Prologue

The Mohawk Valley - October 1779

Henry Doyle ran back toward the village at full speed, tree branches slashing his face and tugging at his gear, dreading what he might find.

For three months, Doyle and his Mohawk brothers had been fighting a hopeless retreating battle against General Sullivan’s invading American army of 3,000 Continental regulars and militia as the Rebels worked their way north from the Susquehanna, burning every Mohawk village they came to. The Mohawks, their crops destroyed and homes torched, fled toward safety in Canada. But in the panic to escape, a group of women and children had been left behind.

Henry slowed down and moved cautiously as he neared the crest of a small hill overlooking the village. Beside his knife and tomahawk, he was carrying the Kentucky long rifle he had taken from a dead Rebel, two pistols, and a large-caliber Hessian Jaeger carbine on his back. In the village, 50 yards away, a group of five Rebels, all militiamen, had gathered the twelve women and children into a clearing.

“All right! You know what to do,” the leader, a big, red-bearded man, shouted. “Cooper! Randall! Start firing these rat holes!” He pointed to the Mohawk homes, clustered neatly at the edge of the village’s corn and bean fields stretching along the river.

“The prisoners?” another Rebel asked.

“Kill ‘em all!”

“Even the children?”

“The children especially,” the leader roared. “Kill ‘em before they can breed. But keep this one alive for a while.” He grabbed a young girl, perhaps no more than 13, and ripped the front of her shirt open. “Look at those fine little titties, boys. This one will amuse us while we burn the village.”

Doyle primed his rifle, rested the barrel on a tree branch, took a breath, and shot the leader through his left eye − an easy shot at this range. Then, running forward through the trees, he yelled a Mohawk war cry. The startled Rebels glanced wildly around, looking for the source of the threat. Spotting the smoke, one fired his musket in the direction of Doyle’s first shot, another at the sound of his cry. By now, Doyle was thirty yards closer, still a barely-visible blur among the trees and foliage. He unslung the Jaeger musket. Not trusting its accuracy, he gut-shot another Rebel. The three remaining Rebels, now panicked, clustered in the center of the village and fired again at his new location. Grabbing his pistols and yelling war cries, Henry rushed them, bounding down the hillside.

One man continued, terrified, fumbling clumsily to reload; a second, armed with a bayonet on his musket, squared off against Henry. The third paused for a moment, then dropped his empty weapon and started running down the trail from which they’d come.

Doyle missed the reloading Rebel with his first pistol shot but hit him in the chest with his second as the man was franticly pulling his ramrod free. Dodging the third man’s poorly aimed bayonet thrust, he finished the Rebel off with two lightning-fast, blood-spattering tomahawk slashes to the face. Doyle continued to race after the one fleeing survivor, yelling to the women and children to start up the hunting trail to the west of the village.

Within fifty yards he had closed the distance to twenty feet, and without breaking stride, threw his tomahawk with enormous force. The tomahawk buried its blade in the man’s back and he dropped like a stone. Doyle paused for a moment over the man’s body, quieting his breathing, cupping one ear forward and tilting the other downward, like a deer, listening for sounds of approaching troops. The forest was still silent.

He yanked his tomahawk out of the man’s back, kicked him over, pulled his knife, and with three quick, practiced cuts, scalped him. He paused briefly to strip two of the Rebels of their muskets and ammunition, ran quickly through the village, gathering up some dried corn and pemmican, then, collecting his weapons, hurried up the trail after the women, pausing only to reload at the crest of the hill.

In under a mile, he caught up with the party and guided them to a deer trail leading to a waterfall they knew well, about a mile away. After he had armed them and set them on their way with the promise to rejoin them for the trek to the north, he carefully erased all signs of their leaving the main trail.

He ran up the trail to just before it bent to the left, took a shawl he had removed from one of the women and snagged it on a branch where his pursuers could easily see it. Several hundred yards further, he dropped one of the powder horns he’d taken from the Rebels, carved with the dead man’s initials. Then he left the trail, covering his tracks as he went, and headed for his rendezvous with the women and children by the waterfall.

\* \* \* \*

Ft. Niagara, The Western Territories - November, 1779

Henry Doyle stood by the open gate in the pounding rain as the last of the Mohawks, almost all women and children with a few elders carried in litters, dejectedly struggled into the British log fort at Niagara. They had left a homeland in ruins, burned by the order of the man Washington whom the People would forever after call *Caunotaucarius*, “destroyer of villages.”

Doyle sloshed through the mud to the British officers’ quarters. The one sentry, huddling under the dripping eaves for shelter, considered challenging Doyle, took a look at the death written in his face and thought better of it. Doyle kicked open the door, and without ceremony or greeting to the red-coated British and Loyalist officers in the room, placed his rifle against the wall, threw off his drenched cloak, and walked to the fire to warm himself. He spoke to the Mohawk Chief Joseph Brantin a low voice, staring into the flames, the steam rising from his sodden buckskins.

“I have brought in all I could find, *Thayendanega*. The old ones who died on the march we buried as decently as possible.”

Joseph Brant strode to him and put a brother’s arm around his shoulders. “The People thank you, *Okteondon*. But know that this destruction will not go unavenged.”

“There is no more work for me, here, my brother.” Henry turned and looked Brant in the eye, the anger in his face replaced by a bleakness as cold as the chilling rain outside. “The council fire of the Onandagas at *Kanadaseagea* no longer burns. The people of the Six Nations fight each other, and Deganawida's Great Peace is broken. It’s over.”

“Come with me, little brother,” Brant replied. “We must talk together.” He turned to the officers around the map-covered table in the room: “Gentlemen, please continue without me.” Then, to Doyle, “Can I give you something? Food? Something to drink?” Doyle just shook his head. They walked together to an inner room where the young warrior, in some ways still a teen-age boy, in others an old, old man, collapsed into a chair. He had held himself together for days, rarely sleeping, to keep those who depended on him strong. He felt now as if all the life had been sucked out of him.

“You must let me go, *Thayendanega*, Doyle said, his voice now so soft Brant had to strain to hear him. “You graciously made me one of you. I will never forget the People, or the pride I feel being Mohawk – a *Haudenosaunee* − or your friendship. But some large part of me burned to ashes in the fires we left behind us.”

“But where will you go? If the Rebels catch you they will surely hang you. And thanks to the incompetence, laziness, and stupidity of the generals the British have sent here to manage this war – I say this for your ears only– the colonies are lost, especially now that the damned French have entered the war on the Rebels’ side.

Doyle sat in quiet for a while, Brant respecting his silence. Finally Doyle spoke. “I know my father is Sir William Johnson. I may go to Ireland to find out where he came from. After that, I don’t know.”

“Then my brother, permit me to help you. Take a day or two to rest, then come to me. There are people in London – Lord Melbourne of the Admiralty and Sir Joseph Blaine come to mind – who would be pleased to meet you and could suggest a number of paths for you to follow. With the letters it would be my greatest honor to write, they will welcome you, and if desired, open doors for you. But know this. I have often thought that there was no more sorrow left in the world for me to know, but your departure will leave a wound in my heart that will never heal.”

“And mine,” said Doyle, looking up at his friend.

Doyle shut his eyes as the stored-up fatigue and sadness washed through him. Brant waited until Doyle was asleep, gently draped a cloak from the wall over him, blew out the candle on the table next to Doyle, and silently left the darkened room − leaving only the flickering light of the fire’s embers dancing along the walls and ceiling.

Chapter 1

Tamaransett, Algeria - 1815

“I’ve cheated death a hundred times,” Henry Doyle laughed to himself, “and gotten away with it. So many battles. So many killings. I know I don’t deserve this happiness. Too bad. I’ll still take it.”

He was enjoying the last of his morning coffee sitting on a knoll overlooking the sprawling oasis of the Tuareg’s winter camp. It was a time of day he treasured − watching the golden glow of pre-dawn spread over the landscape, casting long, eerie shadows behind men and animals, then deepening into blood red until the sun exploded over the mountains to the east and painted the clouds pink and purple. In the dawn’s coolness, the morning sun had not yet burned the color out of the sky. Below him, the vast plain was dotted with the wealth of Dihya’s Tuareg people – thousands of sheep and the camel and horse herds of Henry’s cavalry – the military force that protected the Tuareg’s wealth.

Dihya’s long, gracefully feline body was curled next to him, perhaps asleep, perhaps just dozing. He liked just looking at her. Tuareg women, unlike other Muslims, wore no veils. Years of exposure to the desert sun – generations, actually − had turned her skin a deep rich olive color. Her features, however, jet black hair framing a finely-chiseled face and gray eyes, were European. No one knew where her people,the ruling *Imazighen* class of the Tuaregs, had come from. They were already a feared power in North Africa when the Phoenicians and Carthaginians first arrived.

She is aptly named Dihya, the lioness, he thought. I wonder if she’s awake. He ran his hand gently down her shoulder and then more slowly over her left breast, feeling her nipple harden as she breathed in the pleasure. She turned towards him, rolling over and sliding her hand under and up his loose shirt, and then moved her hand downward. He shifted his position to free the cloth from around his hips. The smile on her face was wickedly eager.

Suddenly, she turned away from him, and cat-like, lifted herself to a sitting position. Fifty yards away, on the level ground below them, a high-pitched young boy’s excited cries rose up to them, echoed by the deep-throated laughter of a man and the clash of sword blades. Their son Agizul was sparring on horseback with Joba, Henry’s sword master, parrying thrusts while trying to maneuver to the other’s unprotected left side.

“He was born to sit a horse,” said Henry, as he rose with Dihya to watch Agizul and Joba, pride lighting up his face. “He is certainly your son.”

“Pah!” Dihya answered. “He rides like a *Franzwazi*, not an *Imazighen*. See how he hauls his reins against his pony’s mouth. He has no concern for his mount.”

“He’s ten years old, Dihya.”

“No matter. There must be no difference between the horse, the rider, and the riding. Joba spoils him – as do you and all your men. Praise be to Allah that he has a mother to teach him discipline.” Her voice carried strongly through the desert air. “Heels down, Agizul! Heels down! Must I always tell you the same thing?”

Their son’s response was to sharply pivot his pony, grasp its mane with his left hand, and disappear over its side. His face peeked out under the pony’s neck as he passed them at the gallop, an irresistibly mischievous grin spread across his face.

“When he acts like that, he is no son of mine,” Dihya said.

“We named him Agizul, ‘the brave.’ What would you expect?” laughed Henry.

“There is a difference between brave and foolish,” she answered, echoing his laughter, “although I suspect that difference would be lost on you. I fell in love with your courage; your foolishness I discovered only after we married.”

“Well, a man has to excel at *something*. But the boy will be fine in Joba’s care.” They watched as Joba caught up to Agizul, and began leading him back to the horse herd at a walk.

“We’ll see. Agizul’s safety may depend on his mount. He needs to learn to care for his horse as if he were protecting his own life.

Fearing the moment was wrong, Henry cautiously returned to their conversation the previous evening. “We were talking about his future last night, Dihya.”

“No, you were talking and I was disagreeing. You want Agizul to leave our people before he has learned how to be a man − to grow up with strangers – infidels, in fact.”

Henry knew trying to convince Dihya to change her mind was like telling the sirocco not to blow. He went on anyway. “You know the threat we must prepare for comes from enemies far more powerful than desert tribes. Now that Napoleon is safely imprisoned in Elba, peace has finally come to Europe – which means their attention will turn to easier conquests. The Ottoman rule over North Africa is an empty shell. My brother Peter and the Americans proved that in their war against Tripoli ten years ago. North Africa sits like a prize waiting to be plucked. The French, Spanish and English will, in their lust for power, look here for their next conquests.”

Dihya’s eyes were far away. When I ty to talk her into changing her mind, Henry thought, my words are like wind-blown sand whispering against ancient stone. I keep trying to use logical arguments to change the mind of a woman who makes decisions based on the truth of her heart. He lapsed into silence. After a time, she turned to look at him at him again.

“You know, *Tizemt”*– it was his pet name for her – it meant ‘lioness’*−* “what happened to the Mohawk people who raised me in the American War of Rebellion. The Americans drove them in exile from their ancestral home. I want Agizul to learn the ways of the enemy he will need to defend us against after I’m gone. With my contacts, I can gain him admission to Eton in England, and then to the military academy at Sandhurst. When he turns eleven, I believe for our people’s safety, he must take his Christian name, William Doyle, and live among the English.”

“And become one of them,” Dihya answered. “A stranger to his people.”

“I know that is your fear. No mother wants to lose a son.” He lifted her right hand, and let his fingers trace the strong veins that rose above her well-muscled sword arm, tracing along the scar of an old wound. “This is the blood that runs through him. His heart is your heart. He can never lose that.” She placed her other hand gently on top of his but said nothing.

The crack of a rifle shot in the hills rising above their encampment broke Dihya’s silence. They both turned towards the sound. Henry watched the bright signaling mirror flashes from his sentry. “Good,” he said as he read the message. “Maysar-who-goes-without-water. I have been expecting a letter from Peter. Let us return to our tent and wait for Maysar’s news. We will talk more about Agizul’s future.”

“You most certainly will talk,” Dihya answered, then with a toss of her head as she rose, “whether I listen or not remains to be seen.”

An hour later, they were sitting in Dihya’s tent to hear Maysar’s report. It had taken Henry some time to get used to the idea that among the Tuareg, and especially among the *Imazighen* ruling class, the dwelling tent is owned by the women; husbands are, in fact, just guests. If a woman divorces her husband, he loses not just his wife but their home, and has to move in with his relatives. In their first, tempestuous year of courtship, Dihya had threatened to exile Henry from her tent and her life every few weeks. Now, it was a joke they both shared in.

Maysar was an old, old man. His skin looked like a corpse’s left to bake in the blistering desert sun. But the eyes that peered out from under his hooded lids were bright with wisdom. The most trusted of the network of spies Henry had placed throughout the kingdoms of North Africa, his endurance was legendary, even among the Tuareg.

“So, Maysar-who-goes-without-water,” Henry began. “Your news?”

“The *Franzwazi* chief, Napoleon, has escaped captivity and returned in triumph to his country. Worse, the news is that the people have risen to support him; the *Franzwazi* king has fled. Napoleon now proclaims himself emperor again, at the head of an army of more than three hundred thousand men poised to crush his enemies.”

“The devil, you say!” cried Henry. He rose quickly from the cushions he was sitting on, walked to the far edge of the tent, and stood there, caught in the turmoil of his thoughts. He was standing next to his Mameluke sword. He lifted it, absent-mindedly pulling the glistening, engraved blade out of the scabbard a few inches to read the words inscribed on it. After a minute, he jammed the sword back into its scabbard angrily and tossed it on a cushion lying on the floor. Maysar waited patiently for Henry to resume the briefing; Dihya watched him with growing concern.

“And who opposes him?” asked Henry, finally, turning back to them. His face had hardened.

“The *Inglitere* with their general Wellington have mustered little more than ninety thousand men. If one can trust what I was told, they are raw troops, conscripts. The *Prusyali* promise another two hundred thousand men; the *Ruslar* pledge one hundred and fifty thousand. But I have more evil news. The *Franzwazi* emperor has allied himself with Shiite heretics in Turkey and Albania, even declaring himself, false infidel that he is, a convert to the true faith of the Prophet, blessings be upon Him. The most radical have fallen for Napoleon’s lies and are ready to proclaim him the Hidden Imam – the Mahdi. They are gathering an army to split the allies forces, leaving the *Inglitere* to fight the *Franzwazi* by themselves.”

Henry returned to the cushions to sit next to Dihya. “This is evil news indeed,” he said. “So the Shiite fanatics have proclaimed Jihad against the Prussians and Russians. Turkey and Albania swarm with their followers, the most deadly, fanatical *bashi-bazouks*.” He paused a few moments. “I know their hearts may be inflamed with pious rage, but I cannot believe they will stir so long as their pockets are not full of gold. Religious zeal goes only so far amongst them.”

“That is the last piece of my bad news,” said Maysar. “I have learned that Ibn Hazm has pledged the gold needed to keep an army in the field for two months. I believe there are already plans to ship the treasure overland to Algiers from where the *Franzwazi* will take it by ship to the Adriatic.”

Henry remained quiet for several minutes, deep in his own troubled thoughts. “You might as well tell me what you’re planning,” Dihya said finally. “I know that look.”

“He must be stopped,” said Henry almost to himself. “Napoleon has mastered the art of separating allies and defeating one enemy at a time. By themselves, the English can’t defeat the *Grand Armée*. With England isolated, the rest of Europe hammered into servitude, and Napoleon now wearing the mantle of the Mahdi with the support of Shiite fanatics, he will surely look to North Africa for his next conquest. Sooner than we might wish, we will be staring into the mouths of his cannon.”

“And who will stop him, *Tamimt*?” she said, using her word of endearment. “Surely not you, now.”

“I think I’m the only one who can, *Tizemt*.”

Knowing where this encounter would lead, Maysar politely excused himself and left the tent.

“You are a fifty-five-year-old man, *Tamimt,* ” Dihya said when they were alone. “You have not lifted a sword in battle in ten years. This is a younger man’s work. You belong here, protecting our people and raising your son!”

“This work calls for a spy, not a soldier, Dihya. When Maysar-who-goes-without-water is rested, I will talk further with him. I will go to Azgar or Algiers – wherever he thinks we may have the greatest chance for success in stopping the passage of gold to the Shiites.”

“The Sheik of Azgar may have agreed to leave us in peace, but he is no friend,” said Dihya, “and you know you have enemies in Algiers who would revel in your capture and slow death.”

“And one friend, the Dey, Omar Pasha. We served together at Acre years ago when he knew me as El Habibka.”

“The way Turks change rulers, he is likely to have been strangled by his own Janissaries before you reach Algiers. This is too dangerous, *Tamimt*. For love of me and care for your son, you should not do this.”

“For love of our people, I must do it, *Tizemt.*”

“Then you are a silly old man,” she exclaimed in an angry explosion. “Your enemies will surely kill you this time – and then who will raise our son and protect our people?” She leaped to her feet and stormed out of the tent with a parting shot hurled back at Henry, “So go! Go! Be the fool you were born to be! But if you survive, do not expect to be welcome in my bed when you return!”

Chapter 2

Tamaransett

Henry crumpled up the letter he was writing to Dihya, and threw it into the glowing brazier where his two previous failed attempts had gone. He watched as the paper turned brown, then black, and then flared into flame before becoming ash. An hour ago, without a word to him, Dihya had saddled a horse and rode off into the desert in fury. Henry had thought of waiting for her return and decided it was better just to leave. It’s useless for me to try to justify what I’m doing, he thought. She’ll never agree. But I was right in what I told her. I must stop Napoleon.

His thoughts turned back to Dihya, and in an instant he had his answer. He darted out of their tent up the knoll where they had spent the morning. At the top, he looked to the east, hoping to see her returning. The far reach of desert was empty. He went among the rocks on the hillside and plucked a stem of Myrtle, *tefeltest* to the *Imazighen*, sacred for its healing powers and precious to Dihya because of the beauty of its small, star-shaped white flowers. He returned to their tent, took a clean sheet of paper and wrote:

*No matter where I travel, or what dangers I face, I carry you with me in my heart. When I think of leaning into your space and kissing you I remember the joy of how you whisper ‘more.’*

Henry put the note on their sleeping mat and placed the flower on top. I wonder if she’s right about me, he thought. This could indeed be a fool’s errand. The peace that I forged for the Tuareg people years ago has changed me as well. We’ve subdued rival tribes like the Chaaba and Kaybeles and ended their raids on our camel herds and caravans. My treaty with Ibn Hazm has secured the East and a similar treaty with Hassan Pasha, years ago, normalized relations with Algiers to our mutual profit. I haven’t fought a battle in close to a decade. Joba now sees to the regular training of our troopers. Oh well, he reflected, I haven’t really chosen this journey. It has been chosen for me. And so I can’t know the way back. Whoever set me on this path will have to bring me home. With a shrug, he went outside where Joba had been waiting patiently with his horse.

*Tinitran*, “the star,” was a pure descendant of the prized Kehilan mare Henry had brought with him from Arabia. She stood fifteen hands high, with the *Jibbah*, the bulging forehead that held the blessings of Allah characteristic of her bloodlines. Her great, arching, high-crested neck, the *Mitbah*, and gaily-carried tail signaled her courage and pride. Joba had provided Henry with three days of food and water. Henry would re-provision when he got to *Kaf Ajnoun*. Henry’s throwing daggers and disguise kit were in his saddlebags, his pistols, fine percussion cap weapons by Loron and Company in Marseilles, were in his saddle holsters, and his double-barreled rifle in a scabbard under his left leg. He wore his favorite sword, the Mameluke blade Jezzar Pasha had given him so many years before at Acre.

Joba held *Tinitran*’s surging head as a trooper gave Henry a leg up. As Henry settled his feet in the stirrups, Joba looked up at him. “Be careful,” he said.

Joba wasn’t talking about Ibn Hazm. Joba knew Henry would head for his secret hiding place in the mountain fastness of Idinen, *Kaf Ajnoun*, the djinn-haunted Cave of the Devils. The Tuaregs and other desert tribes knew it to be a place of ancient, terrifying evil. Few men foolish enough to have climbed the mountain to the cave ever came back alive, and those who did, returned as raving madmen.

Joba was well aware that somehow, Henry was untouched by the magic of djinns. Henry once had tried to tell him of his spirit bird *aswe’gaí* and the beliefs of the Mohawk people in America who raised him. Joba had stopped him. The less he knew about magic, Joba thought, the better. He had sometimes wondered if Henry wasn’t a djinn, himself, sent to help the *Imazighen*.

“Take care of Dihya and Agizul, my old friend,” Henry said, and then with the slightest relaxation of pressure on the reins, *Tinitran* sprang forward. Joba climbed the knoll to watch Henry’s dust trail finally vanish in the haze of the desert.

Two hours later, Dihya returned, at the gallop. When she dismounted her exhausted, foam-streaked horse, she ran into her and Henry’s tent. Joba watched her, knowing what would come next. He spoke rapidly to one of his troopers: “A camel, four days rations, and my weapons. Now!” So she’s had second thoughts, Joba reflected. First thoughts are usually better.

Dihya came out of her tent, the misery etched into her face. “Go after him, Joba.”

“I will find him, my Lady.” Joba paused for a moment, cautious about deepening her misery or awakening her anger. “You know I can’t bring him back.”

“I know. But take him this message. Tell him he may still be a fool, but he is the fool I love with all my heart. And my anger and fear for his safety have made me a greater fool. I will be only half alive until he comes home to me. And give him this.” She handed Joba Henry’s note to her, at the bottom of which she had written lines from Rumi, the Persian poet Henry loved:

*I want your sun to reach my raindrops  
So your heat can lift my soul upward like a cloud.*

Joba nodded, placed the note inside his burnoose for safety, mounted the camel his men had brought him, and kicked it into a run. He didn’t look back.

Dihya returned to their tent and sat forlornly on their empty sleeping mat. For almost twenty years, the last thing I remember is his arm around me as I fall asleep. I have rarely woken up in the morning without his smile being the first thing that greets me. In the first ten years of warfare, I was always his shield.

Her mind flashed back to the dusty, chaotic swirl of their last battle against Hassan Bey’s Turks outside the city of Derna, ten years before, during the Americans’ attack on Tripoli. When Henry had asked Joba to meet him at the battlefield with three hundred of Henry’s best troopers, Dihya had invited herself along.

She always stayed to Henry’s unprotected left side in a fight, unconsciously feeling his reaction to the enemies around him before he pivoted his mount to encounter a new foe. Ahead, a Turk Henry had been chasing suddenly spun his horse to the left, right in front of him. As Henry swerved to avoid contact, the man nimbly ducked his horse behind Henry’s, taking a slashing swing at Henry’s unprotected back as he passed, opening a small wound. Now he was on Henry’s unprotected left side, closing quickly. Ahead, another of Hassan Bey’s men was charging straight at Henry, pinning him momentarily between two enemies. Henry turned in his saddle to meet the attack from the nearer of the two men, parrying the Turk’s sword slash, then pivoted to meet the danger from the rear.

Dihya had timed her move perfectly. The pursuing Turk’s head simply flew off his body and the headless rider and horse galloped past Henry. In response to his quickly blurted “thanks,” Dihya had just smiled, and lifted her bloody sword in salute. After the battle, Henry had thanked her again and asked “But why are you here? This is the Americans’ fight, not yours.”

“Why to protect you, of course.” she said.

Her mind came back to the present. The bright sun on their red tent gave the inside a glowing rose light. But there was no warmth in it now. Our quarrels have been passionate, she thought; so has our love making. And I love him for the caring, patient father he is for our son. We are balanced, together, like the blazing sun and cool, flowing water. Now I must suffer hot grief and drown in sorrow alone. She collapsed on their sleeping mat in tears.

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Joba’s *méhari* camel was bred for speed, and Joba pushed it hard. He had no desire to catch up to Henry within the haunted mountains. An hour later, with the long jagged crest of the mountains of Idinen rising ominously in front of him, he approached the escarpment of the Wadi Tanezuft, his camel still at its mile-eating dead run. At the edge of the cliff, as the loose soil crumbled beneath his camel’s hooves, he had a moment to realize, in fear, that he was going too fast. Then he and his camel hurtled over the edge. When he came to, with the sun now starting to set, his camel lay next to him, its neck broken. Joba tried to stand, and his left leg collapsed under him. He gathered his food and water, and using his rifle for a crutch, worked his slow, painful way back up the escarpment to where a rescue party might see him.

Chapter 3

The Bay of Biscay

The American Privateer *Dihya*, commanded by Peter Kirkpatrick, had been tracking the strange sail since daybreak, matching her pace and staying four miles to leeward. He could have caught up to the stranger when he wished. A 360-ton topsail schooner, built at Thomas Kemp’s boatyard in Fells Point, Maryland, with the raked masts and sharp clipper hull characteristic of these ships, *Dihya* could fly.

At her launching in January 1813, Peter named her in honor of his brother Henry’s wife – with Henry’s permission of course – for whom Peter had developed a thoroughly honorable, but a hopeless, almost adolescent crush. Peter helped carve *Dihya’s* figurehead: a beautiful black-haired woman, her figure modestly covered by her flowing Bedouin robes. *Dihya* was also big enough to carry a crew of 100 men and a significant weight of metal. Peter arranged with the Navy Yard to provide him with fourteen 12-pound long guns and four 24-pound carronades, the short-range “right smashers.”

Peter’s first lieutenant, Thomas Christopher, perched on the foremast port shrouds, had been studying the stranger with his glass. “She’s made no attempt to elude us. And a Danish flag, red and white clear enough, so a neutral − or at least that’s what she want us to think.”

“I think it’s time to take a close look at her,” Peter said. “Two points to starboard,” Peter ordered the helmsman. *Dihya* gracefully turned into a beam reach, her fastest point of sail. “Topsail, t’gallant and stun’s’ls,” he called out.

Canvas instantly blossomed above Diyha and she surged forward like a racehorse. As the spray, glinting in the bright sunlight, began to fly from her bows, Peter heard a familiar cough coming from Christopher, now standing next to him.

“Ah,” Peter said with a laugh, “it’s ‘Doubting Thomas’ with a word of caution.” Christopher had joined the Navy as a fourteen-year-old midshipman out of Marblehead and had been Peter’s first lieutenant in the Navy aboard *USS Eagle* in 1805. He had followed Peter as captain of one of his merchant ships after Peter resigned his commission. With the outbreak of war, he had gladly joined *Dihya* as first lieutenant again.

“Begging your pardon, Captain.” he said, “We have a king’s ransom locked in your cabin and stored in our hold, our run of luck has been incredible, and we’re on our way home safely,” he paused to knock wood on the foremast fife rail next to him. On this, his most successful voyage, Peter had captured 20 British prizes worth close to half a million dollars, all but three of which had safely made port in Nantes or New York. In his repeated forays into the English Channel, he had tormented the British Navy ships detailed to guard the lumbering British convoys or sent out to capture him. “Not satisfied with terrifying our coast and putting Lloyds into panic,” complained the London *Times,* “out of sheer wantonness this impudent American sometimes affects to chase and harry our men-of-war of far superior force.”

“I wonder, Christopher continued, “if we might not be pressing our luck, now. This is our last voyage. From what we’ve heard from the neutral ships we’ve stopped as well as our British prizes, the peace treaty is due to be signed in a matter of weeks. Why not just let this quarry go? Sometimes when you reach into a hole in a tree looking for honey you wind up with a swarm of bees. And we’re short-handed. Half the crew is gone now, manning our prizes.”

“Fair enough, Tom. But we’ve yet to find a British cruiser that can stay with us. Let’s at least get close enough to take a look. After all, there’s no harm when one is leaving an orchard in plucking one last plum on the way out.”

The mention of plums stirred a memory in Peter’s mind. He and his close friend, U.S. Marine Lieutenant Presley Neville O’Bannon, were marching with O’Bannon’s Marines at the head of General William Eaton’s army in Tripoli. Their mission was to drive out Hamet’s usurping brother, Jusef Karamanli, and put Hamet on the throne, counting on his gratitude to give America favorable treatment from the Barbary pirates who sailed out of Tripoli to attack American ships. Their goal was Jusef’s stronghold at Derna on the Tripolitan coast.

They were marching through the lush fields and fruit orchards to the east of Derna. In order not to inflame the local population, Hamet had decreed that any soldier who picked fruit from these orchards would have his right hand cut off. O’Bannon had discussed the issue with his Marines and decided that while plucked fruit was definitely off limits, anything on the ground was fair game. So the lead Marines knocked the ripest plums from the trees with their rifles as they passed for their squad mates to pick up and share. After weeks of suffering from hunger and thirst in the 500-mile march across the merciless Sahara, Peter had never tasted plums so sweet.

By noon, *Dihya* had closed the distance to three miles. The stranger was now clearly a brig, roughly the same size as *Dihya*. “I see only three gun ports on her side,” Christopher said, “and just a handful of men on deck.” Peter fired a gun to signal the ship to heave to. Their quarry’s answer was to haul to the north and put on more sail in a desperate attempt to escape.

“Look there!” Christopher cried, pointing to a flurry of flapping sail on the ship ahead of them. “I think she’s lost her fore-topmast.” Their quarry trimmed her sails sharply by the wind as the crew worked feverishly to clear the wreckage. *Dihya* surged up behind her on the leeward side. They could now see her name, *Spider*, gilded on her stern. Strange name for a Danish ship, Peter thought.

At 1:26 they were a pistol shot away when the stranger hauled down her Danish flag, raised the blue British ensign of the Channel Fleet, and released the painted cloth concealing her eight starboard gun ports. “Damn me!” Peter cursed himself as the ships closed, “if I haven’t just fallen for one of the oldest tricks in the game. All that business with damaged rigging was a lure – and I swallowed it whole.

Within seconds, the stranger’s decks swarmed with men and officers wearing Royal Navy uniforms. They gave a lusty three cheers as they ran out their guns. “Down!” Peter cried, and his crew dropped to the deck behind *Dihya’s* bulwarks as the British delivered a whirring broadside of grape and round shot at point blank range. Only the British crew’s eagerness saved *Dihya*. Had *Spider’s* gun crews waited even seconds longer to fire on the downward roll, their broadside would have caught *Dihya* amidships. As it was, most of their broadside splashed harmlessly into the sea ahead of *Dihya* or punched holes in her foresails and cut a few lines without doing serious damage.

Peter had been caught completely napping, but *Diyha’s* returning fire from her starboard battery came just seconds before the second broadside from what they now knew to be *HMS Spider*. By now, sharpshooters filled both ships’ tops, raining musket and rifle fire on the enemy below. “Bring us alongside,” Peter called to his coxswain Byron Fox, now at the wheel. “We’ll board her!” *Dihya’s* speed, however, was too great, and she shot ahead*. Spider’s* captain instantly put up his helm, wearing his ship to cross *Dihya’s* stern and hit her with punishing raking fire.

Peter’s response was just as quick. He put up his helm as well, and soon the two ships were now engaged broadside to broadside. *Spider’s* armament consisted of sixteen 12-pound carronades, at this range the equal of Peter’s broadside, but *Dihya’s* 24-pound smashers crashed through the thin bulwarks of the British ship. Unlike British round shot, American balls exploded when they hit home. The deck of *Spider* became a red ruin of shrapnel and clouds of lethal splinters. More devastating, the American’s rate of fire was easily twice that of their foes. So rapid was the barrage that to the sailors on *Spider,* it seemed as if the side of the American ship was on fire. After 20 minutes, most of *Spider’s* starboard battery had been silenced and her rigging was torn to shreds. Her scuppers ran with blood, and instead of cheers, the sounds from her crew now were the cries of wounded men.

“Boarding parties ready!” Peter cried above the din. He gathered with Lieutenant O’Brien and his Marines in the bow while Christopher assembled a second assault group in the stern. Even though *Dihya* was a private vessel authorized by a Letter of Marque to attack and seize British shipping, Peter manned and commanded her like the *USS Eagle* he had captained in the Barbary Wars. That included a contingent of twenty men under O’Brien, all US Marine veterans. Peter had not dressed them in regulation uniforms − that would have been coming it too high, Peter thought. He settled for simple blue uniforms and cloth caps. But in all other ways, they carried out the duties of a Marine detachment aboard any warship.

Fox smartly brought *Dihya* alongside *HMS Spider* and *Dihya’s* crew had just lashed on to their enemy with grappling hooks when Christopher cried out, “Captain! They have struck!” Peter looked back to see *HMS Spider’s* British ensign tumble to her wreckage-filled deck. He climbed on board to take her captain’s surrender.

Peter received the wounded British captain’s sword in the cabin of *HMS Spider.* Realizing the shame a British officer must feel to have to surrender his ship to an American, and a privateer at that, Peter graciously returned Captain Wickham’s sword. “I would not think to take the sword of a man who had used it so bravely,” he said. Wickham received it back and placed it to the side almost indifferently, as if it were a trifle of no consequence.

“We’ve been chasing you and your damned Yankee skimming dish for a month,” Wickham ruefully acknowledged. “And now, when we caught you, we found we were facing a bulldog, not a race hound,” he added, the pain on his face as much the result of his surrender as his wound.

“May I inquire of your losses?” asked Peter.

“Our butcher’s bill may come to fifteen dead and another twenty-five wounded,” Wickham replied. “I must say you have hammered us cruelly,” he added. “Upon my word, I have never seen such gunfire.”

Peter tried to think of some complimentary, or at least conciliatory response, and failed. He broke the ensuing, awkward silence by asking, as gently as possible, “I see you are wounded, I pray, not seriously?” Wickham just waved his hand dismissively.

Peter tried again. “Without wishing at all to presume, Captain, might I offer to send over my surgeon to assist your ship’s doctor in caring for your wounded?”

“You’re very kind, I’m sure,” Wickham answered, now for the first time looking up at Peter and responding more graciously, “but I would not take him from his duty aboard your ship.”

“His duty, happily, is mercifully light. We lost four men and have just eight wounded.”

At that news, Captain Wickham just collapsed in his chair and slid back into despair.

“I will send my doctor and his loblolly boys over,” said Peter hurriedly, “and my Marines will make sure that none of your or your officer’s personal property is taken.” With that, he saluted and left Captain Wickham to his misery. They both knew what awaited Wickham, his officers and men – the cold, damp French prison at Verdun.