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Untamed: MacKinnon's Rangers 2 (English Edition)



Par Pamela Clare
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurPamela Clare brings her expert plotting, sizzling chemistry and thrilling adventure to her breathtaking MacKinnon's Rangers series, in the grand tradition of The Last of the Mohicans, perfect for fans of Maya Banks, Monica McCarty and Zoe Archer.They were a band of brothers, their loyalty to one another forged by hardship and battle, the bond between these Highland warriors, rugged colonials, and fierce Native Americans stronger even than blood ties.Though forced to fight for the hated British, Morgan MacKinnon would no more betray the men he leads than slit his own throat - not even when he was captured

by the French and threatened with an agonizing death by fire at the hands of their Abenaki allies. Only the look of innocent longing in the eyes of a convent-bred French lass could make him question his vow to escape and return to the Rangers. And soon the sweet passion he awoke in Amalie had him cursing the war that forced him to choose between upholding his honor and pledging himself to the woman he loves. Be swept away by the other sexy MacKinnon's Rangers in *Surrender and Defiant*. Or take a wildly romantic ride with Pamela Clare's *I-Team: Extreme Exposure, Hard Evidence, Unlawful Contact, Naked Edge, Breaking Point, Striking Distance, Seduction Game*. Extrait Riveting, exciting Pamela Clare delivers what readers want. Connie Mason, New York Times bestselling author Pamela Clare is a fabulous storyteller whose beautifully written, fast-paced tales will leave you breathless with anticipation. She creates heroes, heroines, and villains with the ease of a master that draw the reader irresistibly into the story, making them part of the pain, the fear and the passion. Leigh Greenwood, USA Today bestselling author Praise for the MacKinnons Rangers Novels UNTAMED Captivating Clares detailed attention to the history of alliances forged and battles fought near Fort Ticonderoga adds authenticity, and the characters evolve and change with a realism that readers will love. Publishers Weekly (starred review) Magnificent You need only to read the first page to know that you are beginning another historical romantic masterpiece by Pamela Clare, a master storyteller who always delights readers Untamed will leave you breathless and cheering with its attention to historical detail, characters you can almost reach out and touch, a story line that's deeply riveting, and a love story that will melt your heart as only these MacKinnons, Highland warriors, Scottish brothers, can do You must always keep a Pamela Clare book on your keeper shelf. She is not just a read, she is a reread. Fresh Fiction Riveting. Clare cleverly combines history and fiction to bring us a tale full of drama and sensuality, with well-drawn characters and continuous action. RT Book s A great tale The story line is action packed but owned by the fleeing lead couple and the historical backdrop that makes this clearly must-reading for Colonial America romance fans. Midwest Book This story had me from the first page. Pamela Clare is a master storyteller who writes stories steeped in historical settings that are so vivid you feel you are walking alongside the main characters as you view the story through their eyes. This one has it all. It is a story of honor, deception, loyalty, passion, duty, forgiveness, faith, and, above all, love. The main characters are strong and beautifully matched. They complete [each] other so perfectly The love scenes are just to die for, and this story brought tears to my eyes more than once, as well. I highly recommend this stirring and wonderful series to anyone who loves a good love story. Night Owl Romance Surrounded by the lush backdrop of the historical wild frontier, Untamed is the extraordinary story of how Morgan and Amalie find a once-in-a-lifetime love. The pages are filled with danger, excitement, and suspense. Compelling characters, a seemingly impossible conflict, and one of the most magnificent men I've ever read about make Untamed unforgettable Every moment they share is incredibly sensual and erotic. I fell in love with Morgan. Amalie is perfect in every way for him. Untamed is the ultimate angst-filled romance Untamed is perfect. Joyfully ed Both hero and heroine are strong, deep characters whose romance feels believable This is a good read. Curled Up With a Good Book A powerful story about two people who discover love despite war and betrayal I felt truly invested in the characters in Untamed and found the time period captivating. Morgan has now taken the lead as my favorite hero of the year. All About Romance SURRENDER [A] lush historical romance Believable characters, scorching chemistry, and a convincing setting make this a worthy read. Publishers Weekly Be forewarned that this is not a book you'll put down lightly. Once you start, you'll be hard-pressed to do anything else but travel along on this journey filled with action, danger, fantastically vivid historical events and written in almost liquid prose: nonstop and ever-flowing words that blend together in a lifelike portrayal of colonial times and the people who stood up to almost unimaginable hardships, written only as Pamela Clare can write them Surrender is a must-have I can't recommend this book highly enough. Romance Reader at Heart An astonishing story. All you need to do is open the cover and read page one to know you're being taken on an incredible journey and beginning one of the most exciting books ever written. Surrender is nothing short of genius, a work of art, written by a master storyteller. Pamela Clare pens a story so gut-wrenching, so intense, so deeply moving that you can barely put it down. There are wonderful one-liners that make you laugh along with the most beautiful words of love you'll ever read. Its an intense drama with unforgettable characters and a hero and heroine you'll hold in your heart forever. Surrender to Surrender. Fresh Fiction Trust me, you do not want to miss this exciting and HOT start to what promises to be a fabulous new series. I have loved all of Pamela Clares novels from the first one and this is one that I hated to see end Great plot and characters as well as some very memorable supporting characters If you love historical romance, be sure to pick this one up soon! Night Owl Romance This is fantastic historical

romance that uses the backdrop of the French and Indian War to tell a terrific tale of love. The story line is action packed and never slows down until the final exhilarating climax. Fans will treasure this keeper and look forward to more MacKinnon thrillers. Midwest Book Engrossing This is a book to savor. The Romance Reader Ms. Clare writes a compelling story that I found difficult to set aside. I was totally submerged in the characters and the story through the very end. I'm anxiously awaiting the next two novels where we will learn more about Iain's brothers. Once Upon A Romance [Surrender] has its fill of adventure. The author evokes her setting wonderfully. Readers looking for a passionate romance and plenty of adventure will likely enjoy this story. All About Romance Berkley Sensation Books by Pamela Clare EXTREME EXPOSURE HARD

EVIDENCE UNLAWFUL CONTACT NAKED EDGE BREAKING

POINTSURRENDER UNTAMED Untamed Pamela Clare For Amy Vandersall, who has always believed in me. Acknowledgments Special thanks to Catrona Mary Mac Kirnan for once again lending her expertise in Scottish Gaelic to the MacKinnon Brothers and to Stephanie Desprez for correcting my French. Tapadh leibh! Merci beaucoup! Much gratitude to Natasha Kern for her support and encouragement and to Cindy Hwang for allowing me to keep this series alive and for caring about the historical details. Additional thanks to Mike Terenzetti of Pontour Tours of Lake George for taking me to the magical waterfall on the eastern shore of Lake George and showing me the lake from the Rangers point of view; to Christopher Fox, the curator at Fort Ticonderoga, for the tour of the fort and its collections; to Dr. David Starbuck for sharing his insights about his excavations on Rogers Island; and to Eileen Hannay of Rogers Island Visitor Center for being so patient with two people who didn't know when to stop asking questions. Love and thanks to my sister, Michelle, and to my good friends Sue Zimmerman, Kristi Ross, Libby Murphy, Ronlyn Howe, Suzanne Warren, and Jennifer Johnson for their tireless support and loving friendship. And, as always, thank you to my family, especially my sons, Alec and Benjamin. I love you. Table of Contents PROLOGUE July 8, 1758 Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga) New France Amalie Chauvenet straightened the gold braid on her father's gray uniform, trying to hide her fear. I will be fine, Papa. You've no need to trouble yourself on my behalf. In the distance she could hear the dull thud of marching feet and the scrape of metal against metal as thousands of British soldiers surrounded the fort's landward side and prepared to attack. Certain the British would capture the fort in a matter of hours, her father had come to escort her to the little chapel where he felt she'd be safest. If the fort should fall, stay close to Pre Franois. Papa's dear face was lined with worry. I will come to you if I can. If aught should befall me, Pre Franois will take you to Montcalm or Bourlamaque. They will keep you safe. Nothing will happen to you, Papa! Her words sounded childish even to her own ears. A measure of her fear for him. It had become the custom in this accursed war for both sides to shoot officers first in hopes of leaving the enemy leaderless and confused. But Amalie could not abide the thought of her father in harm's way, a mere mark in range of some British soldier's musket. Papa lifted her chin, forced her to meet his gaze. Listen to me! You are an officer's daughter, Amalie, but in the rush of victory, even disciplined soldiers are wont to rape and pillage. Do not allow yourself to be found alone! She heard her father's words and understood the unspoken message beneath them. She was an officer's daughter, but she was also mixed, her blood a mix of French and Abenaki. Though most French accepted her, the British were not so kind. In their eyes, a woman of mixed blood was little better than a dog, so she'd been told. If the fort should fall, her standing as a major's daughter likely would not keep her safe without a high-ranking officer's protection. Oui, Papa. Dread spread like ice through her belly. Is there no chance that we may yet prevail? The British general Abercrombie commands a force of at least fifteen thousand, easily four times our number, and MacKinnon's Rangers are with him. Amalie's dread grew. Everyone knew of MacKinnon's Rangers. There were no fiercer fighters, no warriors more feared or reviled throughout New France than this band of barbaric Celts. Unmatched at woodcraft and shooting marks, they had once crossed leagues of untamed forest in the dead of winter to destroy her grandmother's village at Oganak, ruthlessly killing most of the men, burning the lodges, and leaving the women and children to starve. The French had put a bounty on the MacKinnon brothers' scalps, but the Abenaki wanted them alive so they could exact vengeance in blood and pain. Some amongst her mother's people said MacKinnon's Rangers could fly. Others claimed to have seen them take the forms of wolves or bears. Still others claimed they feasted upon the flesh of their dead. The stories about them were so astonishing that some believed these MacKinnon men weren't men at all, but powerful *chi* spirits. But there were other rumors, stories of Rangers sparing women and children, tales of priests and nuns whom they'd shielded from British Regulars with their own bodies, accounts of mercy shown to French soldiers and enemy Indians alike. But which stories were true? Amalie did not wish to find out. Why did you not stay at the convent? Her father's brow folded into a frown. At least there you would be safe. She smoothed a stray curl

on his gray wig. I came because you needed me, Papa. She journeyed all the way from Trois Rivieres in April to care for him when he had fallen ill with fever. He was her only true family. Though she had cousins and aunts amongst the Abenaki, she barely knew them. Her mother had died in childhood when Amalie was not yet two, and her father had parted ways with his wife's kin, preferring to shelter his only child amongst the Ursulines than in the wild. And although Amalie was grateful for the care she received at the abbey, she had long chafed at the strict rules and rigid routine that shaped convent life, longing to see the world beyond the abbey's stifling walls. Beware of seeking adventure, the *mre suprieure* had warned her when Amalie had announced she was leaving. You might not be prepared when it finds you. Amalie had no idea what the *mre suprieure* had meant until yesterday, when hundreds upon hundreds of British boats had landed to the south on the shores of Lac du Saint-Sacrement, what the British called Lake George, disgorging thousands of soldiers dressed in blood red. Now battle was imminent, and only God knew what this day would bring. Yet, despite the peril, she did not regret her decision to come to the frontier. She had never spent more than a few weeks at a time with her father, and the months she lived by his side were amongst the happiest and most exciting she could remember. She found joy in nursing him back to health, cooking and cleaning for him, mending his uniform, heating his bath and filling his pipe, as any devoted daughter would do. But there was more. They had laughed together, read Voltaire and Rousseau, discussed the latest ideas of the day, notions about society and liberty she had not encountered at the abbey. Her father had let her speak her mind, even encouraged her to do so, never chastising her for asking questions as the *mre suprieure* had so often done. She came to know him as a father, to admire him as a man, to respect him as an officer. She came to love him. She could not bear to lose him. She pressed her palm to his cheek. If the strength of our army should fail, it will not be long before the British reach Trois Rivieres and Montreal. Then abbey walls will make little difference. I would not trade these months with you for something so small as safety. His gaze softened. Ah, my sweet Amalie, I do need you. You have brought such sunshine to my life. If I had but considered it, I would have taken you from the abbey long ago. But if the breastworks cannot withstand Abercrombie's artillery. His voice trailed off. Then he smiled and drew her close, surrounding her with his reassuring strength and his familiar scented pipe smoke, starched linen, and brisk cologne. It is in God's hands, *ma petite caille*. My little quail. And so Amalie went to await the outcome of the battle in the chapel, swallowing her tears and forcing herself to smile when her father took his leave of her to return to his duties at the breastworks. Be safe, Papa, she whispered as he walked away, so smart in his gray uniform. She knelt down with her rosary beside *Pre Francois* and had just begun to pray when the battle exploded. Like thunder it seemed to shake the very ground, the din of cannon, musket fire, and men's shouts almost deafening. She had never been near a battlefield before, and her hands trembled as she worked her way through each bead, fighting to remember the words, her thoughts on Papa and what might happen to all of them should the fort fall. The soldiers would be imprisoned. Her father and the other officers would be interrogated and traded for British captives. And the women. In the rush of victory, even disciplined soldiers are wont to rape and pillage. *Notre Pre, qui tes aux cieux* Our Father, who art in heaven. She had not been kneeling long when *Pre Francois* was summoned to the hospital to comfort the wounded and anoint the dying. Impatient to help and mindful of her father's warning not to be found alone, Amalie, who had tended sick and injured women at the convent, asked to come with him. Are you certain, Amalie? *Pre Francois* looked down at her, doubt clouding his green eyes. This is war. It will be gruesome. She nodded, braiding her long hair and binding the plait into a thick knot at her nape. Oui, Father, I am certain. I have seen death before. But she had never seen anything like what awaited them at the hospital. The dead were so numerous that there was no room for them inside. Their bodies lay without dignity in the hot sunshine, moved hastily aside to make way for those still living. The wounded lay on beds, on the floor, against the walls. They muttered snatches of prayer, groaned through gritted teeth, cried out in agony, waiting for someone to ease their suffering. *Monsieur Lambert*, the surgeon, and his men worked as swiftly as they could, but there were so many. And everywhere, there was blood, the air thick with the stench of gunpowder and death. Surely, this was hell. Amalie thrust aside her childish fears and her tears, donned an apron, and set to work, doing what the surgeon asked of her. Outside, the battle seemed to come in waves, building until she feared the very sky should fall, then fading to silence, only to begin anew. A soldier clutched at her skirts with bloody fingers. She took his hand, sat beside him, and knew the moment she saw the wound in his chest that he would perish. If only she could give him laudanum, ease the pain of his passing, but there was not enough. She had been told to save it for those who at least stood a chance of survival. He seemed about to speak, struggled for breath. And then he was gone. About her age, he had died before she could utter a word of comfort, before *Pre Francois* could offer him last rites, before the

surgeon could tend him. She swallowed the hard lump in her throat, muttered a prayer, then drew the soldiers eyes closed. Another blast of cannon shook the walls of the little log hospital, making Amalie gasp. Those are French guns, mademoiselle. The soldier in the next bed spoke, his voice tight with pain. Do not be afraid. As long as they fire, we know the breastworks stand. Ashamed of her fear, Amalie covered the dead soldier with a blanket, a signal to the surgeons attendants to remove his body. How could she, who was safe behind the forts walls, allow herself to cower at the mere sound of war when all around her lay men who had braved the full violence of the battlefield? It is I who should be offering you comfort, monsieur. She moved to sit beside him and checked beneath the bloodstained bandage on his right arm. The musket ball had passed through, but it had broken bone. Monsieur Lambert would almost certainly have to amputate. Are you thirsty? You are the daughter of Major Chauvenet, are you not? Oui. You are just as beautiful as the men say. I have never seen such long hair. Then his eyes widened, his face pallid. I hope you take no offense at my boldness. The battle seems to have loosened my tongue. Though shed been at Fort Carillon for more than three months, she still hadnt grown accustomed to the attention of men. Uncertain how to respond, she reached for her plait, which had somehow slipped free of its knot, its thick end touching the floor when she sat. Quickly, she bound it up again, lest it trail through the blood that was tracked across the floorboards.

Then she pulled the water bucket close, drew out the ladle, and lifted it to the soldiers lips. Drink. The wounded soldier had just taken his first swallow when there came a commotion at the door and Montcalms third in command, the Chevalier de Bourlamaque, was brought inside, bleeding from what looked to be a grave wound in his shoulder. How goes the battle? someone called. An expectant hush fell over the room. Bourlamaque sat with a grimace, his white wig slightly askew. We are prevailing. Murmurs of astonishment and relief passed through the crowded hospital like a breeze, and Amalie met the injured soldiers gaze, her own surprise reflected in his eyes. For whatever reason, Abercrombie hasnt brought up his artillery. Bourlamaque gritted his teeth as a soldier helped him out of his jacket. We are cutting down the enemy as swiftly as they appear, and their losses are grievous. Four times we have repulsed them. None have even passed the abatis to reach our breastworks. Abercrombie is a fool! one of the soldiers exclaimed to harsh laughter. Bourlamaque did not smile. That may well beand thank God for it! but his marksmen are laying down a most murderous fire upon us from the cover of the trees. We have pounded them with cannon, but we cannot root them out. MacKinnon and his men? Oui. Their Mahican allies are beside them.

Bourlamaque wiped sweat and gunpowder from his brow with a linen handkerchief. The lot of them shift from tree to tree like ghosts and will not relent. And they call themselves Catholic! A soldier spat on the floor. But Bourlamaque held up his hand for silence. Listen! They are retreating again. The sound of shooting died away, replaced first by the distant beating of drums and then by an oppressive, sullen stillness. So many times now the battle had ceased, only to begin again. Amalie dared not hope, and yet Barely able to breathe, she bent her mind back to her work. Whether the battle was over or not, these men needed her help. She bound the soldiers wound in fresh linen, gave him laudanum, prayed with him, then moved to the next bed and the next. Shed gone to the back room to fetch more linen strips for bandages when she heard the drums beat afresh. Her stomach sank, and her step faltered. Curse them! a soldier shouted. Do they not know when to withdraw? There came a roar of cannon, and again the battle raged. More dead. More wounded. But not

Papa. Not Papa. Holding on to that hope, Amalie went where she was needed. She carried water to the injured men who lay on the bare earth outside, cleaned and bandaged their less serious wounds, offered what solace she could. She did not notice the sweat trickling between her breasts or the rumbling of her empty stomach or her own thirst. Then the cadence of the British drums changed again, and once more the battle fell silent. And then was she imagining it? cheers. The sound swelled, grew stronger, and all heads turned toward the northwest, where soldiers stood upon the walls, their muskets raised overhead, their gazes on the breastworks and the battlefield beyond. A soldier ran toward them, his face split by a wide smile. They are retreating! The British are fleeing! The day is won! Relief swept through Amalie, leaving her dizzy. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, felt a gentle squeeze from the soldier whose hand she was holding. Cest fini, mademoiselle! he said, a smile on his bruised face. Its over. Amalie opened her eyes, smiled back. Oui, cest fini. But even as she said it, she knew it wasnt true. For the men who lay here and those inside, the fight was far from over, life and death still hanging in the balance. She threw herself into caring for them with renewed strength, refreshed by the knowledge that no more need die today and grateful beyond words that her father did not lie amongst the injured or the slain. But if shed expected the end of the battle to stem the tide of wounded and dead, shed been mistaken. Carried on litters or hobbling, they arrived by the dozens, some scarcely scathed, some terribly wounded, some already beyond all but Gods help. Most had been hit by

musket fire, holes torn into their flesh by cruel lead. Others had been pierced by shards of wood or burnt by powder. Be thankful they never had the chance to use their bayonets or their artillery, said a young soldier when she gasped at the terrible wound in his shoulder. Have you ever seen a man with his entrails? That is quite enough, Sergeant. Amalie recognized Lieutenant Rillieux's voice and glanced back to find him standing behind her, his tricorne in his hand, his face smeared with gunpowder, sweat, and blood. One of her father's officers and a tall man, he towered over her where she knelt on the ground. He bowed stiffly. I pray you are not wounded, monsieur. She stood, wiping her fingers on her bloodstained apron. It was then she noticed the pity and sadness in his eyes. The breath left her lungs, and her heart began to pound, the sound of her pulse almost drowning out his words. Mademoiselle, it is with great sorrow that I must report. But she had already seen. Non! Two young officers approached the hospital, bearing her father on a litter. Heedless of soldiers' stares or Lieutenant Rillieux's attempt to stop her, she ran to him. But it was too late. Her father's eyes were closed, his lips and skin blue, his throat torn by a musket ball. She didn't have to check his breathing to know he was dead. Non, Papa! Non! She cupped his cold cheek in her palm, then laid her head against his still and silent chest, pain seeming to split her breast, tears blurring her vision. Over the sound of her own sobs, she heard Lieutenant Rillieux speak. He was slain by one of MacKinnon's Rangers during the first assault. He toppled over the breastworks, and we could not reach him until the battle ended for fear of the Rangers' rifles. You should know that he fought bravely and died instantly. We shall all mourn him. And in the darkness of her grief, it dawned on her. Everything her father had been, everything he'd known, everything they might have done together was gone. Her father was dead. She was alone.

Chapter 1 April 19, 1759 Ticonderoga New York frontier Major Morgan MacKinnon lay on his belly, looking down from the summit of Rattlesnake Mountain to the French fort at Ticonderoga below. He held up his brother Iain's spying glass; nay, it was now his spying glass and watched as French soldiers unloaded kegs of gunpowder from the hold of a small ship. Clearly, Brouillette was preparing to defend the fort again. But if Morgan and his men succeeded in their mission tonight, that powder would never see the inside of a French musket. Connor stretched out beside him and spoke in a whisper. I cannae look down upon this place without thinkin' of that bastard Abercrombie and the good men we lost. Morgan lowered the spying glass and met his younger brother's gaze. Nor can I, but we didna come here to grieve. Nay. Connor's gaze hardened. We've come for vengeance. Last summer, they'd had no choice but to follow Abercrombie or Nanny Crombie as the men had called him to a terrible defeat. An arrogant bastard who paid no heed to the counsel of mere provincials, Abercrombie had ignored their warnings that Ticonderoga could not be taken without artillery. He hadn't believed that the hastily built abatis—the barrier of felled trees and branches that had been piled afore the walls—could hinder trained British Regulars and had ordered his men against the French breastworks with naught but muskets. Soldiers had become ensnared like rabbits, cut down by French marksmen afore they could reach the walls, victims of their own loyalty and Abercrombie's overweening pride. On that terrible day, the Rangers, then under the command of Morgan's older brother Iain, had taken position to the northwest together with Captain Joseph's Muhheconneok warriors and had fired endlessly at the French marksmen, trying to dislodge them. But the French had turned cannon upon them and pounded them into the ground. So many had been lost—good men and true, men with families, men who'd fought beside them from the beginning. 'Twas here they'd lost Cam and dozens more. Dead for naught. When Abercrombie had finally sounded the retreat and the smoke had cleared, the fort had stood just as it had afore. Never had Morgan seen such senseless death and at the age of seven and twenty he'd seen death enough to sicken a man's soul. For nigh on four years, he and his brothers had lived and breathed war. Forced by that whoreson Wentworth to choose between fighting for Britain or being hanged for a crime they had not committed, they'd taken up arms against the French and their Indian allies, harrying them with ambushes, seizing their supplies, fighting them in forest and fen. They'd slain fellow Catholic and heathen alike, burying their own dead along the way. Morgan had never imagined that he, as a MacKinnon, would fight the French, traditional allies of all Scotsmen still faithful to Church and Crown.

During the Forty-Five, the French had aided the Highland clans, including Morgan's grandfather Iain Og MacKinnon, laird of Clan MacKinnon in their vain struggle to drive the German Protestant from the throne. Then, after the disastrous defeat at Culloden, the French had given refuge to many an exiled Scot, saving countless lives from the wrath of Cumberland. Even now France sheltered the rightful heir to the throne, Bonnie Charles Stuart. Every true Scotsman owed the French a debt. Aye, it was a devil's bargain that had spared Morgan and his brothers the gallows. Father Delavay, the French priest Iain had kidnapped last year when he'd had need of a priest to marry him and Annie, said the sin was not theirs but Wentworth's. And yet absolution stuck in Morgan's throat, for it was not bloody Wentworth who pulled the trigger on his rifle, but

he himself. If anything gave him peace, it was knowing that Iain was now out of the fray, settled on the MacKinnon farm with Annie and little Iain, the firstborn of a new generation of MacKinnons. Wentworth had released Iain from service, not because he wished to spare Iain, but because he was besotted with Annie. Whatever the cause for Wentworth's mercy, Morgan was grateful. He never would have found the courage to face Annie had Iain been slain in battle or worse taken captive. Morgan saw something move in the dark forest below, heard the slow click of rifles being cocked around him, and felt a warm swell of pride. He rarely needed to give orders. Having fought side by side for so long, the Rangers thought and moved as one. There were no better fighters in the colonies, no men better suited to the hardship of this war. 'Twas an honor to lead them, as Iain had done afore him. Morgan closed the spying glass, raised his rifle, cocked it. But it was not French scouts who emerged from the green wall of forest, but Captain Joseph's warriors, eighty men in black and white war paint moving swiftly and silently through the shadows. They'd been watching the Rangers west flank on the long march northward and had gone on to scout out the French sentries while Morgan and his men surveyed the fort from above. Morgan lowered his rifle and whispered to Joseph in the Muhheconneok tongue. You thrash about like a randy bull moose. We heard you coming from a league away. You might have been shot. Joseph grinned. There is more to fear in a bee's sting than in your muskets. My blind granny has better aim. Bonded by blood to Morgan and his brothers, Joseph Aupauteunk was the son of a Muhheconneok chief and a fearsome warrior. He and his father had come to the MacKinnon farm, bringing gifts of dried corn and venison that had helped Morgan and his family survive their first bitter winter of exile in the colonies. Though Morgan's mother God rest her soul had at first been terrified of Indians, a lasting friendship had grown between Morgan's family and the Mahicans of Stockbridge. 'Twas Joseph and his uncles who'd taught Morgan and his brothers to track, to fight, to survive in the wild. As for what Joseph's sisters had taught them, Morgan was too much of a gentleman to say without a gill or two of whiskey in his belly. Morgan switched to English so that those amongst his men who did not speak Muhheconneok could understand. What does Bourlamaque have waitin' for us? It was time to plan their strategy. Amalie picked at her dinner, her appetite lost to talk of war. She did her best to listen politely, no matter how dismayed she felt at the thought of another British attack. Monsieur de Bourlamaque was commander of a garrison in the midst of conflict. It was right that he and his trusted officers should discuss the war as they dined. She did not wish to distract them with childish sentiments, nor was she so selfish that she required diversion. And if, at times, she wished her guardian would ask to hear her thoughts Her father was the only person who'd ever done that, and he was gone. And so Amalie passed the meal in silence much as she'd done at the abbey. We must not let last summer's victory lull us into becoming overconfident. Bourlamaque dabbed his lips with a white linen serviette. His blue uniform, with its decorations and the red sash, set him apart from his officers, who wore gray. Amherst is not a fool like Abercrombie. He would never have attacked without artillery. Lieutenant Fouchet looked doubtful. Surely he will think twice before attempting to take us again. The British lost so many men! Amalie had heard that British losses exceeded fifteen hundred men. She could not imagine so many deaths. In all, the French had lost a hundred with another three hundred wounded, and that had seemed devastating. And yet, Amalie had overheard Bourlamaque call those casualties light. Lieutenant Durand took a sip of wine. How can they dare to plan another attack after having been defeated so resoundingly? That resounding defeat is exactly why Amherst will attack. Bourlamaque fixed both Fouchet and Durand with a grave eye. For the sake of British pride, he will try to capture the fort this summer. Lieutenant Rillieux leaned back in his chair, his face a wide grin. Alone amongst the younger officers, who favored their natural hair, he wore a powdered wig, the white a marked contrast to his olive skin and dark brows. Let him do his worst. Amalie stifled a gasp. How could he tempt fate in such a way when it meant the deaths of his own men? He'd do far better to pray for peace! But Lieutenant Rillieux didn't seem to realize he'd said something thoughtless. We shall drive Amherst back into the forest just as we did his predecessor. My men are ready. Were they ready when MacKinnon and his men attacked that last supply train? Bourlamaque raised an eyebrow in clear disapproval. We lost a fortune in rifled muskets not to mention several cases of my favorite wine. No matter how well you prepare, the Rangers seem to stay one step ahead of you. Amalie's belly knotted, as it did anytime she heard mention of MacKinnon's Rangers. They seemed to be everywhere and nowhere, these men who had killed her father. Although Papa had reassured her that there was no such thing as chi bai, she'd begun to wonder if her cousins were right. Perhaps the Rangers weren't men after all. Lieutenant Rillieux's nostrils flared, and he bowed his head in apology. My regrets once more for your loss, monsieur. The MacKinnon brothers are formidable adversaries, but we will break them. Let us hope so. Perhaps now that the eldest MacKinnon has been released from service, the

Rangers will fall under poor leadership. I doubt that, monsieur. Morgan MacKinnon is every bit the woodsman, marksman, and leader that Iain MacKinnon was. It would be foolish to underestimate him. But arrangements have been made. As I said, my men are ready. Amalie wasn't ready. She hadn't forgotten last summer's battle and feared the prospect of renewed bloodshed. Her grief for her father was still keen, her dreams filled with musket fire and the cries of dying men. If only the accursed war would end! Life would be free to blossom again in New France. Sails would fill the harbors, bringing not soldiers but men and women who wanted to build homes and raise families here. The towns would bustle with hay wagons and applecarts instead of cannon and marching soldiers. Farmers would return to their fields and orchards, trappers to their forest trails, wives to their gardens and their weaving. And what will you do, Amalie? Where will you go when the war is won? Bourlamaque, who was now her guardian, believed that it was past time for her either to take vows and serve Christ or to marry and serve a husband. I would see you safely settled, he often reminded her. It is my duty to your father, whom I greatly admired, despite his politics. But Amalie had no desire to return to the dreary life of the abbey. It seemed to her that she'd drawn her first real breath when, after sixteen years, she'd left its walls. There she'd felt listless, as if some part of her were trapped in slumber. Here at Fort Carillon, in her father's company, she'd been truly happy. She'd felt alive. She supposed she ought to marry, and yet in her grief she had not the heart for it. Bourlamaque assured her that a husband and children were the answer to her sorrow, and she knew he believed a swift marriage would be best for her. Still, she had hoped to make a love match as her parents had done. Women were expected to perform certain duties in marriage: to lie near their husbands and to bear their children. And Amalie knew from Sister Marie Louise, who'd taken vows after her husband and children had died of smallpox, that these wifely duties did a man really mount his wife as a ram mounted a ewe? were onerous even when one felt affection for one's mate. To hear the good sister speak of it, childbirth was akin to the tortures of hell. I'd rather spend my life kneeling on a cold stone floor than suffer such agony again, she'd whispered one afternoon as they'd tended the herb garden together. God demands far less of a woman than does a husband. What little Amalie knew of birth seemed to prove Sister Marie Louise's words true. It was not uncommon for a young girl to be left at the convent to bear a child in shame, and more than once Amalie had been awoken by the piteous cries that marked the throes of labor. Hadn't her own mother perished in childbed? If Amalie were ever to suffer so, it would be on behalf of a man she loved. She wanted a husband who cherished her and whom she cherished in return, a man who, like her father, would value her opinions more than her obedience, who would see her as more than a helpmeet and the mother of his children, who would truly see her. Certainly, Lieutenant Rillieux, while possessed of many admirable qualities, was not such a man. After her father's death, he had begun to show an interest in her, pressing his suit with her guardian despite her insistence that she did not wish to be his wife. He did not seem to understand that his disregard for her opinions was the very proof she needed that they would not make a suitable match. And so she had pleaded bereavement, feigning confusion over which path to take: that of a novice or that of a wife. And Bourlamaque had relented in his efforts to find her a husband. Yet she knew her reprieve wouldn't last. Neither Monsieur le Marquis de Montcalm nor Monsieur de Bourlamaque wished her to remain at Fort Carillon any longer than was necessary, insisting that the frontier was no place for a woman without a husband. If it hadn't been for MacKinnon's Rangers, whose lurking presence made the forest around Fort Carillon perilous, Bourlamaque would have sent her back to Trois Rivières when Montcalm had traveled north to Montréal. But the destruction of several supply trains and the loss of almost thirty soldiers to the horrid Scotsmen had convinced him that she was safer for the moment staying at the fort. What will you do if the British prevail and the war is lost, Amalie? She could not journey to France, for she knew no one there. Nor would she seek out her mother's kin, whose customs and language were strange to her. From two different worlds, she seemed to belong in neither. The thought doused her last spark of appetite. She set her silverware aside. You haven't eaten a bite, Amalie. Bourlamaque frowned. Are you feeling ill? Amalie had come to feel affection for Bourlamaque, the sort of affection one might feel for a favorite uncle. She did not wish to seem spiteful. I fear talk of another battle has ruined my appetite, monsieur. Forgive me. There is nothing to forgive. He smiled indulgently. We soldiers must do better to govern our tongues in your company. Lieutenant Rillieux took her hand, stroked his thumb over her knuckles. You have nothing to fear, mademoiselle. There is not a soldier at Fort Carillon who would not fight to protect you. Is that not true, messieurs? But of course! Fouchet and Durand insisted, almost in unison. Amalie pulled her hand free, tucked it in her lap. I am not afraid for myself, messieurs, but for the soldiers. Almost two hundred have perished since I arrived last spring. I would hate to see more crosses planted in the earth. Lieutenant Rillieux chuckled. Your concern is to be commended, Amalie, but they were

soldiers. It was their honor and privilege to die for France. Amalie felt heat rush into her face, and the words were out before she could stop them. That does not mean France should be wasteful with their lives. Lieutenant Rillieux's smile faded, his gaze boring through her. And what can a young mademoiselle who was raised in an abbey tell us about the complexities of war? Do go on, for I am most eager to hear. She lifted her chin, was about to speak, when Bourlamaque held up his hand. Your point is well taken, mon cher lieutenant, he said, but let us speak of something else. In Paris, we would never be forgiven if we were to persist in speaking of so dismal a topic in the presence of ladies. Lieutenant Rillieux bowed his head again. Ah, quite right, monsieur. I do apologize. But Amalie did not miss the flush beneath his olive skin, or the angry press of his lips. It was Bourlamaque who spoke next. Pre Franois tells me the medicinal herbs you planted in the garden are thriving, Amalie. And so they passed the remainder of the meal in polite but forced conversation, Amalie regretting her temper if not the words themselves. Bourlamaque, Fouchet, and Durand spoke on topics they seemed to think might interest a woman: the uses of herbs, the new vestments Amalie had sewn for Pre Franois, the weather. While Lieutenant Rillieux looked bored. The last course had just been cleared away when she heard it. The sharp report of musket fire. Then the front door flew open and a young sergeant dashed inside, a look of excitement on his face. He stopped when he saw Bourlamaque and saluted smartly. It is MacKinnon's Rangers, monsieur! We have them! Morgan knew it was a trap the moment the first powder keg failed to explode. He waited until it was dark. Then with Connor and Joseph to guard the retreat, he crept along the riverbank with a small force of Rangers to fire upon the kegs and ignite them. But, though he knew for certain he had hit his mark and the others theirs, not a single keg had gone up. Now the French were alerted to their presence, and with no explosions or fire to distract them, they would come after the Rangers with their full strength. Fall back! Even as he shouted the command, the French opened fire but not only from the walls. At least twenty infantrymen stood on the deck of the ship moored behind them, muskets aimed at the pier below. 'Twas like shooting ducks on a pond. Morgan and his men were trapped in a cross fire. To the river! He drew his pistol, felt a ball whiz past his cheek, crouched down to make himself a smaller target, peering through the darkness to account for his men. Killy. McHugh. Brendan. Forbes. All running back to the riverbank. Where was Dougie? Then the forest behind them erupted with musket fire as the combined forces of the Rangers and the Muhheconneok almost two hundred men returned fire. They staggered their fire, giving the enemy no chance to breathe, sowing panic amongst the French, particularly those on the ship, who seemed to realize all at once that they were far outside the fort's walls. That's the way, boys! Morgan took cover behind a battered hogshead, aimed his rifle at one of the soldiers on the ship, and fired, watching out of the corner of his eye as, one by one, his men reached the riverbank and dropped out of sight, Killy cursing all the way. Bastard sons of whores! But where was Dougie? And then he saw. Dougie lay on his back near the stack of kegs, reloading his rifle, a strip of white tied around his thigh. Go on! Go! But Morgan wasn't about to leave without him. He led his men into this trap. He would bloody well get them out of them. He glanced toward the riverbank, saw McHugh, Killy, Brendan, and Forbes nose their rifles over the top of the bank and take aim, ready to cover him. He hurled his rifle, his claidheamh mór, and his tumpine pack to Killy and got ready to run. And then it came: the Muhheconneok war cry. It rose out of the forest, primal and raw, terrifying the French, turning their attention away from the pier and giving Morgan the chance he needed. Blood thrumming, he drew in a breath, dashed out from behind the hogshead, and ran a jagged path toward Dougie, barely feeling the ball that burnt a path across his forearm or the one that creased his hip. A fine time to get shot this is! But Dougie was ready for him, crouching on one knee, his injured leg stretched out beside him. You're daft, MacKinnon! Morgan dropped down, took Dougie onto his back, and forced himself to his feet. Och, you're heavy as an ox! And you stink! His gaze fixed on the riverbank a hundred feet away, Morgan ran, Dougie's added weight pounding through the straining muscles of his thighs to the soles of his moccasins, his heart slamming in his chest. You run like a lass! Dougie shouted in his ear. Can you no go faster? But Morgan didn't have the breath to do more than curse. Mac-dolain! Whoreson! Sixty feet. Fifty. Forty. A roar of cannon erupted behind him, the French firing their twelve-pounders at the forest just as they had last summer, trying to turn the shelter of the trees into a charnel pit. Jeers coming from the trees told him balls had fallen short of the mark this time. Thirty feet. Twenty. Ten. Morgan sucked breath into his aching lungs, drove himself forward, hurling both of them over the edge. They tumbled, arse over elbow, down the embankment to the sand below. No sooner had they landed than McHugh and Forbes took Dougie between them and hurried him along the river toward the forest beyond. Young Brendan clasped Morgan's forearm, helped him back to his feet, then hurried after McHugh and Forbes, already reloading. Killy held out Morgan's rifle and his pack, a smile on his scarred

Irish face. You bloody daft Scot. Another blast of cannon. Morgan slipped the tumpline over his head, tucked his sword into place, grabbed his rifle, and then began to reload, shouting over the din. Help McHugh and Forbes! Ill cover our backs in case those bastards on the ship try to follow! Aye. Killy turned and was gone. Morgan got into position, peeked over the edge of the riverbank, picked a target on the darkened deck of the ship, and fired. Reloading quickly, he kept up a rapid fire, glancing over to watch his mens progress until they disappeared amongst the trees. Then, feeling a rush of relief, he cast one last glance at the fort walls and felt something strike him in the right shoulder. Instantly, his right arm went numb, falling useless to his side. Something warm and wet trickled down his chest. Blood. Hed been shot. It was then the pain struck, forcing the breath from his lungs, driving him to his knees. He heard a shout of victory and looked up to see a French soldier high in the ships rigging, musket raised over his head. So this is how it ends. The thought ran through Morgans mind, detached from any fear. But no just yet. Unable to load and fire his heavy rifle with one hand, he dropped it to the sand, withdrew his pistol, aimed, and fired, ending the soldiers celebration. But several other soldiers had climbed into the rigging to see what their comrades cheering was about, and before Morgan could take cover, several fired. A ball ripped through his right thigh, the shock of it like fire and ice. And Morgan knew it was over. He fell onto his side, forced himself onto his belly, and tried to crawl for cover, gritting his teeth against the pain. Morgan! He recognized Connors voice and saw his brother emerge from the forest at a run, Killy, Forbes, and McHugh behind him. No, Connor! Stop! From somewhere nearby Morgan heard the tromp of hundreds of boots and knew the gates of the fort had been thrown open. Were the French planning a counterattack? I am lost already! Get the men out of here! Even in the dark, he could see the anguish and horror on his brothers face as Connor realized he would not be able to reach him in time to keep him from the swarming French. His strength all but spent, Morgan met Connors tormented gaze, his chest swelling with regret, grief, love. So long theyd been together, the four of them Morgan, Iain, Connor, Joseph. And now Gathering all his breath, Morgan shouted. Beannachd leat! Blessings go with you, brother! And dinnae mourn me overlong. Tell little Iain But Morgan never finished the thought. The last thing he heard before darkness claimed him was Connors anguished cry.

Chapter 2 Amalie crawled out of bed early the next morning after a fitful sleep, dawn peeking through her window, the nights shadows still clinging to her mind. She poured water from a porcelain pitcher into its matching bowl and splashed her face, the waters chill helping to wash away her weariness and her lingering sense of dread. Although last nights fighting had ended quickly and the enemy had been driven away, war had followed her into her dreams, her slumber troubled by cannon fire, dying men, and that terrible, haunting cry. It had risen out of the forest like the howl of demons, sending chills down her spine, making her blood run cold. It is the Mahican war cry, Boursamaque had told her, seeing her fear. The Abenaki have one very similar. Have you never heard it? No, monsieur, shed answered. Hed looked down at her for a moment, seeming to consider her. I forget that youve never actually lived amongst your mothers people. Then hed dismissed her, sending her to her room to await the outcome of the skirmish, while hed gone with his officers. Determined to put the night and its fears behind her, Amalie dried her face with a linen towel, then sat on her bed, loosed her braids, and began to work out the tangles from her hair. The mre suprieure had tried many times to get her to cut her locks, but Amalie had steadfastly refused not her only rebellion. Unable to understand why God should care how long her hair was, shed resisted even when shed been warned that pride was a grave sin. A woman should be humble in all she does, Amalie, the mre suprieure had scolded. Such willfulness endangers your soul. Amalie had tried to explain that her long hair was but a way of knowing her mother, a way of being close to her. Though she could not remember her mother, her father had told her many times how her mothers dark tresses had hung to her knees. Like a river of black silk, hed said. But the mre suprieure had brushed this aside, saying it was far better for Amalie to know God than the woman whod borne her. It had taken a letter from Amalies father to decide the matter, though the mre suprieure had required her to wear her hair up lest its beauty stir envy in the hearts of the other girls. Of course, the other girls hadnt envied Amalie at all, but had teased her about her darker skin and the strange color of her eyes neither green nor brown but both. The few times shed seen her Abenaki cousinesher female cousins theyd done the same in reverse, calling her pale, laughing at her eyes, and teasing her about her hair, which was more brown than black and hung not straight and smooth like her mothers, but in tendrils. Amalie did not resent their teasing, for she could see for herself that what they said was true. She was different. Her mother had been half Abenaki, Amalie but a quarter. Her features were neither French nor Indian. She was truly as her mother had named her Child of Twilight. In her eyes, you were neither day nor night, sun nor stars, but a mingling of both, Papa had explained. Sweet heaven, how she missed him! Fighting a sudden pricking of tears, Amalie shifted her thoughts to the day

ahead. If she hurried, she might be able to weed Bourlamaques garden before the sun grew too warm. She braided her hair and tied it up with the blue silk ribbon her father had given her, then slipped into her stockings and petticoats. She would have liked to go without her stays, but Bourlamaque did not tolerate undress at his breakfast table. She left them loose instead, then pulled on her gray linen gown. She had just opened her bedroom door when shouting erupted from downstairs. It goes against my conscience as a surgeon and a Catholic! If you wished him to die, why did you bring him to me? Better to have let him perish where he lay! Amalie recognized the voice as that of the forts surgeon, Monsieur Lambert. I do not wish him to die! Bourlamaque spat out each word. I wish him to live so that I can wrest from him all he knows! I cannot interrogate a dead man! You do not mean only to interrogate him. That I could understand and condone. You mean to hand him over to the Abenaki, who will burn him alive! Chills skittered down Amalies spine at the thought of anyone suffering such a fate, even an enemy. Have you forgotten the number of Frenchmen and Abenaki these men have slain or the Abenaki village they destroyed two winters past or the supply wagons theyve pillaged, stealing medicines you needed to treat our men? Amalie felt her pulse leap. They had captured one of MacKinnons Rangers? Captured and gravely wounded, it seemed. And then she understood. Monsieur de Bourlamaque wished the Ranger to live so that he might learn his secrets and give the Abenaki their promised chance at vengeance, but Monsieur Lambert clearly wanted no part of it, afflicted at the notion of saving a mans life only to hand him over to torture and death. Ive forgotten nothing!

Monsieur Lamberts voice shook. But I took an oath to heal men, not to harm them! Then heal him! Bourlamaques shout made Amalie jump, his words booming through the little house. What befalls him when he leaves your care is a military matter and none of your affair! For a moment there was silence. Although she knew Monsieur de Bourlamaque was doing his duty, Amalie found herself feeling pity for Monsieur Lambert. On the one hand, healing this Ranger and turning him over to Bourlamaque would save French lives, appease an important French ally, perhaps helping to win the war. On the other, saving the mans life so that he might suffer torment surely went against all a doctor was trained to do. And what would you do, Amalie? Would she have been able to tend the Rangers wounds, ease his pain, and calm his fever, knowing she was sparing him for the cruelest of deaths? She wanted to think that she would. The Rangers had killed her father, after all. They had destroyed her grandmothers village and sown terror in the forest. But the very thought of saving a man so that he might perish in flames made her stomach knot. In truth, she did not know what she would do. Very well, monsieur, I shall do my best to save his life, Monsieur Lambert said at last.

But know this I will treat him with the same diligence I would any officer. I will not deprive him of laudanum as Lieutenant Rillieux demands, nor will I suffer your soldiers to abuse him. I expected no less, mon ami. Leave young Rillieux to me. But how do we know this man is truly Morgan MacKinnon? One of our partisans claims to have met him and recognized him, and when I spoke the name, he opened his eyes. Not just a Ranger, but their leader! And then Amalie understood why it was so important that he survive. If you need anything I should like Mademoiselle Chauvenets help in tending him once Ive removed the balls from his leg and shoulder. He is shackled and greatly weakened, so she will be in no danger. She speaks the English tongue and has a deft hand at healing, and I fear my young attendants harbor too great a hatred for these Rangers to care for him reliably. Consider it done. Whatever else they said was lost beneath the din of Amalies heartbeat as it thundered in her ears. One hand clasped over her mouth, she closed her door, and leaned against it, stunned. Bourlamaque had just given her over to care for a man he had consigned to death. And not just any man. The leader of MacKinnons Rangers himself. Morgan drifted between agony and oblivion. Hed known when French soldiers carried him into the fort. Hed known when theyd realized who he was, shouting his name and cheering as if theyd taken a great prize. Hed known when theyd stripped him bare, shackled him, and called their surgeon to probe his wounds. Il a perdu beaucoup de sang. Ses blessures sont profondes. Il pourrait bien mourir. Hes lost a lot of blood. His wounds are deep. He might well die. Morgan understood their words, and he welcomed death. He knew well what would happen to him should he survive. Twas far better to die now, his blood spilled upon the floor, than to perish in the fires of the Abenaki, his torment stretched over unending days. Aye, he feared so terrible and painful a death. What man would not? But more than pain itself, he feared that the flames might prove fiercer than his courage, loosing his tongue, overthrowing his mind, breaking him so that he betrayed his brothers and the Rangers. And that he could not do. If there had been any hope for escape, hed have seized it and fought his way out like a manor died trying. But shackled hand and foot and this close to death, hed never get out of bed, let alone out of the fort. Hadnt he always known this day would come? Aye, he had. But if a MacKinnon had to die, twas far better that it be him than Iain or Connor. If only there were a priest He let himself drift,

relinquishing his soul to God. But the French were not going to let him go so easily. They forced laudanum down his throat and thrust a leather strap between his teeth. It was not out of mercy for him that they did these things. They were simply trying to heal his body so they could pry into his mind. Bite down, their surgeon said in heavily accented English. Too weak from loss of blood to fight them and chained to the little bed, Morgan spat out the strap, his pain turning to rage. Save your blade for another! I dinnae want your help! The surgeon looked down at him, his blue eyes troubled, Morgans blood already on his hands. That is not for you to decide, Major MacKinnon. Rough hands forced the strap back into his mouth and held him down as the surgeon raised his knife. The pain was staggering, far worse than Morgan had imagined. The shock of it drove the breath from his lungs, turned his stomach, made his entire body jerk. He felt his chains draw tight, iron biting into his ankles and wrists. Holy Jesus God! He clenched his teeth, squeezed his eyes shut, fought not to cry out as the surgeon cut into his chest, searching. A cold sweat broke out on his brow, the moment wearing on until he was aware of nothing but pain. He felt his body arch, as with one last excruciating tug the ball was pulled free. Darkness dragged at the corners of his mind, drew him down. But it didnt last. The surgeon cleaned the wound with brandy, the deep, fiery burn a new kind of torment. Then he stitched it, applied a stinking poultice, and wrapped Morgans shoulder with linen strips. By the time the surgeon had finished, Morgan felt strangely euphoric. Perhaps hed gone daft. Or perhaps the laudanum was now at its full strength. Then the surgeon moved to Morgans right thigh, and the ordeal began anew. Il faudra peut-tre amputer sa jambe. Through a haze of pain, Morgan understood. They were trying to decide whether to cut off his leg. A bolt of fear surged from his gut, lodged in his chest. Filte dhuit, a Mhuire, a tha ln de ghra. Hail Mary, full of grace. But even as his mind sought for the sacred words, pain swamped him and sent him hurtling into forgetfulness. Amalie looked down at the unconscious prisoner and tried her best to hate him. He and his men had killed Papa and hundreds more in this past night alone. A dozen soldiers lay battered and bleeding just beyond this room because of them. Theyd slain dozens of Abenaki men, leaving women, children, and elders to starve. Theyd turned the forest around Lac Saint-Sacrement into a trail of death, evading every trap laid for them. Until now. The secrets this MacKinnon holds might be the key to winning this damnable war, Bourlamaque had told her, looking more grave than shed ever seen him. This is your chance to avenge your fathers death, Amalie, to serve France as he did. Is that what she wanted to exact vengeance? If only she didnt know what lay ahead for Major MacKinnon. Saving his life so that he might be kept prisoner and questioned was one thing. Saving his life so that he could suffer the prolonged agonies of fire was quite another. She would not wish that on anyone. It is not your choice, Amalie. It will not be your doing. The thought helped to assuage her conscience, but it did not ease the ache in her belly. She sat on a stool beside him and studied him, this warrior who had terrified so many. He did not look like chi bai, but a mana desperately wounded man. Yet, he was no ordinary man. He was perhaps the biggest, most striking man shed ever seen, not only tall, but broad of shoulder and quite handsome in a rugged, wild sort of way. His hair was long, dark as a ravens wing, and tangled from his thrashing, a plait at each temple. His skin was brown from the sun but smooth and unblemished. Long black lashes rested against high cheekbones, deep hollows making his cheeks seem even higher. His lips were unusually full, his jaw square and dark with several days growth of beard. Theyd bound his ankles and wrists in iron shackles and chained them to the four legs of the little bed to hold him fast, still fearing his strength despite his wounds. And no wonder. His arms were easily three times the thickness of hers and muscular, his hands big enough to encircle a mans throat. She had no doubt that he was capable of killing with those hands, that he had killed with those hands. Shed heard hed been adopted by the Mahican, and she saw theyd made their mark upon him. Indigo-colored drawings had been etched into his skin from shoulder to wrist: geometric shapes, spirals, and a single bear claw on each shoulder. Leather cords beaded with wampum and strange amulets had been tied around his arms just above the bulge of his muscles, seeming to accentuate his raw strength. A leather cord with dark, wooden beads encircled his neck, disappearing beneath his blankets. Expecting to find some heathen symbol, she drew it forth and gasped. A little wooden cross. It was not pagan adornment he wore, but a simple rosary of wood. Shed forgotten he was Catholic. The ache in her stomach grew. She reached out, hesitated, then felt his forehead. His skin was hot with the beginnings of a fever. He stirred at her touch, groaned, his dark brows bent with pain, his suffering drawing forth compassion she did not wish to feel for him. Brushing aside the unwelcome feeling, she reached for the little blue bottle of laudanum, uncorked it, and poured out a spoonful. Then, careful not to spill a drop of the precious potion, she eased the spoon between his lips and let the tincture trickle into his mouth. Instinctively, he swallowed. Then his eyes opened. Amalie stiffened, unnerved that he should wake so suddenly. He is shackled, silly girl! He cannot harm you! His gaze met hers,

then a look of confusion spread on his face. For a moment he simply stared at her through glassy blue eyes not the bright blue of the sky on a summer day, but the deep, dark blue of midnight. Then he spoke, startling the silence, his voice deep and ragged. I would think myself in hell but for the sight of you, lass. Even had she had her English at the ready, she would not have known what to say, his words catching someplace deep inside her, making her pulse trip. Then he shifted, raising one fettered wrist as if to reach for her. She scooted backward, nearly toppling her stool in her haste to evade him. But pain halted his motions even before his chains grew tight. He drew a shuddering breath through gritted teeth, his jaw clenched tight, his eyes squeezed shut. Be still, or you will cause yourself to suffer needlessly. She stood and reached toward the bedside table for the water pitcher and a tin cup, irritated with herself to find her hands shaking. He is just a man, Amalie. You are childish to fear him. But he was not just a man. He was a Ranger, perhaps the very Ranger who had sent Papa to his grave. It was only natural for her to feel afraid. My leg? Is it gone? Another wave of pity washed through her. You have it still. Vexed with herself, she poured water into the tin cup, then returned to his side to find him watching her once more, a strange look in his blue eyes. Drink. She slid one hand beneath his head to raise it and held the cup to his lips. He turned his head away, rivulets spilling down his jaw and over the thick muscles of his neck, pooling in the recess at the base of his throat. Nay, lass! I cannae. At first she thought he couldn't drink because of his fever or his injuries. Only when she placed his head back on the pillow and watched him turn his face away from her did she realize the truth. He meant to deny himself water. He meant to let himself die. Astonished, Amalie said the first thing that came to mind. It is a mortal sin to cause your own death. But is it not also a sin to save his life so that he can be burnt alive? Then I'd best go swiftly to hell and no keep the devil waiting. With those shocking words, he closed his eyes and drifted into a restless sleep, leaving Amalie to fight the pricking of her conscience.

Chapter 3 Morgan gave himself over to his fever, willing it to ravage and consume him, eager to die and pass from this life with his secrets intact the last thing he could do for his men, for his brothers. But dying wasn't as simple as he'd thought it would be.

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