

My thoughts were cut short as Jack froze.

He whispered, "Did you hear that?"

I listened, straining my ears to hear what he had. There was nothing at first, then the rustling of leaves as someone or something moved close by. I cursed myself, for I had left Angus's musket strapped to my saddle. Putting my finger to my lips, I moved as quietly as I could in the direction of the noise, using my other hand to signal Jack to follow me.

The noise came again, and I forced myself through the undergrowth and burst into a clearing, Jack treading on my heels in his eagerness to follow. We were confronted by a Yankee soldier. He was just lowering himself onto the ground, his back against a tree, but sprang to his feet as soon as he saw us.

I rushed him, sending him crashing back against the tree. He fought hard, wriggling to push me off. He was smaller than me, but wiry and strong. One hand was reaching to his side, and I realised that he was trying to grab the bayonet that was lying alongside his musket. I dared not take my attention from him, but I sensed rather than saw Jack dancing round helplessly, aiming the odd kick at the man, but more often getting me with his foot.

"Jack," I bellowed, "grab the bayonet and musket."

Jack snatched up both. Once that danger had

passed, it was as if all fight left the American. He lay there limp on the ground, not even moving when I stood up.

“Get up, you bastard,” I snarled, and Jack prodded him with the bayonet when he did not move quickly enough for his liking.

“Boys, boys,” the man said, now on his feet, “don’t be hasty.” He held his hands out from his body, showing us the palms. “I’ll not give you trouble. I’ve been hiding in this godforsaken forest waiting for the redcoats to leave. All I want is to get away, find my regiment and get back home.” He smiled then, a nervous smile that went as quickly as it came. “I’m not a real soldier, just a farmer like your fathers, I’d reckon. I’ve got little ones at home. Why not pretend you’ve not seen me?” As he spoke, I realised he was edging away from us. Before he could try to flee, I darted forward, grabbed his arm and twisted it behind his back, hard.

He squealed, and then muttered, “Easy, easy,” but I wasn’t in the mood to be easy. Whether he had children or not did not concern me, or that he was a farmer. He had left them behind and come north to take our farms from *us*, and leave children *here* fatherless. I pushed his arm up higher, enjoying the way he rose on his toes to lessen the

pain.

“Come on, Jack,” I said, “let’s take this piece of dung back and hand him over to the redcoats.” Jack laughed when I added, “You waited too long, see. Our soldiers left, but they’ve come back now just to round up scum like you!”

When we came out of the forest, pushing our prisoner ahead of us, a cry went up. Jack’s father called us both “bully boys” and said how proud we had made him and that he would be sure to tell my father that when next he saw him. Other prisoners had been rounded up and we happily handed ours over. We didn’t mention the weapons we had taken from him. Jack kept the bayonet and I took the musket, thinking that this at least would please Father.

All my euphoria leached away on my ride home. As dusk descended I knew there was no hope that my absence had gone unnoticed. A foolish shred of hope that Father would applaud my daring was all I had, but deep in my heart I knew that this would not be so.

I was not wrong.

Father was sitting on the porch as I rode in, Angus by his side. Mother must have been listening for the sound of Hamish’s hooves because she immediately appeared in the doorway, her face white and her eyes

red. I wanted to throw myself down from my horse and rush to tell her how sorry I was for causing her such worry, but I knew I had to face Father first. Without looking around, Father said, "Hannah, go inside. I will speak to Alexander."

Mother hesitated slightly, but turned and without a word to him or to me quietly closed the door behind her.