

Once again we were marching in column, and once again the flutes played "British Grenadiers," but now we weren't staring at guns. We were marching into Detroit. And Detroit was ours. We passed through the palisade into the town. The worried, curious faces of women and children peered from the windows and doors of the houses. As soon as I entered I saw two buildings with large holes in their walls. Our cannon fire had done more damage than I'd thought. Hundreds of Yankee soldiers lined the side of the road. They were throwing their muskets and swords onto great piles. Many of them were crying. Some shook their fists at us and cursed—others cursed their leaders. I noticed a young officer. He was standing a few feet in from the road. Tears streamed down his face. As I watched he pulled his sword out of its sheath. Crying, he broke the sword over his knee and threw the two pieces into the mud. Most of the Americans just stared at us, their faces blank. They must have been wondering where the great army was that had forced their surrender. Surely they hadn't given over everything to these few soldiers?

But they had. Their general had been deceived. He'd been deceived by the militiamen wearing the red coats of the British infantry. He'd been deceived by our cannon into thinking we could batter his fort to dust. Mostly he'd been deceived by a few hundred Indians, who looked like a great army and broke his heart with fear. Fort Detroit had surrendered, which meant the British now controlled everything from Fort Michilimackinac in the north to the Ohio River in the south, a land as big as Upper Canada itself. Our army, short on guns, short on ammunition, short on everything, now had thousands of extra guns and dozens of cannon, captured from the Yankees, to be used against the Yankees. What's more, word was already spreading of a fortune in American gold to be distributed among the men. Rumour had it we were all about to get six months' pay, and not one of us had fired a shot. A soldier ran past us, holding a flag. A few minutes later we saw him on the roof of a building inside the fort, hauling down the Yankee Stars and Stripes. Up went the Union Jack in its place. We cheered. The Yankees turned their faces away. We passed through the gate into Fort Detroit. The walls were at least twelve feet thick. How would we have got inside? It didn't matter—we walked inside. A dozen British soldiers came out of a large building in the middle of the fort. They were escorting an American prisoner. "It's Hull!" someone called out. "It's General Hull!" I craned my neck to look. He was old and heavy, with

grey hair and a grey beard. As he got closer I saw his face clearly. His eyes were half closed, his head was bowed. His skin was a sick, yellow colour, covered in a sheen of sweat. He was chewing something furiously—tobacco. The juice was dribbling out the side of his mouth, staining his beard and uniform. He looked pathetic. "Eyes *front!*" Stan ton snapped angrily. We looked away. As they led him out of the fort we could hear cries of "Traitor!" "Coward!" The Yankee troops cursed their general to his face. We formed into companies on the parade ground. A detachment of American soldiers formed across from us. One of them stepped forward carrying a folded banner—the regimental colours of the defending troops. This officer was nothing like Hull. His face burned with anger, pride, and shame. He saluted stiffly, and handed the banner to Colonel Procter, who saluted in return, took the banner, and gave it to one of our men. The surrender was complete. Brock and Tecumseh entered the fort together, side by side on horseback. The twin generals had come to survey their conquest. Brock owed this victory to Tecumseh. The Yankees' fear of those Indian tomahawks had done more than any cannon could do. As I watched the Shawnee chief, proud but grave at Brock's side, the joy of victory faded out of me. Tecumseh had given Brock Detroit. He had kept his word. Did he know Brock's word meant nothing?

That night, back on our own side of the river, we stood around bonfires outside the fort and sang and arm-wrestled and drank rum. The officers made a point of looking the other way. I walked about alone, beyond the edge of revellers, holding a bottle of rum someone had handed me. I hadn't been allowed to drink rum with the other men before, but now I was a veteran, and no one seemed to care. I took a long drink, and another. It burned my throat and made my gut churn, but my head felt light and free. Brock hadn't sent for me. He seemed to have forgotten all about me. I wanted to forget about him. The battle was over. The local militia would be returning to their farms soon. Maybe I should go with them. I wanted out. The others could sing and tell lies about their bravery when no one fired a shot. I knew the truth. The Indians were celebrating around their own campfires, a few hundred yards away. Their shouts echoed across the night air. They had reason to celebrate—they'd taken Fort Detroit for us. But really they had no reason to celebrate at all. If every one of them had died for their nation, they'd still be no closer to getting it. "Hey, look!" I turned toward the shout. Half a dozen Shawnee warriors were standing at the edge of one of our campfires. The singing stopped. The men stood up quickly. They weren't any less afraid of Indians than the Yankees were. One of the warriors stepped forward silently. He offered a sergeant a belt made of beads and shells braided

together. It was called a wampum, and the Indians valued them highly. The sergeant hesitated. "Take it, sergeant," someone whispered. "Quick, before they change their minds." The sergeant reached forward and took the wampum. "Well now, thank you," he nodded. "Thank you." "Give them some rum." "Yeah, give it to them." The sergeant handed a bottle to the warrior. "Here. Drink it in good health." The Indian shook his head. One warrior spoke up gently, but he was cut off sharply by the others. "Well, now." The sergeant looked to his men and then back. "If you won't drink, you can at least share the fire." He motioned them toward the blaze. The warriors stepped forward slowly, looking nervously at each other. "Play something, Tom. Go on." An accordion wheezed out a jig. The Indians smiled. One of them did a little dance. Everyone laughed. Blood pounded angrily in my head. These soldiers were singing and dancing with the Indians. Part of me said that this was good, that this was how understanding started. But the rum drowned that out. All I could see were these men acting like old comrades toward the Indians while our leaders were betraying them. It was all fake. It was all unreal. I stepped toward the fire. "This is wrong." No one heard me. I shouted it. "This is *wrong!*" The music stopped. Faces turned to me, glowing in the light of the fire.

I moved toward the warrior who had made the gift of the wampum. "Don't you know they're lying to you? They're not your friends. They just want you to do their fighting for them. They want you to fight the Long Knives, so they can win their war and then take your land." "For the love of God, private—" But I wouldn't stop. "You think you're fighting for your homes? We're not going to let you keep your homes. We're lying to you!" "Are you crazy—" "We're lying to you! We're going to take your land, just like the Long Knives. We may not fight you for it, but we'll take it just the same. We just need you right now ... we just—" "He's going to start a fight." "Someone stop him!" The warriors gazed at me steadily. They couldn't know what I was saying, but they could see my expression. Did they understand? How could I make them understand? "We just need you to fight for us." I was crying. "We *need* you to fight for us, so we don't have to fight ourselves, that's all. You should go. You should leave us. Go back to your lands. We're not worth dying for—" "Fields!" A hand grabbed my arm. I swung around in fury. "Just try to—" "Atten ... *shun!*" An officer's uniform, a command. My mind raged against it, but a deeper instinct obeyed. I snapped to attention.

It was Stanton, his face cold with fury. "What's going on here?" "He tried to pick a fight with the Indians, sir." "No! I—" "Be quiet!" Stanton turned to the men at the campfire. "Perhaps it would be best if the Indians returned to their own people." He bowed to them and gestured toward the Indian fires. The warrior who had given the wampum nodded gravely and spoke to his men. They disappeared into the dark. "The rest of you have had enough celebration for one night. Turn in. Fields, come with me." "Sir—" "*Come with ME!*" We walked in silence toward the fort. We were almost at its gates when he wheeled around. "I cannot believe this. We have just won a victory. Our general is a hero. And when he can't find his cuff links for the victory dinner, he discovers his batman has disappeared. And I'm sent to find him, because I recommended him in the first place. And when I do find him, he's about to start an Indian war!" "I wasn't—" "Do you know what could have happened? Do you know how much we need the Indians? What if a fight had started? What if it had got out of control? You could have undone everything that was accomplished here today." I couldn't speak. That wasn't what I'd meant. A pain stabbed at my head. I felt dizzy. "I'm confining you to the blockhouse, Fields. General Brock will decide what to do with you." He shook his head.

"I was a fool to place any trust in you." He marched me to the blockhouse and handed me over to the guard. I was placed in a tiny room, with a straw pallet. I curled up on the pallet and shut my eyes against my pounding head. He was wrong. I hadn't meant to start a fight. What had I meant? What had I done?

IMS)

I leaned over the bow of the *Chippawa*, trying not to be sick. Sailing in a large schooner in the middle of a storm was something new for me, and my insides didn't like it. The waves heaved us up to the sky, then threw us into great ravines of grey-green water. I wanted to leave my body. The sea-sickness was a relief, in a way. It took my mind off my own thoughts. I had wanted out of this army. Well, I might be getting out, but not the way I'd hoped. The least I was going to get was a whipping, the worst—jail and a dishonourable discharge. Brock had ordered me onto the *Chippawa* before he boarded it. He was going to deal with me personally. I tried not to think about what sort of dealing he had in mind. We were on our way east to Fort Erie. Brock was rushing to Niagara to see what the Americans were up to. The first victory was so easy that most soldiers were eager to take on the Yankees again. But all I had to look forward to was punishment and disgrace. "Sail ho!" I lifted my head. Another schooner was approaching us from the east. The thought half-formed in my mind that it was an American warship, that we were

going to be attacked and sunk in the middle of the lake. My stomach looked forward to it. But then I noticed the British ensign snapping in the wind, and I remembered that the Great Lakes belonged to us; the Americans had no ships to fight us with. The two schooners drew alongside. Brock came out of his cabin in the *Chippawa*'s stern and watched as the other ship launched a boat carrying a British officer. He clamored up the net we'd thrown over the side and snapped to attention in front of his general. "General Brock, sir, Governor-General Prevost sends his compliments from Quebec, sir. I am to give you this message: Great Britain and the United States of America have ceased hostilities. An armistice has been signed, while both sides negotiate an end to the war." Brock's mouth dropped open, then quickly shut. "An *armistice*? When?" "It was signed August sixteenth, sir. The day Detroit surrendered. Of course, both sides were unaware of your victory there at the time. Still, the truce holds." "Come." Brock turned on his heel and stalked back into his cabin, the officer following. The soldiers and sailors gossiped. What did the armistice mean? Was the war over? Had we won? Everyone waited for news. I waited, too. But I was more worried about my own future than the future of the war. I was asleep below decks (the storm had ended and my seasickness was ebbing, bit by bit) when the guard shook me awake.

127 "Come on," he ordered. "The general wants to see you." He led me to the back of the ship and knocked on a door. I recognized the voice. "Yes." I stepped into a tiny room, barely big enough for a desk and a bed. We both had to stoop a bit to keep from hitting our heads on the ceiling. Brock was tearing through his large trunk, throwing clothes and papers in every direction. "The brandy, Fields. Where's the brandy? You always keep it in this trunk. One night, *one night*, I choose a glass of brandy before bed, and it's not here! "It's in the small trunk, sir." The small trunk was beside me. I opened the lid and pulled out the bottle. He glared at me. "Why did you put it there? You've always kept it in the big trunk." "No sir. I always keep it in the small trunk." "Don't contradict me, boy!" "Yes sir." He grabbed the brandy and poured himself a large glass. "You've gotten yourself into quite a mess, Fields. Stanton told me you tried to start a fight with an Indian." "I did not, sir." The denial seemed to surprise him. "You contradict Captain Stanton?" "No sir. Captain Stanton didn't know what was happening when he arrived. He misunderstood." "He says you were drunk." "I think I was, sir." "You've become quite useless, Fields." The tone was

petulant, impatient, like some offended school teacher. "You're sullen, unreliable. I can't depend on you anymore. And now this. I should have you whipped. Or worse." "Yes sir." "Certainly I can't have you as my batman. You will be reassigned to your regiment as soon as we reach shore." "Yes sir. May I be discharged from the army, sir?" It surprised him. He put down his brandy. "Is that what you want?" "Yes sir." He looked at me for a moment, almost sadly, and then his face hardened. "Very well. If you want to go, go. We have no room for cowards." The blood rushed to my face. "I am not a coward!" He stepped toward me angrily. "You are insubordinate and untrustworthy and mutinous and probably a coward, and I cannot believe I am even speaking to you, when I should simply have you flogged." "Flog me if you want," I shouted, hoarse with anger, "but I'm no coward!" For a moment I thought he was going to call the sentry. He looked at the door, half-opened his mouth, then closed it and turned away. "I have never endured such insolence from a soldier." He picked up his brandy. "But then you're not a regular soldier, are you? You're a colonial. One of the people I have been sent here to protect. Why, I don't know." He walked over to the tiny window. "In England you would know your place." He stared out at the black sky. "You would never raise your voice against a gentleman."

People know their place in England. "But not here. There is too much of the American in you all. You're rude to your betters, say whatever you think, have no respect. You're not worth fighting for." He paused. "You're certainly not worth dying for." "At least I've never lied." The words came from . . . somewhere. I knew I shouldn't have said it. I was in worse trouble now than for anything I'd done at Detroit. But worse than the punishment, worse than anything he could do to me, was knowing that he'd lied. If only he hadn't lied.... Brock turned from the window. A pink blush coloured his pale skin. He gripped the brandy in his hand. "Are you suggesting that I have lied?" *The truth. Speak the truth.* "You know I heard you and Colonel Procter. You're going to betray the Indians." *Now you 'we done it* "You've committed treason." He seemed more surprised than angry. "What you've said is treasonous." "Treason to you. To me it's just the truth." I waited. Things had gone too far. A moment ago I was out of the army, free. Now I was a word away from being shot. But at least it was out. Brock watched the brandy as he swirled it around in the glass. I was surprised to see the tired smile that suddenly crossed his face. "You're right of course. We probably have betrayed the Indians. They believe they will win their land from this war, and they won't. And I know they won't, but I let Tecumseh believe it." He drained the brandy in the glass, then poured him-

self another and sat down. "If it were up to me I would let them keep their land. Many of us feel an Indian buffer state between British North America and the United States would be good protection. But it won't happen. Too many settlers are arriving. They need farms. The Indians have the land the settlers need. Sooner or later we will take the Indians' land from them. This is not what I wish for, Fields. It is only what I know will happen." He raised his glass to his lips, then lowered it without drinking. "I find it... extraordinary, to be telling you this." He shook his head a little. I didn't say anything. I didn't know what to say. He wasn't really talking to me, anyway. He was talking to himself, or to the brandy. "But then you deserve to know," he continued. "You do seem to me the best and worst of these settlers. Obstinate, uncivilized, rude. But honest, also, and proud. I am sorry I called you a coward." I felt guilty, somehow. "I didn't mean to call you a liar, sir." "Well, but you did." He straightened up in his chair. "And I am. I needed the Indians at Detroit. I will need them again at Niagara. This armistice is a trick by the Americans to give them time to bring men and supplies to the front. We were fools to accept it, and we'll pay." He got up from his chair. "So I will lie to your Indians again. I need them if I am to have another victory. I am a general, Fields. Victory is what is expected of me. For victory, I would lie to God himself." I stood there, uncertain, not knowing what to do, even what to feel.

He began to arrange papers on his desk. "I will see to your discharge when we reach Fort Erie. You will not be charged with treason—unless, of course, you repeat any thing that has been said here." "Sir—I would like to continue, sir, as your batman." Why? I don't know why. Except I didn't see him now as a liar. No, it was more complicated than that. He looked at me for a long moment. "Are you sure?" I nodded. "Yes, sir. Very sure. I... I'm sorry, sir." He returned to his papers. "Very well, Fields. That will be all." I turned sharply on my heel and left the cabin. But I didn't return below. I walked along the deck of the ship, watched the black waves with their shining white crests roll against the hull, stared up at the great bowl of stars shining through the rigging that creaked in the fresh west wind. And wondered when I would begin to understand the world.

"Why don't they attack? The armistice ended weeks ago, and still they sit there. Why in God's name don't they attack?" His name was Major Thomas Evans. Brock liked him. He was brave and confident—like his general. And he asked questions other officers were afraid to ask. The two of them stood on the sloping ground in front of Fort George—Evans and Brock, watching the American fires on the shore only a few hundred yards away. A fierce fall wind whipped at their cloaks. They braced their feet to keep from being pushed toward the river below. I stood well back, holding Alfred's reins. Brock shook his head. "I don't understand. If I were them, I would attack. I would have attacked long ago." There were four of them for every one of us. An American army of eight thousand men stretched along the Niagara river, with guns and ammunition and a thirst to avenge Detroit. We had barely two thousand, defending a front thirty-six miles long, from Fort Erie in the south to Fort George in the north.

The Americans might attack from several points, say at Fort Erie and Fort George. If they did that they could break through our lines and come at us from the rear. To prevent it, Brock had to split his forces, putting most of his strength at either end. But that left us weak in the middle. If they attacked in force there, they could cut us in half. And we were losing control of the lakes. We knew they were building ships for Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. And just a few days ago Yankee troops in small boats had crept up on two of our ships anchored off Fort Erie and boarded them. They captured one and destroyed the other. When Brock heard he pounded his desk. "They will command the lakes. If they command the lakes, the war is over." No matter how you looked at it, they had the advantage. But it was already the middle of October, and they did nothing. They just sat there and waited. We didn't know why, though we heard stories. Almost every day Yankee deserters tried swimming across the river. The currents and whirlpools claimed a lot of them. Those that survived told of troops sleeping without tents and walking barefoot, of officers fighting among themselves and refusing to obey orders. The Yankees had started this war, but their politicians and generals didn't seem eager to spend time or money fighting it. Still, things weren't that much better here. It was a bitter fall. The rain soaked everything—we lived in mud. There were fights among the men, even talk of mutiny. Many of our militia had gone back to their farms. Brock let them go.

I had never seen Brock more worried. He was an impatient general, and hated waiting. But he had no choice except to wait. We could never attack the Americans with our small force. Anyway, Governor-General Prevost had told Brock not to attack—he was still afraid of "provoking" the Americans. It was hard for Brock. On the one hand, everyone called him the saviour of Canada. When we got to Fort Erie six weeks ago he had rushed to Kingston to consult with Prevost and inspect the troops. No one could praise him enough. He was the most popular man in British North America, a brilliant general, a heroic leader. But did it matter? The Americans were stronger than they'd ever been. Brock had moved every uniform he could find to Niagara, strengthened the fortifications. When two hundred Mohawk and other tribes of the Six Nations arrived and offered to help fight the Long Knives, Brock embraced their leaders. But the Yankees still outnumbered us four to one. Why didn't they attack? Brock and Evans turned away from the river. "Take Alfred back to the fort," Brock told me. "I shall walk awhile." I snapped a salute and pulled on Alfred's reins. I saluted Brock a lot now. It was the way things were—formal, correct. We both liked it that way. Once I had almost worshipped Brock. Then I had almost hated him. Now... what should I feel? I'd called him a liar, but he wasn't a liar. Not really. He was doing what he had to do, doing what was expected of him.

But still... the Indians were fighting for him, would die for him, and they would never get what he promised them. What was right? How should I feel? I think maybe I felt a bit frightened of him. And I think he was a little frightened of me. That's strange to say. Brock, the hero of Upper Canada, commander of all its troops, frightened of a fifteen-year-old batman? But I don't think anyone had seen him the way I'd seen him in the cabin that night. He rarely showed what he was thinking, let alone how he felt. Maybe what he said that night frightened him. Maybe, because he said it to me, he was a little frightened of me. So we both retreated into our roles. I tried to become the perfect batman—always available, but silent, like some helpful ghost. He acted like the perfect officer. It suited both of us.

I served Brock dinner in his quarters that night. He almost always ate alone now, munching on his boiled pork or beef with his head bent over a map. At York he had talked out loud to his maps, argued with them, I think dreamed victories with them. Now he stared at them silently, studying the same hills over and over, maybe waiting for a clue, a sign, a way out. He was so different now. Before, everything was action. Now, everything was waiting. And the maps seemed to hold no clues. I was just taking away his tray when booted footsteps clicked down the hall. We both looked up—everyone knew

the step of an officer in a hurry. Evans appeared. Whatever the news, it was bad. His face was drawn, tight. I left the room quickly, not waiting to be told, and stood guard at the door, to give them privacy and to overhear. "Mutiny, sir. At Queenston. One company of regulars is in revolt, threatening to shoot the officers. Captain Dennis has written asking for help." It wasn't surprising. The strain of waiting for the battle was telling on everyone. The men were wet and unhappy and worried about dying. Brock would take it badly, though. It was one thing for the militia to ask to go home. But when British troops were disloyal... He didn't say anything for a moment. I heard him pace about. He would be composing himself, forcing his temper down, running his hand through his hair, trying to push his mind to deal with the situation. "I want you to go there in the morning," he said finally. "Bring the ringleaders here. We will have to make an example of them." "Yes sir." There was weariness in Evans's voice. He knew what he was about to do. A few years ago some troops had mutinied at Fort George. Brock had the leaders executed in front of the men. The story went that he cried as he watched them being shot. But they were still shot. "There's something else you can do when you're there," Brock continued, ignoring Evans's reluctance. "Cross over to the American side under a flag of truce. Tell them I will exchange prisoners."

"Yes sir." "And Evans—you might take note of whatever you happen to see." "I'll report immediately, sir." "But most important, we must crush this mutiny quickly and severely." "Yes, sir." Evans's step was slower and heavier when he left.

The next day I tried to be even less noticeable than usual around Brock. He was in a black mood, snapping at the officers and men and, when he noticed me, snapping at me. Our one advantage over the Yankees was our trained and disciplined infantry. And now the infantry was mutinying. I groaned to myself when a messenger came and said Brock needed me. He was eating with the officers that night. His uniform was already laid out for tomorrow—I'd hoped to keep out of his way until Evans was back and the mutiny settled. But it was too much to hope for. I reached the door of the officers' mess just as a young private came out, sweating. He gave me a quick look that said it was hell in there, then scurried off. I took a breath, and knocked on the door. "Come." Half a dozen officers were sitting around the large oak table, their food cold and half eaten. Brock was at the far end of the table. "Private Fields." He was even more stern and formal than usual. "We would like to ask you some questions. You

may rest assured your answers will be treated in confidence, and nothing you say will be used against you. Do you understand?" "Yes sir." I didn't understand. "You were born in Upper Canada and volunteered for the service just before the outbreak of war, is that correct?" I nodded. He knew that. "Have you heard about the mutiny at Queenston?" I swallowed. Was I in trouble? Should I lie? But I knew Brock better than to lie to him. "Yes sir." "It has, I take it, become common knowledge among the men." I panicked. He knew I'd overheard his conversation with Evans. He thought I'd told everyone. But I hadn't. I hadn't said a word. The soldiers got wind of the revolt the way soldiers get wind of everything that happens. "I didn't say a word, sir!" Brock almost smiled. "I'm sure you didn't, Fields. You have always impressed me with your ability to hear things you shouldn't and not repeat them." The other officers chuckled. They all had batmen, and probably all shared the same jokes about them. "There are other colonial regulars in this army. Do you think they are loyal?" It shocked me. A British officer was asking a volunteer private if the other volunteers were loyal. Now I knew why the private had been sweating. He was one of the regulars from England. He'd probably been asked the same question about them.

"All the men are loyal, sir." It was the smart thing to say, and true, too. I'd never heard anyone talk mutiny. They complained a lot—the food tasted better if you complained about it. But they were loyal. "I'm glad to hear it, Fields." Brock leaned back in his chair. "I have always believed the men were loyal. But as you know, I was not entirely correct." "Every man I know is loyal, sir. We would follow you anywhere." We already had. Brock nodded. "I sent for you, Fields, because I know you are not afraid to speak the truth—" he grimaced, "no matter how unpleasant. I am reassured by your report. That is all." I turned to go. I was sweating, too. Being honest around British officers had its price. I was halfway to the door when Evans burst in. He was soaking wet. His breath came in gasps. He didn't bother to salute, but threw himself into a chair. "General Brock, the Americans . . ." He was so out of breath he could barely speak. "... The Americans are about to attack." "Get him some wine." Brock was out of his chair and striding toward Evans. I ran to the sideboard, poured a glass of port, and brought it to Evans. He drank the glass in a gulp. "Thank you. Another please. I haven't eaten yet today." I gathered up some bread and cheese from the table, and brought over the decanter of port. "What happened, Evans?" Brock grabbed Evans's chair and leaned over him. For a moment I thought he was going

to grab the major, shake the news loose. "Sir—" Evans gulped some more port, and bit off a slice of the bread. Now his mouth was too full to talk. I thought Brock was going to break something. "Sir." Evans finally found his voice. "I arrived at Queenston to find it under a hail of musket fire from across the river. Captain Dennis said the Americans had made a habit of this, lately. I decided I must see at once what was happening. I set off across the river with the local militia captain." He offered awry smile. "The snipers were most unsporting. I believe they used our flag of truce as a target. "When I reached the far shore, I was greeted by one of their majors. No senior officer would speak with me. They said sir—" he straightened up in his chair. "They said they could not discuss an exchange of prisoners *for another two days*. Sir, I am convinced they plan to attack tomorrow." "Nonsense." One of the colonels lit a cigar. "That means nothing. Their senior officers weren't available. A junior officer simply wanted to avoid taking responsibility." "That is most likely what happened." Brock let go of Evans's chair. He looked disappointed. For a moment he had hoped the battle was finally about to begin. But Evans had simply got carried away. "Sir, there's more." Evans rose unsteadily from his chair. "There were thousands of troops on the American side. Regular infantry, and savage-looking militia. I'm certain they have massed much of their army across the river from Queenston Heights." "That makes no sense," another officer protested. "Queenston is in the centre of our line of defence. Why would they attack there, when a flanking attack would be

more certain of success?" Brock was standing absolutely still, staring at the regimental colours draped on one wall. Everyone knew that stance—he was trying to reach out across the miles and enter the mind of an enemy general. "Did you see anything else?" he asked Evans. "Yes, sir. I saw half a dozen flat-bottomed boats, each able to carry twenty men, hidden in inlets and along the shore, covered with brush and leaves. Who knows how many more there might be." "It would perfectly ordinary for boats to be there," someone said. "They might plan to follow their main attack with an attack at Queenston." "Or it might be a diversion, to draw off our troops from our flanks." "I think they *wanted* Evans to see the boats, to fool him." Evans kept his gaze on Brock, who continued to gaze at the wall. "Sir," Evans said quietly. "I am certain the Americans are about to attack, probably within a few hours. We must prepare." The room was silent. Everyone watched Brock. He was like a pillar, standing there motionless, his one hand clenched against his chest, his eyes unfocused, staring through the wall, the night, the rain, toward the distant enemy. No one moved. We were all frozen in Brock's trance. Then he was striding toward the door so quickly, almost violently, that several officers jumped. "Evans, follow me." They disappeared into a small room across the hall. The other officers looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders.

Someone called for port. The regular servant had disappeared, so I took over. It gave me an excuse to stay. It was almost an hour later when Brock came back into the room. I had seen that grey, granite look only once before—in York, when he decided to move on Detroit. "I am convinced the Americans are planning an attack, possibly tomorrow. Whether the main attack will come at Queenston or somewhere else we cannot know. We must be ready." He delivered his orders in a stream, one to each officer. The local militia were to come to the fort tonight. The outlying militia were to rush to their posts as quickly as possible. All troops along the front were to be ready for an attack as early as dawn. The Indians were to be alerted, and told they might be needed at any moment. It went on, a river of commands. "Evans." Brock turned back to the major. "What did you do with the Queenston mutineers?" "I sent them back to their posts, sir." Evans shrugged. "It seemed a poor time to be arresting our own men." Brock scowled, then the scowl disappeared and he laughed, he actually laughed. "If your prediction is correct, Evans, this could be the most fortunate mutiny in history. We shall have to decorate them. "Gentlemen, we have a full night ahead."

All that night I delivered messages, orders, letters. I returned to Brock's quarters at three to find him slumped over his desk, asleep. I left him there, went to the stables,

made sure Alfred was fed and his saddle nearby. I made sure another horse was ready too, one used by messengers riding between forts. Then I threw myself onto my bed. I dreamed of guns, and men dying, and horses screaming, and the endless roar of cannon. Over and over again I heard the cannon. I half-awoke. There was a storm outside. Thunder grumbled in the far distance. I jumped from my bed. The thunder was regular, repeated. It was no dream. It *was* the sound of cannon. The Americans had attacked.

I ran out of the barracks at the same moment Brock appeared from the officers' quarters. He sprinted across the parade ground toward the stables. I was there before him. "Where's the saddle?" "Here, sir." He didn't wait for me to help, but threw the saddle over Alfred's back and cinched it tight. I was saddling the horse beside. "Tell the other officers I am on my way to Queenston." I looked up at him. "Sir, let me go with you. My horse is ready." "I don't need you at Queenston." He wheeled Alfred toward the stable door. "You do sir. You need a messenger. I'm the only one ready." He paused for a second, then waved me onto my horse. "Follow me." We rode through the gates of Fort George together, then turned south toward the artillery that roared five miles away.

It was still dark, and a cold sleet cut at our clothes. Brock's cloak was quickly spattered with mud; I was covered in it. But he ignored the sleet and the mud and pushed Alfred on. I watched him, bent over his horse, staring out at the night. It was up to him now. He knew it—we all knew it. Our lives, our future, were up to him. I suddenly realized how lonely he must be, riding in the dark toward battle. I felt glad I was there with him. A rider came charging down the road toward us. Brock raised his hand and the rider reined in his horse, though he was going so fast he almost got past us before he could stop. He was a young militia officer. "Sir—" He was breathless. "The Americans have landed in force at Queenston." "How many? Are they being opposed?" Brock leaned forward in his saddle. "Yes sir," the officer said excitedly. "Our cannon on the heights are doing great damage. Their boats are sinking, or being forced downstream. Only a few hundred troops have made it to our side, and we have them pinned." "Good," Brock replied. "Get to Fort George. Tell General Sheaffe to stand ready. This may be only a diversion." "Yes sir." The officer saluted and we rode off in our different directions. We were almost at Queenston when we came upon a company of militia marching toward the village. They were the York militia, the same men who had volunteered to follow Brock to Detroit. Now they were with him here. The general took off his hat and waved them toward the village.

They gave him a cheer in reply. The eastern sky was streaked red with approaching dawn when we reached the village. Queenston was a collection of about a dozen houses surrounded by orchards and old stone fences. The village was already crowded with more than a hundred soldiers from the 49th regiment. They were Brock's favourite. He'd been with them for years, and had brought them down from Kingston for the battle. They shouted and cheered as he rode past them. Brock pushed Alfred up the slope from the village to the heights that overlooked the river. He ignored the steady stream of cannon fire that poured across from the American side onto the slope and into the village. Even before we reached the crest the sound of the battle had become deafening. When we got to the top we saw why. The American artillery was positioned directly across from us on the American heights. Volley after volley of grapeshot poured across the sky. The American village of Lewiston was choked with regiments of American troops. Below us a handful of our militia were pouring a deadly fire on several hundred Yankees who huddled defenceless at the bottom of the cliff. Our own cannon was sending shot at the wide, flat boats that every now and then launched from the American shore and tried to cross the river. The gorge below us was filled with smoke and fog and dying men. The rising sun showed bodies floating face down in the swirling waters of the Niagara. Downstream, American soldiers struggled onto shore, some in the remains of their shattered boats, some swimming for their lives. They were quickly taken prisoner.

It was an inferno in the gorge. To the Americans trapped under our fire, it must have been like Hell itself. Brock dismounted and led Alfred down a steep slope to our cannon. From our militia below an officer came scrambling up the slope to meet him. "General Brock, Captain Dennis at your service, sir." He saluted, but couldn't keep a grin off his face. "I think we have them, sir." Brock shook his head, puzzled. "What's the matter with them? They have thousands of men over there. But they just sit. Why don't they cross?" "Lack of boats, I think." Dennis had to shout to make himself heard over the roar of the cannon. "And they may not want to cross, after seeing what happened to the first wave." Brock gazed down on the Americans huddled at the base of the cliff. Most of them were wounded, crouched among their own dead, using them for shelter. I had never seen dead and wounded soldiers before. The sight of it made my head go light. I stepped back, afraid I might be sick. Brock was unmoved. He was used to battlefields. "Dennis," he said, pointing. "Is there any way those men can scale these cliffs and come at us from behind?" Dennis shook his head. "No sir. There's only one path from the landing to the village, and we have it covered. There's no path straight up the cliff." "Good." Brock waved to a company of infantry that had appeared at the crest of the heights above the cannon. An officer hurried forward.

"Send word to Fort George and to Chippawa in the south." Brock's voice was calm, almost quiet. "Tell them to send reinforcements." He looked out at the thousands of Americans on the far shore. "Evans was right. This is no diversion. This is the main attack." He turned back to the officer. "Take your men down the cliff to where the militia are stationed and support their fire on the troops landing at the dock." "Yes sir." The officer saluted and hurried off. Brock turned his attention to the cannon beside us. Some of the shells were falling short. He started giving orders on how to improve the range. I never saw them, Brock never saw them. They came from nowhere—not nowhere, they came along a path that wound up the cliff—the path that everyone had said didn't exist, except the Americans knew it did. We heard a shout, and then a ragged cheer behind us. Brock wheeled around. Maybe sixty Americans were rushing toward us from the top of the crest above. In the pale morning light their bayonets glowed dull and deadly. "Spike the cannon!" Brock shouted. If the Americans got the use of our artillery, they could pour shot down on our troops directly below. A young gunner shoved a metal spike into the cannon's powder hole. Now the cannon was useless. "Follow me!" Brock grabbed Alfred's reins and led the gun crew away from the cannon. In a moment we were scrambling down the hill toward the village. A roar went up from the other side of the river. The Americans had seen their own troops on the heights.

The battle had turned. We fell back to the village, but the American cannon from across the river rained shot down on the houses more fiercely than ever. The balls crashed through the shingled roofs, set fires burning, smashed stone. The few civilians who hadn't fled cowered in their root cellars. Dust and smoke surrounded everything. Dennis, the militia captain, was wounded; so were many of his men. Brock pulled the troops—maybe two hundred of us now—back to the far edge of the village. We huddled there, under the American cannon fire, watching as more and more Yankee soldiers appeared at the crest of the heights to reinforce the men already there. A moment ago the battle was ours—the Americans pinned down, trapped, most of them afraid even to cross the river. Now they were in command. They owned the heights and had us pinned in the village. Brock was losing the battle. I crouched behind a stone fence, terrified. I'd never been under fire before. Every cannon shot stabbed at my nerves. I wanted to flatten myself against the stone until I became part of it. I wanted to be away from here, anywhere but in the middle of this deadly fire. I had followed Brock to Queenston because it was my duty, but mostly because I wanted to watch Brock win. But this was not Detroit—the Yankees had us. He was only a few feet from me, behaving the same as he ever did. He ignored the grapeshot that whistled about him. His face was calm, his voice steady. Except I noticed he was clenching and unclenching his left fist, over and over, which I'd never seen him do before.

Dennis crawled up beside Brock. He was bleeding in the leg and shoulder, his face ashen. "Sir," he gasped, "are reinforcements coming?" Brock nodded. "They're coming, but they'll be too late. The Americans grow stronger each minute. We must counter-attack." Dennis' jaw dropped. "Sir, we have barely two hundred men. We've lost our cannon. They have the high ground. An attack will fail." Brock shook his head. "Not if pressed forward with determination." He looked toward the heights. "If the Americans control the heights, they control the village. They will be able to move their entire army across. They will winter here, growing stronger each week. By the time spring comes it will be impossible to defeat them. "If we do not win the heights back now, we will have lost the war." Dennis nodded. He seemed unconvinced, but Brock was the general. And Dennis had already been wrong about the path up the cliff. Brock walked swiftly over to a nearby house. I had tethered Alfred there, behind the far wall for safety. Suddenly he appeared in front of us, mounted on Alfred, the cannon whistling past. "Follow me, boys!" he shouted. "Follow me! We shall defeat them yet!" He shook Alfred's reins and the two of them moved gravely forward. The men looked at each other and some groaned, but they rose from behind their shelters and fell into formation behind him. I didn't want to leave the safety of the fence. I didn't

want to stand before their cannon and muskets and die. But Brock was at the front. How could I cower here while he marched off toward the enemy? What would he think of me? I looked along the fence. A militia man sprawled dead on the ground, a mass of red flesh where his face had been. My stomach heaved, and I choked and swallowed hard. He had a musket, and I needed a musket. I crawled along the fence toward him, grabbed the musket, pulled the canvas satchel of balls and powder from around his neck, wiped off the blood, and ran toward the troops ahead. At the base of the slope rising up to the crest of the heights was a stone fence. Brock had already dismounted and was crouching behind it. The men filed in along either side. In the bush above the Yankee infantry kept a steady fire over our heads. Brock looked at the soldiers and militia huddled together. "Take a breath, boys," he called out. "You'll need it in a moment." A ragged cheer ran down the line. I crouched a few feet away from Brock, my musket clenched in my shaking hands. Suddenly Brock was beside me, prying the musket away. "Batmen don't fight," he said quietly. "Who would press my uniform if you were shot? Stay with Alfred." "Please, sir." I swallowed. "I need to be here." He paused for a moment, looked at me, then handed back the musket, and rested his hand lightly on my shoulder. "Good luck, son." I tried to grin. "Good luck, General." He tried to grin back. "Good luck to us both."

Then he stood, pulled his sword from his sheath, and pointed it toward the hill. "Forward!" In an instant he was over the fence, striding up the slope. We scrambled over the fence behind him, trying to catch up. There was no time to form a proper line. We fanned out behind Brock, marching up the steep slope of the hill toward the crest. The ground was slick with wet leaves. It was hard to keep our footing. Ahead of us, at the top of the hill, the Americans clustered around the captured cannon. Others crouched in nearby bushes. Both kept up a steady fire. A man groaned and fell beside me. Another, directly ahead, clutched his side and fell to the ground. I stepped over him, tried not to think, tried to push back the fear. But we were getting closer. Our line held behind Brock. I saw blood trickling from his hand—he'd been nicked there by a musket ball. But he ignored the wound and pushed forward, his sabre drawn, calling to the men to follow. The Americans fell back to the edge of the cliff. They hadn't expected a frontal attack, were frightened by the determined troops who slipped and stumbled up the hill toward them, ignoring their fire. I saw someone pull out a white handkerchief and begin to wave it. An officer struck it down with a curse, pulled out his sword and pointed it toward us. The Americans charged. We didn't expect it. Their commander had the same blood in his veins as Brock did. He had his back to a cliff, nowhere to go, so he charged. They fired as they marched down the hill toward us.

Men fell. The troops behind Brock turned their backs on the Yankees, began to retreat down the hill. Brock swivelled around, saw his men falling back, and cried out. "Not the 49th! The 49th never turns its back!" The men hesitated, unsure. The Americans were advancing. Men were dying everywhere. But Brock was there, calling them to follow. Brock, who the men had never disobeyed, who had given them victory, who they loved in a way, the way soldiers love a general they trust. The men looked at each other. Should they die for him? For an instant the sun came out. Gold glinted off the wet leaves and grass. I looked up the hill. Brock was maybe three steps away, his sword drawn, calling out to the wavering British line. "Forward, men!" he shouted to us. "Forward!" The sun gleamed off his epaulettes, glowed off the silver blade of his sword. For a moment everything seemed suspended, the battle hanging in the air like the smoke from our muskets. I saw the Yankee soldier kneeling, saw him sight down his barrel, saw the flash and puff of smoke. Brock stopped in mid-stride. His sword fell from his hand. I watched it fall—it seemed forever—onto the wet grass below. He sank to his knees, then pitched forward, his face buried in the glistening leaves. "NO!" I stumbled forward, fell, pushed myself on, reached him, got my hands on his shoulders, rolled him over. His face was lifeless. A red stain spread across his scarlet tunic, darkening it to blood red. Brock was dead.

We carried his body down the hill, the musket balls whistling over our heads. The weight of him strained at my shoulders, and my sweat mixed with my tears. *He's dead. He's dead.* Once we were back behind the fence several officers gathered around him. One placed a mirror above his mouth. If it steamed that would be a sign Brock was breathing. But another officer pushed the mirror away. There was no hope. One of the militia commanders began ordering us to form up again. His name was Macdonell, and with Brock dead he was now senior officer. "We'll attack again," he shouted, walking up and down the line. "We'll avenge the general!" I didn't care if we attacked. If we attacked again, we'd probably die. I didn't care if we all died. A hand gently touched my arm. "Not you, lad. You stay with the general." A young officer looked down at me gravely. "That's your duty, now." "Form your line!" Macdonell had taken his horse over the fence. He swung himself into the saddle and pulled out

his sword. "Forward, men!" he cried. "Remember the General! Remember General Brock!" But no more than fifty men leaped over the fence to join him. The rest stayed where they were, wounded, exhausted, defeated. The small, ragged line advanced up the hill behind the colonel, stepping over the bodies of their own men. Before they got halfway the Americans opened fire. Macdonell's horse screamed and fell. Then Macdonell collapsed. The line wavered, and broke. Men began to run back toward the fence. The British officers had no more stomach for assaults. We were pulled back to the rear of the village. Three of us carried Brock into a stone house, then left him to find Alfred. He would be worried about Alfred. The horse was standing outside the house, motionless, staring silently at the door. I tethered him behind the house, out of danger. It was the last thing I was able to do on my own. I slid down the wall beside the horse and closed my eyes. I was empty. *Brock is dead. No. Yes. He fell—you saw him. You carried him. No, I didn't. It was a mistake. You saw him fall He's dead...* I sat in the mud, my back against the wall. Men around me wept and cursed the Yankees and swore revenge, but I didn't hear them. *Everyone's dead. We're all going to be dead. I want to be dead. . . .* The battle was lost. The Americans were sending troops across the river, reinforcing their position on the heights. Most of our cannon had been knocked out of action. We were pinned in the village, too few to attack. Any time now, the Yankees would pour down into the village, and some of

us would surrender and the rest of us would die. "Form up! We're moving out." Officers were among us, rousing the men. Were we going to attack again? Was I to die on the hill like Brock? But we weren't going to attack. We were leaving the village, going beyond the range of the cannon. Before long we were in the bush behind the town, marching west up a steep hill. It seemed strange—Fort George was to the north. Why weren'twe going back to Fort George? I didn't care. *March me anywhere. Let me fight. Brock is dead.* . . . But the sight when we came out of the bush woke me up. Hundreds of British troops, scarlet uniforms row on row, stood in a ploughed field. Flags snapped in the breeze, officers on horses galloped about shouting orders. The reinforcements from Chippawa and Fort George had arrived, but whoever was replacing Brock had decided to keep away from the village. He was preparing his attack in safety, waiting until everything was in place. Brock would never have been so cautious. Beside them were rows of militia, the men wearing whatever they threw on when word came of the attack. Their faces were grim, hard. They'd heard of Brock's death. He was their general too, and they wanted blood. We fell into the line, near one end. Everyone seemed to think I was another private, part of the 49th regiment. I let them think it. Behind us, on a great black horse, sat a British general. Sheaffe—I had seen him at Fort George. People said he was conservative, by the book, the opposite of Brock. For two hours we waited. Sheaffe was massing every

troop he could find, waiting until the last reinforcements arrived before attacking, forming his lines in perfect order. By the book. "Let's get on with it," someone muttered. Sheaffe continued to wait. But there was no need to hurry. From the bush surrounding the Yankees came howls and screams and musket shot. The Mohawk. I imagined the Yankee soldiers, listening to the war cries in the bush. What were those sounds doing to them? What were they thinking? I was sure that the longer we waited, the more frightened the Yankees would be. "Fix bayonets!" At last Sheaffe was ready to attack. There were almost a thousand of us—but who could know how many Americans had poured across the river in the hours since Brock's death? Well, we'd find out soon. "Forward!" We marched across the field, the Mohawk running from the bush to join our flank. On the far side we could see the Yankees. I'd expected more of them. They'd had hours to reinforce. But there were no more than a couple hundred, dug in behind piles of earth. They had wasted their time. We marched forward steadily, our boots sinking into the wet earth of the field, the drums beating out the pace. I wasn't sweating any more. I clenched my musket in cold determination. They killed Brock. I wanted to reach them. I wanted to kill. For the first time in my life, I wanted to kill. *Brock is dead.* The Americans opened fire, but there were too few of them, and we were still too far away.

Suddenly the Indians gave a great battle cry and rushed forward. In their hands they clenched muskets, in their belts, tomahawks—eager for the scalps of the Long Knives. It was too much for the Yankees. Men began running away toward the cliff. I saw an officer waving his sword, shouting at the men to stand their ground, but he was pushed back by a wave of deserters. A group of them held their ground, maybe a few dozen at the most. Our line approached. I could see their faces—frightened of death, frightened of disgrace. "Attack with bayonets!" I plunged forward, my musket thrust out in front of me. In a moment, we were at the earthworks. I leaped over them. There was a flash of blue, of steel. Without thinking, I thrust my musket at it. The bayonet sank into something soft, like sand. I froze. He was no older than I was. His eyes stared at me, his mouth open. Then he sank to the earth, my bayonet still in his chest, the blood soaking his shirt. *My God!* I yanked at the bayonet, pulled it out of him. He fell backward, sprawled on the ground, his eyes still wide open, dead. Suddenly I was vomiting, unable to stop. I bent over, retched, retched again. Then I staggered away. No matter what happened, I couldn't stand to look at him again. The Americans who survived our charge were falling back. I rejoined the line, already at the top of the cliff. Below was chaos. The Indians were pouring down the hill, burying their hatchets into the skulls of every Yankee they reached. Some Americans had thrown themselves from

the cliffs in panic—you could see their twisted bodies on the banks below. Others were trying to swim across the churning river. I saw one head disappear, then another. Dozens of men huddled on the bank by the river, many of them without muskets, waiting in terror for the Indians. An American officer marched up the hill, escorted by two militiamen. They brought him to Sheaffe. A minute later the bugle sounded cease-fire. But the Mohawks ignored the bugle. They had come to kill. Sheaffe himself had to beg their chief to stop before they reluctantly put their tomahawks back in their belts. I looked across the river. Thousands of Americans lined the shore, row on row of blue, silently watching their comrades surrender. Why hadn't they crossed? An Indian jumped on a rock and raised his arms. Head back, bare skin glistening in the rain, he screamed bloody defiance to the men across the river. A few swore back. Most turned away. The American army of the Niagara—eight thousand strong—had refused to go into battle. They were frightened, poorly led. And terrified of being scalped. And then I knew. Brock didn't need to die. If he'd waited until the Indians arrived, he would have had his victory and still be alive. The charge up the hill had been a mistake. I covered my face with my hands. I had seen too much today. I had killed a man. I had seen men slaughtered. *Brock you died—for nothing.*

They took his body back to Fort George, and five thousand soldiers, militia, and Indians, muskets upside-down in tribute, stood in line as the coffin passed by. There had been no celebrating after the victory. Brock's death had stolen our victory from us. After the battle most of the soldiers just wandered about, talking among themselves, asking, Did you see it? Were you there? What happened? I talked to no one and no one talked to me. Most of the time I spent near Alfred, endlessly brushing and grooming him. He was all of Brock I had left. After the funeral I wandered away from the soldiers and mourners and began to walk. I walked along the bank of the river, stared out at the green waters of the Niagara, and thought about Brock. He had often been cold to me, but never cruel. Mostly he had asked only that I serve him, and I had served him as well as I could. I thought about the day I left the farm—it seemed like

years ago now. I was so different. I had killed a man, watched him die. I had seen a man I loved killed. I stopped, and closed my eyes. I had loved Brock. He had taught me, looked after me when I was supposed to be looking after him, shown me what strength was, shown me how the strongest among us are weak. When I first met him he asked me if I were a good man. I'd said—what had I said? I'd said I hoped I was good enough. He liked that answer. He would have liked it. That's what he wanted for himself—to be good enough to win, to be good enough to win respect. Maitland told me that soldiers eat bad food and sleep on the ground and march and fight and die. Brock was a soldier. It was part of who he was to die like that. That was how he was supposed to die. I turned away from the river, and walked back to the fort.

The order to see Captain Stanton came early the next morning. I hurried over to the officers' quarters. I hadn't seen him since Detroit. I didn't want to see him now. "Sit down, private." It was a surprising order. Privates stood in front of officers. I had never heard a captain ask a private to sit. Stanton was sorting through a great pile of papers. This was a time officers hated. The battle was over, winter was coming on, there were supplies to order, men to clothe and

house through the winter months, nothing interesting— like war—to do. Stanton shuffled through his papers and pulled out a letter. He looked at it thoughtfully for a moment, then put it down. "Do you know how to read, private?" I nodded. "Yes sir." "You'll remember I was the officer who recommended you as General Brock's batman. It was a risk, but an interesting risk." I sat stiffly in the chair, watching him. I should be standing. Sitting was wrong. Why had he asked me to sit? "Were you happy, serving General Brock?" Stanton asked. "Sir? I .. .yes, sir. Very happy." Happy was the wrong word, but I didn't know the right one, and wouldn't have said it out loud if I did. "General Brock was . . . impressed with your work." Stanton glanced down at the letter on his desk. "He gave me this letter some days before . . . before the battle at Queenston Heights, and asked me to open it in the event he ..." Stanton coughed. "... in the event he was killed." Stanton rubbed his eyes. It was only the day after the funeral. "I was... surprised by this request, I must tell you. I did not know the general well, at least no better than any of the other officers, some of whom are quite senior to me. But I see now why I was entrusted with it." He handed the letter to me across the desk. "Here, read it."

I recognized the handwriting at once—Brock's script was broad and clear. The letter was dated September 30th, two weeks ago. It was strange, seeing words written by him. It was strange reading in front of an officer. But I'd been told to read. The words were hard—I didn't even know what some of them meant. But the meaning was clear. *Captain Stanton, Some months ago Tasked, you to procure for me from the ranks a private to serve as my batman. As you will recall, I expressed misgivings concerning your nomination of the coConiaC volunteer Jeremy fields. T/ie boy appeared too young and ine^peri- enced even for this admittedly Cess than onerous task. however, I have betn impressed6y the service ofTrivate fields and wish to egress my gratitude for your perspicacious choice. 9{& hasserved me welland is a valuable, if at times impertinent, aide. I sense the boy is capable of greater achieve^ment than he has been given opportunity to display heretofore. I am taking the liberty, therefore, of asking you this favour. Since, if you are reading this, misfortune shall have fallen upon me and I am no longer able to execute my otun affairs, I would deem it a great service if you would attend to the proper education of fields. I have instructed my solicitors in London, in the event of my death, to set aside a sum of five*

hundred pounds, in trust, to be used to defray the costs of bringing fields to England and supporting him while he pursues his studies. I believe he has had little formal schooling, and it may be some years before he is able to pursue whatever vocation awaits him. If you would see to it that my wishes have been carried out, and expedite fields's discharge from His Majesty's service, and attend to those necessary details such as his transportation to England and accommodation once there (I fear these tasks it would be daunting for one of such purely colonial experience), I will owe you a great debt, which, obviously, I shall be unable to repay. Please accept my deepest apologies for placing this burden upon your shoulders, and accept also my sincerest gratitude for your services. I remain, Your humble and obedient servant,

Isaac Brock, "Do you understand the letter?" Stanton asked. I nodded. I didn't trust myself to speak. Stanton rose from his chair. "Very well, then. I will see to the details. You will need tutoring in England before you will be ready for any other education. I will also arrange for your accommodation there. It will take a week, I should think, to arrange your discharge. Until then, consider

yourself on leave. When would you like to depart for England?" I shook my head. "Whenever ... whenever you want." "It should be soon. The Atlantic is not an ocean best crossed in winter. There is a ship sailing from Quebec City in three weeks. Can you be there?" "Yes." "Then we'll try for that date. Have you any questions?" I had only one. "Sir, can I keep the letter?" Stanton paused. "I had rather hoped to keep it myself. He ... we were all devoted to him you know." He cleared his throat. "But the letter is about you, and it really belongs to you. Yes, take the letter." I stood up and snapped to attention. "Will that be all, sir?" "Yes. Return here in one week. That will be all, Fields." "Sir." I pivoted sharply about-face. I was exaggerating everything I did, hoping it would keep me in control. "Fields ..." Stanton's voice came from behind. I swung around. "Sir?" He stood behind his desk, head bent over, examining some paper. "I... I'm rather proud that I chose you to be the general's batman." He didn't look up. I swallowed, tried to say something, but there was nothing to say. We knew what we were thinking. I closed the door softly behind me.

The next morning I left Fort George and set out for the farm. In the past five months I had gone through war and

seen death and served a great man. Now I was going to England. It was time to say a proper goodbye to my home. The walk was colder than in May, and longer, but I didn't mind. I was tougher than I was then and used to marching mile upon mile. A grey wind whipped at the flaps of my cloak, but I ignored it. The fields were bare, as they had been bare then. But they were lifeless now. The harvest was in, and only the stubble of the crops littered the brown earth. I saw no one. The farmers were in the barns or in their homes. They had no call to be out in the fields. I stayed the first night at the village where Brock had given his speech, and the second night at York. The next morning, before the sun had fully lightened the flat clouds covering the sky, I set out for the farm. I walked slowly. Five months ago I travelled down this road harbouring a rage for a man who had stolen my mother's farm for twenty pounds. I had wanted to kill him. Now I *had* killed, killed a man I didn't know, who probably didn't deserve to die. I found it hard to remember the rage. It was past noon when I walked up the path to the house. As soon as I saw it I knew no one lived there now. The doors to the barn were open, creaking in the wind. The barn was empty. I walked across the muddy yard to the house. A window was broken, the door ajar. I stepped inside. The furniture was gone. It was as though no one had ever lived here, as though the place had been abandoned the day it was built. There was an empty box—we'd kept wood in it—against one wall. I pulled it into the middle of the room and sat down.

I tried to imagine my mother here, moving quietly about, a bowl in her hand, her apron tied about her. I tried to imagine this room filled with light from the fire, the smell of baking scenting the air, the snow beating uselessly against the window, everything inside warm and safe. I had never said goodbye to her. She never knew what became of her son. Had she known she was dying? Did she rage against it, as I had raged against Uncle Will? Maybe not. She had made a home and produced a child, and raised him, and given everything she had to give to those who needed her. *I'm all right, mama.* "Who's there?" I jumped. A figure framed the doorway. It was dark in the room, but there was enough light to make out the musket pointing at me. "Who are you?" the figure asked again. "What are you doing here?" I knew the voice now. "This is my home, Uncle Will." "Jeremy?" He lowered the musket and stepped into the room. "Jeremy, it wyou. My God, you gave me a fright. Seth came running to the house, said he'd seen some soldier going in here. You never know, in these times" He was talking too fast, and the nervousness in his voice made it quaver a bit. "So." He leaned the musket against the wall, but kept near it. "You're a soldier." "Yes." "Have you fought in the war?" "Yes. I was batman to General Brock."

His eyes widened. " *You* ?That takes some believing, boy." "It doesn't matter if you believe it or not." Was this the man I had wanted to kill? I hadn't noticed before the fat under the chin, the belly that fell over the belt. Had I really hated this man? "What are you ... why did you come back?" he asked. He was frightened. Had I come for his land? Had I told some British officer about him? Was the law coming? Had I really known Brock? How much trouble was he in? "I came back to see the place. I'm leaving for England. I wanted to say goodbye to the house." Did he know he sighed so loudly I could hear it? "Oh. Off to England. Is your regiment returning there?" "No. I'm going to school." I didn't want to talk any more. I had done what I came to do. I wanted to get out of this ghost of a house, off this land that had no life. I started toward the door. Uncle Will stepped backwards, out into the yard. "Here." He'd forgotten his musket. I handed it to him. Fear darted across his eyes when he saw me holding the gun. He grabbed it away from me, then smiled an apology. "Well, it was good to see you again, Jeremy. You must come back here, when you return from England." He didn't want me back. He didn't want to see my face again. He wanted the ship to sink in the middle of the ocean with all hands. "Goodbye, uncle." I started down the path, then stopped. "Uncle Will." He stood there, holding the musket against his chest.

"Yes, Jeremy?" "I want the family Bible." He opened his mouth, then closed it. He was going to tell me it was his, that he was head of the family now, that I had no right to it. But then he thought of what might happen if he refused. What was a Bible, if it would get rid of me? There were plenty of Bibles, and he had the money to buy them. "If you want it, son, you're welcome to it." "Have Seth bring it to me. I'll be on the road." I turned my back on him, on the farm, on the dead past, and walked away.

Epilogue

I am sitting at a desk in a tent on the banks of a river called the Rideau. We are building a canal—a great canal from Kingston to the Ottawa River. The generals say we need it to move troops between Upper and Lower Canada, in case the Americans invade again. Almost twenty years it's been, and still we worry about invasion. The war, of course, is over, but people fear another could come. The Americans go to war as easily as lighting a pipe—with the Spanish, with the Indians, with us. Myself, I'm not sure we need the canal. The Americans have left us alone since the War of 1812. I think they've given up on owning all the continent. But it doesn't really matter. For me the pleasure is in the building—I let the politicians decide what needs to be built. I didn't see the last two years of the war. There was a lot of fighting. They attacked York and burned it. We attacked and burned Washington. We lost Detroit. They took Niagara, then lost it. The only news from the war that really mattered to me was hearing of Tecumseh's death. After the Yankees recaptured Detroit they moved up the Thames Valley. The British and Indians met them at a place called Moraviantown. When the British saw they were going to lose they surrendered. But Tecumseh kept the Indians fighting, until finally he was killed, and his warriors disappeared into the bush. Their hopes for their land disappeared with them. It was 1814 before both sides got tired of the killing and decided to quit. The reasons for the war were long forgotten. Napoleon had been defeated, and the ports of Europe

were open. Neither side had won any land they could hold on to. The politicians decided to return both countries to their old borders. The war, I think, never really meant much to the Yankees. They dreamed of grabbing half a continent without having to fire a shot. When they realized it would be harder than that they gave up, and went back to conquering the west. The farmers of Upper Canada returned to their fields, more worried about the crops than the country. But they were never quite the same again. They had proved they were different from the Americans. Maybe they shared the same language, the same religion, even the same ancestors. But they weren't Americans, and didn't want to be Americans, and were willing to fight to preserve the difference. They won their fight. They were probably the only winners in the entire war. But the war, when it ended, was already far from me. I was living in London, in a house run by a woman who never smiled and never put any salt in the potatoes, getting an education. It was lonely in London, at first. I was homesick, which was strange because I had no home. London was enormous. All those people crammed together, and I didn't know one of them and not one of them wanted to know me. But I knew I was there for a reason. Brock had given me a chance—a chance to choose my life instead of having it chosen for me. I wasn't going to waste that chance. I got on. I discovered I was good with numbers—better than good. I could see into them where others just stared and

didn't understand. Eventually I entered a school for army engineers. I still had this dream of seeing all those capitals on the map in the back of my Bible. I've seen some of them. I've built roads across a baked Indian plain, rounded the cape that marks the end of Africa, cut my way through the Jamaican bush, crossed the desert sands of Australia. I have fallen in love, and then out of it, and then moved on before I could fall into it again. And now I'm back in Upper Canada, helping to build this canal. And I'm thinking of Brock. He's never really left my mind. In the army, whenever I meet a new officer, I measure him against Brock. I've never met a man who matched him. Brock is worshipped now. They call him the Saviour of Upper Canada. There's a great monument built in his memory at Queenston Heights. People talk of him as though he were some kind of saint. I can never think of him that way. When I think of Brock I think of a general in a kitchen, showing a fifteen-year-old boy how to make a roast beef sandwich. I think of him leaping out of a boat into dark waters to push it free of a rock. I think of him sitting in his cabin on the *Chippawa*, amazed at the impudent batman who dares question him, and then struggling to answer the question. He was a decent man, who knew what he had to do, and tried to do it. And if others say the same of me, that will be good enough. Time to stop. It's after midnight, and we start work at dawn. I have work to do.

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if the sacrifice of those who fought and died nearly two hundred years ago is to have any final meaning, then it is for us to fight—peacefully and passionately and with all our strength—to preserve our country. We owe them no less. Ottawa June 2,1991