good to hear someone speak with a voice of action," Elliott translated. "When is your council of war?" "In an hour." Tecumseh nodded again. "I will be there." He turned to leave, then paused, and turned back to Brock. "It would be good for my people, if you would speak to them." "I will speak to them in the morning." "That is good." He spoke a few words to Elliott directly, then left. Elliott turned to go. "Elliott," Brock stopped him. "What did he say to you at the end, that you didn't translate?" Elliott's weathered face bent in to a smile. "Sir, he said, 'This is a man.' " Most of the next hour I spent locating the officers' mess and finding some bread and cold salted pork for Brock. By the time I returned the officers were already gathering for the meeting. Brock took the food without thinking and waved me away, then suddenly called out, "Fields." "Sir!" "Stay near the door. I may need you to run messages." "Sir!" He gave me a dark look. "And try to make a point of not hearing things." I blushed. "Yes, *sir!*"

It was impossible though. Everything they said inside carried through the door. Especially when my ear was up against it. Brock told the officers he was considering crossing the river and attacking Detroit. He asked each officer for his opinion. One by one they disagreed. The enemy outnumbered us. A superiority of two-to-one was needed to storm a fortified position. We could not count on the local militia. More American troops could be arriving at any time. Only two people sided with Brock. One was an old militia officer who, I learned, had known Brock for years. The other was Tecumseh. Brock listened, then began: "We must accept that we will always be outnumbered in this war—in men, in guns, in equipment. But the American general has shown us what he is made of. With superior forces, he failed to launch an assault on this fort—an assault that I am sure would have succeeded. "I believe we can defeat their army. They fear us." He turned to Tecumseh. "They particularly fear you and your warriors. "Here is what I propose: We will issue the militia with as many red coats as we have to spare, to make the Americans think our regular troops are more numerous. We will move the army to Sandwich, across the river from Detroit. At the same time, we will construct a gun battery and move what cannon we have into position there. "Meanwhile, we will dispatch a courier to Michilimackinac in the north, with a letter. His real purpose is to be captured by the Americans. The letter will

advise our forces there that we have five thousand Indians with us, ready to attack, and we need no more. Of course, we have not that number in our entire army, but this general may be frightened enough to believe it. "I propose to cross the Detroit River in three days. The Indian forces will slip across the night before and hide themselves in the bush. If our landing is opposed, they will attack from the woods. "My hope is that the Americans will choose to come out of the fort and attack us in the open. If they do, I believe our trained infantry will be superior to their untrained volunteers. "That is my plan, gentlemen. I count on your support and loyalty in carrying it out." There were no questions, no comments. Most of these officers had been opposed to Brock's plan since he first proposed it back in York. But there was no point in trying to change his mind.

The next morning after breakfast Brock walked out of the fort to talk to the Indians. He met them under an oak tree, just outside its walls. I watched from the gate, under a warm August sun and pale blue sky. Hundreds of dark-skinned men with painted faces fanned out across the open field. I had never seen clothing so elaborate—rich bands of beads were draped over soft leathers decorated with more beads, feathers, and metal. Beside them the British in their scarlet uniforms looked plain and dull. Someone told me warriors from more than

a dozen tribes were gathered on that field, from the Mohawk of Upper Canada to the Creek and Osage of the American South. They had been forged into an alliance by Tecumseh, and he alone held them together. Brock spoke briefly, Elliott translating into several different tongues. The Americans were pushing the Indians farther and farther west, he told them. The British had always respected the Indians and their homelands. Now the Long Knives were threatening the homes of the British. If the children of the Great King were forced from these lands the Long Knives would take everything away, and leave the Indians with nothing. "Together," he finished, "we shall protect both our peoples from the Long Knives. We will guarantee that your borders shall be respected, your people left free. We ask only that you help us as you have helped us before, in attacking this enemy we share." The Indians looked upon him silently, glancing occasionally at each other, sometimes nodding, sometimes shaking their heads. Then Tecumseh rose to speak. Standing there, beneath the oak, his long black hair flowing down his back, he seemed to me part general, part preacher. He reminded them of past wars, of Indian villages destroyed by the American invaders, of women and children killed, of land seized by settlers and cleared of trees and wildlife. "The soldiers of the Great King say they are our friends." He paused. "They are our friends when they need us. We do not forget that we have fought for the children of the Great King against the Long Knives before, and been

forgotten by the Great King when the fighting was over." There was bitterness in his voice, and bitter nods of agreement met the words. "But the British take little of our land, the Long Knives take much. The British ask only for skins and pelts. The Long Knives ask for everything.

"There is a British nation, and the nation of the Long Knives." His voice floated across the field of silent listeners. "We too must have a nation, to protect our lands and our people. The British have promised us this nation if we will fight for them. It is the only promise we have. Let us fight for our land!" A great roar rose up from the Indians in the field. They raised their arms and shook them at the summer sky and screamed words I didn't know. Tecumseh quietly nodded to Brock. Brock nodded back. My heart pounded in my chest. These were warriors! Wild, proud—they would fight for their land as fiercely as we would. More fiercely—this was more their land than ours. Then came the betrayal.

I was laying out Brock's clothes that night when I heard him speaking in the hallway outside with Procter. "I fear the Indians," worried Procter. "They are savage. In the heat of battle they can be unimaginably cruel." "Yes," Brock replied. "But they are splendid fighters. And the Americans fear them. Their reputation alone is worth a regiment to me." "Do you think their chief Tecumseh can control them?"

"Yes. He's a fine leader. He has united them in this dream of some kind of Indian nation. They believe him." He was silent for a moment. Then, "Of course it will never happen. He could never keep them together. And I doubt we could permit it if he did." He stepped into his room, but turned to Procter and didn't notice I was there. "Let them go on believing, Procter. We need them now more than they need us." "Good night, sir." "Good night." Then he saw me standing there, and saw the look on my face. Brock was lying to Tecumseh the way Uncle Will had lied to me. Deceit. That's all they knew. Deceit. Brock's pale face pinkened. "What are you doing here?" "Laying out your uniform." "Well is it done?" "Yes." "Then leave." I left quickly, avoiding his eyes. I stepped outside, paced across the parade ground, breathing heavily, walking to— where? There was nowhere to go. But I wanted to go. I wanted to get away from here. I'd believed in him. He was the first man I'd ever really believed in. But he was no different. He lied when it suited him. Cheated when it served his needs. There was no one you could trust. I wanted out of this army. I wanted to be away from this man.

The next day was one endless rushing about. There were a thousand things to be done—reorganizing the local militia, putting the cannons in place across the river from the American fort, marching the troops up to Sandwich, making the boats ready for the crossing. Brock was in constant motion, inspecting troops, inspecting equipment, giving orders and more orders. I kept out of his way. There wasn't much for me to do, except look after his laundry and his horse. (A difficult, high-strung horse—Alfred had been left at Niagara.) The general ate most of his meals in the officers' mess, and he seldom called for me. When we did see each other, neither said much. I couldn't be sure if he knew what I'd heard. If he did, he probably didn't care. Why would he care? What would it matter to him, that his batman knew he was going to betray the Indians? Why should it matter to me? Mama always told me the only two things in this world you could really trust were the love of God and your own two hands. What did it matter to

me what these British soldiers were up to? Better to do your job and keep your ears shut. But I couldn't. I felt sick. When I left the farm it seemed to me everyone good was dead and everyone alive was bad. ' Brock had changed that. I had admired him, grown to trust him, and he seemed to trust me. Now I knew he couldn' t be trusted, either. There was no one on earth you could trust. And I had my doubts about the love of God. Brock sent over a boat with three officers, demanding the surrender of Fort Detroit. It was ridiculous—they outnumbered us and outgunned us. The answer came back that if we wanted their fort, we'd have to fight for it. It sounded as though their General Hull wasn't quite so frightened after all. As soon as the reply came back we let them have it with our cannon at Sandwich. The American cannon answered, but the river was half a mile wide, and many of the shells from both sides damaged nothing but the grass. It didn't matter—Brock was out to scare the Americans, not blow them up. That night we slept under a sky littered with stars. At least we would have slept, except for the dull thunder of the cannon fire that punctured the night air and filled it with bitter smoke. But then, who could sleep anyway? We were going into battle tomorrow. The Indians had already left. They slipped into their canoes as soon as it was dark and glided across the still river. I had seen Brock with Elliott and Tecumseh talking to-

gether by the river's edge, just before the Indian chief left to join his men. They seemed to be talking over a plan. What the plan was, nobody knew. The dawn was beautiful. As we gathered along the shore, a mist rose off the river, softening the light and blending the colours of the grass and water and trees. Brock was in the first wave of boats. I was in the second, on a flat scow, holding the reins of the unhappy horse. As long as I live I will never forget the sight of our army crossing the river. The water was a smooth sheet. The boats glided silently across, each filled with men in brilliant scarlet uniforms. Just downstream, two warships sat at anchor, guarding our crossing. I knew I should be afraid. I was going into my first battle. But instead I was filled with a pride that choked my throat at this beautiful army crossing into America. We landed about three miles downstream from Detroit. As soon as the boats touched the shore the men were hurried off and hustled into formation by shouting, sweating sergeants. The Indians came out of the bush to watch us. They were there to attack any Americans who tried to stop the landing, but the Americans were still inside the fort. I threaded my way through the pushing, rushing soldiers, the horse in tow, until I found Brock. He was in the middle of a knot of officers, looking at a map and pointing in the direction of the fort. Elliott was with him. He knew this country as well as anyone born here. "... If you say so, Elliott, we'll form the line here," Brock said, pointing to the map, "and wait for them to come out." An Indian on horseback galloped toward us. Brock

looked up quickly. "What is it?" The Indian spoke to Elliott, who turned to Brock. "There are American troops about three miles away, marching toward the fort. Maybe four hundred of them." "Damn!" It was the first time I'd heard Brock swear. But in a moment he'd put his mask of reserve back on. "Well, this changes things. Troops to our rear, a fort in front. We are pinned." "Sir, shouldn't we withdraw?" Procter's face was pale, and he seemed to be swallowing a lot. "I think not." Brock frowned at the map. "To withdraw would be equal to defeat. Well," he rolled up the map. "We shall have to attack the fort before their reinforcements arrive." "But sir—!" "Form your troops into a single column," Brock ordered. "Put extra distance between the units. They may forget to count and think we have more men than we do." "Sir," Procter protested. "If we attack the fort we'll be torn apart by their cannon." "I think not." Brock shook his head. "We'll follow the river bank. Our cannon at Sandwich will protect us until we're almost at the town. See here on the map—there's an orchard just before the town, and in front of it a ravine running parallel to the town walls. The ravine will protect us from their guns. From the ravine we will attack the town, and from the town attack the fort. "Gentlemen, I have decided. We march in fifteen minutes. Where's my horse?" "Here, sir." I stepped forward.

III

"Fields, return to Sandwich. I don't want to lose another batman." "But sir—" "That's enough." He mounted the horse and rode off. I wandered slowly back to the boats, ignoring the soldiers that pushed past me. It wasn't right. I had come this far. I wanted to fight. It didn't matter why we were fighting—these men were going to fight, and I was in a uniform, and it was my duty to fight. Confusion tore at me. The night before I'd wanted to leave Brock, leave this army. But now I was here. I didn't want to turn my back on it. I was standing by the water's edge, leaning against the side of a boat, when I saw Stanton. He was marching along the shoreline with the forty men of his company behind him. I recognized the men—it was good to see Maitland again. It was even good to see MacPherson. I left the boats and ran toward them. Stanton gave me a swift look. "Fields, what are you doing here?" "Looking for a company to join, sir. General Brock doesn't need me right now." He frowned. "Looking to join the fight, are you? You may wish you'd stayed behind, before this is through." "I want to fight, sir. I have my musket." He shrugged. "I can't keep track of who is in my company at a time like this. Anyone could attach himself to the rear." I grinned, and saluted, and ran to the back of the column. I had a bit of trouble falling into step. It had been

a while since I'd marched with troops. We followed the bank of the river. The British war ships sailed along beside us. Across the river our cannon continued to pound away at the fort. From the front of the column the sound of fifes and drums drifted through the air—a tune they called "British Grenadiers." The music filled your heart, made you want to fight. Before long we came into sight of the wooden palisade, about twice as high as a man, surrounding the town of Detroit. Beyond that stood the stone walls of the fort. "Look at that." The private beside me jerked his head. "Look at what?" "The gates of the town." I strained to see. In the middle of the palisade was a gate. And something... there! Two cannons perched on top of the palisade, pointed right at us, one on either side of the gate, the gun crews standing ready. Suddenly I was sweating. They'd be using grapeshot—dozens of musket balls inside a canvas bag. When the bag split open the balls went everywhere. One shot could cut down a company like a scythe going through hay. My mouth went dry. I was shaking. I couldn't take my eyes off those guns. We were close enough now to see the blue uniforms of the Yankee soldiers manning the cannon, lit fuses in their hands. Why didn't they fire? The music of the fife and drums sounded hideous now, like some mad song played by a lunatic. We were going to die and they were playing music. Why didn't they fire? I'd never get to use my musket, never even see the enemy. I'd simply fall here, my chest ripped open by a musket ball.

And for what? What was I dying for? Brock was at the front of the column. The gold braids on his shoulders glinted in the morning sun. He'd be the first to die. An officer rode up to him, pointed to the rear of the column, seemed to be urging Brock back, but the general shook his head and the officer gave up. Brock would be the first to go down. The rest of us would be next. *Why didn't they fire?* "Column ... by companies ... left *wheel!*" Suddenly we were marching into the orchard. There were trees between us and the guns. Some protection, not much. And then I saw the ravine—deep and wide, with steep slopes. There was a stone farmhouse at the bottom, and Brock was already riding toward it. We tumbled down the slope. We were safe. The men around me began taking deep breaths. A few exchanged weak grins. We'd all been watching those guns. It only took a few minutes before everyone was in the ravine. Now we had time to take a good look at what faced us. The wooden palisade was maybe fourteen feet high. You could see the shingled roofs of houses poking above it. About two hundred yards beyond, the stone walls of the fort rose up from the top of a hill. How would we ever get up those walls? What was Brock *thinking?* I heard them before I saw them. When I saw them my heart stopped. Indians, hundreds of Indians, burst out of the dense bush on our left, dancing and shouting and screaming for blood. Their faces and chests were bare, streaked with purple and red dye. They waved cruel-looking

tomahawks above their heads. The warriors danced in a long line, then disappeared into the bush. But the line never seemed to end. Always there were more—hundreds more, maybe thousands—thrusting themselves into the clearing, screaming bloody vengeance against the Long Knives, then disappearing into the dark woods. Where had they come from? There couldn't have been more than six hundred Indians at Amherstburg, and here there were thousands. They were a great army all by themselves. Then I saw it. One warrior's face was painted in bright purple, with gold streaks. He'd been among the first Indians to come out of the bush. And here he was again, dancing and whooping in the long line. How could he ... it was a hoax! The Indians were doubling back in the bush and joining the line again. They were the same Indians, over and over, appearing and disappearing. And giving the impression of thousands. The soldiers rested on their muskets and watched the Indian display, partly in awe, partly in fear. Then I saw a militia private throw back his head and laugh. He'd figured it out. Suddenly someone showed up with bottles of brandy and wine and loaves of bread. The farmer who owned the stone house was descended from British stock, and happy to have redcoats on his land. He was offering breakfast. I grabbed a piece of bread. Amazingly, I was hungry. "The gates are opening!" We grabbed our muskets and scrambled into line of battle. Had the Americans decided to come out and fight?

Unless they did, we'd have to attack the town. And no one was looking forward to that. We waited for the line of Yankee blue to march out into the field. But all that emerged were two American officers walking stiffly toward us, carrying a white flag. A white flag! We couldn't believe it. The Yankees' faces were clenched in anger. When they reached the ravine, they stopped and saluted. "We seek permission to speak with your commanding officer." Stanton stepped out of the ravine and saluted them. "Follow me." He led them to the farmhouse. The Indians stopped their war dance, and stared silently. We were all wondering—what was going on? Were they surrendering? Why would they surrender? Maybe our cannon had killed their general. Maybe their troops were deserting. Maybe they'd been fooled by the Indians. The Indians had almost fooled me, and I was on their side. Or maybe it was a trap. Maybe the Yankees were about to attack. The American officers left the farmhouse and marched back to the town. Stanton returned and told us to be ready. "What did they say, captain?" "Tell us, captain," the men begged. Stanton raised his hand. "The Americans have asked for a three-day truce. General Brock has given them three hours. Then we attack. Check your muskets." But it was only minutes before the Americans returned. This time two British officers stepped out of the ravine to

meet them. We watched them speak together in the field, the blue and the red, their hands resting on their swords, just in case. Suddenly one of the Yankees pulled his sword from its sheath. For a moment we tensed. Was this the end of the truce? But he just handed the sword to the British officer, who took it and saluted the American. The man beside me, a wiry old veteran who needed a shave, let out a whoop an Indian would be proud of. "What does it mean?" I grabbed his arm. All around me men were cheering, throwing their hats in the air. "What does it mean?" "What do you think it means?" The soldier grinned at me. "They've surrendered, lad! They've surrendered!"