

Jim DeFelice



The Golden Flask

Jake Gibbs Patriot Spy
Book Three

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by Jim DeFelice

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Introduction

By now, many readers will be familiar with the history of these stories, which are loosely translated from some old manuscripts found in the root cellar of an eighteenth-century farmhouse. Whether the originals were intended as history or fiction is difficult to tell. The places described are verifiably real, as are most of the people and situations. Anyone interested in some of the surrounding history will find some notes addressing it at the end of the book.

The original author's sympathies were clearly on the side of the Revolutionists, and so you must forgive his occasional lapses into partisanship. My contribution has been to update the language here and there, and fight against his habit of puffing out the simplest descriptions and going on for pages when a single paragraph will do.

In one of the strangest and most bewildering events of the war, the British army that had been harrying New Jersey during the early summer of 1777 suddenly gave up its efforts to force General Washington into a decisive battle. Under the command of Sir William Howe, some 20,000 redcoats, Hessians, and various hangers-on marched onto ships and disappeared into the mists of the Atlantic.

They were obviously preparing for a new invasion, but General Washington wasn't sure where. On the one hand, Philadelphia seemed a logical choice: difficult to defend, it was the capital of the Revolutionary congress and had ostensibly been Howe's target during his Jersey campaigns. Yet there were rumors of an attack up the Hudson toward Albany, and intelligence pegged Boston as the next British prize.

The loss of any of these cities would be devastating, but Washington could not guard all three. Just at the moment he was about to choose where to march his army, a letter fell into his possession from General Howe giving his place of attack as "B—."

The writing was in Howe's hand, and even a schoolboy would realize "B—" was Boston. But what was the letter a ruse?

The commander-in-chief faced the most perplexing dilemma of the war. March to Boston and Albany and Philadelphia were free for the plucking. Hesitate for more than a few short days, and the British would dance their way through New England.

There was only one way to discover Howe's true intentions: Send the most illustrious member of the Secret Service into New York to find out what Howe was up to. And therein lies our present tale.

—Jim DeFelice Hudson Valley, N.Y.

Chapter One

Albany, N.Y.

Summer 1777

Wherein, a riot threatens to break out where a ball had been, and Jake is challenged to duel.

He was unarmed, his ribs throbbed from several recent injuries, and he was about to come under severe attack.

A lesser man might have quaked in his low, silver-buckled shoes. But Lieutenant Colonel Jake Stewart Gibbs took the charge manfully, extending his uniformed arm with grace. Mother Schuyler took his hand and led him through the minuet.

Jake even smiled. It was the price one paid for dancing with her daughter Betsy.

"You are as fine a dancer as a soldier," said Catherine Schuyler as the music ended.

He bowed gracefully, his hand carefully placed on his side to keep the bandages on his ribs from bursting. He'd only risen from the convalescent bed this morning — against the wishes of his nurse, who happened to be Betsy herself.

"I can see where your daughter learned her charms," Jake told his hostess as he took her arm and steered her from the dance floor. "I wonder if you two conspired against me."

The ball was being held in the Schuylers' Albany mansion, known as the Pastures. Despite the poor news from the north, most of the city's social elite had gathered.

"My husband's orders were quite specific," said Catherine Schuyler. "You are to stay in Albany this evening and meet him tomorrow only if your wounds have healed sufficiently. You look quite handsome in that uniform," she added. "And your hair has completely covered the awful slash you arrived with."

"I have had more severe cuts from errant barbers," replied Jake.

This was just the sort of lie dashing young spies are always telling young women, but it had a considerably different effect on the middle-aged matron. Mrs. Schuyler frowned and her so sweet voice transformed to a scold. "Don't tell me your tales," she said, waving her finger up his face. "It is only a miracle you survived. The first night they laid you in the bed, I thought you were dead."

"Oh, I've been much closer to death. There was the time in Quebec when the governor caught me in his office, for instance. And two months ago on the *HMS Richmond* the noose was already on my neck. Your friend Claus van Clynne saved me from that predicament."

"You were close to death indeed," interjected Colonel Thomas Flanagan, appearing at Jake's right. General Schuyler had pressed Flanagan into serving as his substitute at the ball while he attended to more difficult matters further north.

"Van Clynne is no friend of ours," sniffed Mrs. Schuyler. "He goes about styling himself a squire when he has no land at all."

"He is a bungler and a thief," charged Flanagan.

"Come, Colonel, I understand you have done business with Claus yourself."

"Business, yes — I should like to meet him here tonight. We have a matter to discuss."

"Claus van Clynne was not invited," said Mrs. Schuyler. "Nor would he be welcome."

"He speaks highly of you," said Jake.

"That is a bolder lie than the one about your wound," she replied.

"I am surprised to see you in uniform," said Flanagan. "I did not think the Secret Service was given to wearing them."

"I think it is quite becoming," said Betsy Schuyler, fluttering her skirts as she reached them. She had temporarily managed to extricate herself from a line of suitors to check on her patient. "Much better than the clothes he arrived in." Betsy hooked her arm in Jake's. "Our own tailor made it. I think the blue of his jacket matches his eyes. His breeches are pleasing as well. Very snug."

"And here I thought you were spoken for," Flanagan hinted to Jake.

"I have heard of no wedding vows," answered Betsy sharply. "Nor an engagement given."

"Sarah has been in Boston to attend a sick aunt," Jake explained. "I have not seen her since she returned, though I sent word to her father."

The muscles in Betsy's arm tensed, telling Jake she wished he would reconsider the point he had made in their conversation that afternoon. In truth, he found Betsy a nearly perfect woman, beautiful and intelligent, plucky and brave. She had only one short-coming: General Phillip Schuyler, commander of the northern department of the Continental Army, was her father. And despite Schuyler's recent kindness, Jake did not have a particularly high opinion of him.

He kept that opinion steadfastly to himself, however. Sarah's claim was older and deeper, and he had explained to Betsy — though it was obvious she had not accepted his words as final.

"Perhaps one of you gentlemen will get me some punch," hinted Betsy's mother Catherine.

"I have some business to attend to," said Flanagan. "But I'm sure Colonel Gibbs will oblige."

Mrs. Schuyler was waylaid by an old acquaintance as the trio headed across the room, leaving Jake and Betsy to find the table themselves.

"You are the only one here who does not seem on edge," said Betsy. Her lilac perfume tickled his nose as the hoops of her brocaded skirt swirled against his side. He had to admit there were much less pleasant ways to spend an evening.

"Don't believe everything you see. I would much prefer to be doing something useful."

"Do you think Burgoyne will attack Albany?"

"He will try to reach it," said Jake.

"Does my father have the troops to stop him?"

The note in her voice surprised him. Jake took hold of Betsy's elbow as he looked down into her eyes. The girl was devoted to her father, but even she couldn't hide her doubts.

Despite his own feelings toward the general, Jake's first impulse was to try and reassure her.

"Don't tell me not to worry," she said before he could speak. "Don't be like the others. Be honest."

The spy nodded, his lips tightening before he spoke.

"We won't give up."

It was the most he could say. The recent fall of Ticonderoga without a fight was a sobering reminder of how precarious the Revolution was. Jake knew there were plans for waylaying Burgoyne's advance — he had been wounded initiating some of them — but he could not be confident they would be enough.

"Well, this party is supposed to boost everyone's spirit," said Betsy resolutely. "Let us try this punch."

The concoction included a small amount of rum and a much larger portion of sugar - ordinarily too sweet for Jake, but some sacrifices were expected during war.

Betsy turned back to the room, smiling at a knot of admirers who were pitching together their courage to ask for a dance. While there was some sentiment that her older sister Angelica was prettier, Jake would have to cast his vote in Betsy's favor. Indeed, there was only one woman he could think of who was more fetching and she was many miles away.

But if that was so, who was wearing the red velvet dress and making a beeline directly for him, young men swooning in her wake?

"Jake, how long have you been in Albany without coming to see me?"

"Sarah?"

Jake took a step forward and found himself nearly consumed by Sarah Thomas. He hugged her to him, running his fingers through her auburn hair and savoring the crush of her round, ripe breasts. For a brief moment he forgot everything — the war, as well as Betsy Schuyler behind him.

"Your father said you were in Boston," he told Sarah.

"I hurried back when I heard your life was in danger," said Sarah, taking a step away and surveying him — with one eye cast menacingly at Betsy. "Apparently I arrived not a moment too soon. What happened to you?"

"Among other things, a Mohawk made the mistake of trying to carry off a piece of my scalp without taking care to make sure I was dead first." He held her hands a moment longer, then loosened his grip to gesture to his side, where Betsy was standing in a pose that would have intimidated Minerva. "Sarah, I believe you know Betsy Schuyler. Her family nursed me back to health."

"Indeed."

Rarely has a simple word contained such understated venom. In a clash of arms, Jake Gibb had few betters, but he felt temporarily overmatched as the air around the two women sparked with the electricity of a sudden summer storm. *

"Sarah Thomas," said Betsy Schuyler. "I hadn't realized you were invited."

"I wasn't," said Sarah. "A friend of mine escorted me. A most distinguished gentleman, as happens."

Any question as to the gentleman's identity was forestalled by a loud harangue just now rising near the orchestra.

"I should think that another violin would be needed for proper dancing. In my day accompaniment was accompaniment, and we did not cut corners with it."

As he had done on so many occasions, Claus van Clynne made a most timely entrance. Pushing his way through the crowd, he temporarily displaced Sarah and Betsy, whose hostilities were interrupted by the small whirlpool created by the squire's arrival.

The portly Dutchman, freshly combed and dressed in a fine russet suit, might have been termed a dashing figure, assuming one made proper allowances for the antique quality of his clothes, his large stomach, and his somewhat scraggly, if over-full, red beard. His shoes bore large golden buckles, and he had not one but two watch chains. His buttons were silver, and his sleeves very properly ruffled. His hat was by far the finest in the hall, circling his head like the clouds over Olympus, and nearly as gray. The beavers that had volunteered their coats for it had

been truly noble beasts.

"I had not expected you out of bed for at least another week," said van Clynne, giving Jake a pat on the side so sturdy the spy gasped with pain. "But of course, I had not counted on Dutch cures."

"You seem to have made your own recovery," said Jake.

"A trifle," said the Dutchman, whose most serious wound during the adventure consisted of the loss of an entire bushel of wampum. "A misunderstanding. The Maquas and I have always been on the friendliest of terms. Indeed, we have done much business together, and will do so in the future."

"Not the near future," said Jake. "They've all gone over to Burgoyne."

Van Clynne dismissed this as he might dismiss word of poor weather. "A temporary indiscretion. Now that you are fully recovered, perhaps you can accompany me to Peekskill. I have some business there and aim to leave in the morning."

"I can't," said Jake. "Schuyler will need me."

The Dutchman sniffed and pulled at his beard, but noting Betsy nearby, did not voice his opinion of the Albany aristocrat turned commander. Instead, he took a glance at the table, searching for something to drink. Besides the punch, the Schuylers were serving the best Madeira they had, but as of yet no ale had been liberated from the kitchen. While van Clynne went to perform that mission, Jake returned his attention to Sarah and Betsy.

The British and American armies exchanged less threatening glares. Under the guise of complimenting each other, the two women traded pointed insults. Sarah noted that Betsy's new dress was most becoming, considering that it had been let out twice in recent months. Betsy opined that the rouge on Sarah's cheek was very much in fashion, no matter what the word from Europe might suggest. Sarah allowed as how no one in the room would notice that Betsy mixed a little clothes dye with her hair soap; Betsy complimented Sarah on the handkerchiefs discreetly stuffed in the front of her dress.

By now a knot of women had assembled, and the atmosphere was heavier than a late winter's fog. While somewhat flattered to be the object of such attention, Jake was not about to let the two young women come to blows. He owed Betsy his gratitude for her service as nurse and Sarah much more. Surely a smile to one, a kiss to the other, and peace would break out.

Or at least a truce that would facilitate tactful withdrawal. But as he stepped forward to propose a cease fire, Jake was grabbed from behind by a most unfeminine hand.

"You, sir, are a scoundrel and a villain. You will accompany me outside, where we will arrange to redress our difficulties on the field of honor."

Chapter Two

Wherein, Jake is summoned to meet with the commander-in-chief, and the Bard is misquoted.

Jake, unsure what he had done and somewhat annoyed at being interrupted, spun around to face his challenger.

He was met by a young man of twenty with a disheveled mop of hair, mud-soiled if nice-tailored clothes, and a broad, impish smile on his face.

"Alexander Hamilton, what the devil brings you to Albany?"

"Come to rescue you from a tight situation, I see," said Hamilton, whose buff and blue uniform proclaimed him a member of General George Washington's staff. He swept his tricornered hat toward Betsy and Sarah. "Ladies."

"Colonel Alexander Hamilton," said Jake, introducing them. He was as glad of the comparison as the interruption. "Be careful of him, ladies; he is most ambitious. Just a few weeks ago he was a captain."

"Charmed," said Betsy as he took her hand to kiss it. She fluttered her eyes at him, making sure Jake saw.

"I hope you will excuse me if I remove Colonel Gibbs from your presence. But first let me say, Miss Thomas, that dress is particularly fetching. And you, Miss Schuyler, I hope my delay in making your acquaintance to this point won't be held against me, for surely it has been my great loss."

The reader will be spared the swain's additional bouquets, though the women were not. Sarah immediately became suspicious, but Betsy's eyes filled with a sort of light a poet might devote a lifetime to describing.

"Outside," Hamilton whispered to Jake as he turned from them. "We must not be overheard."

Jake, with a sinking feeling that he was about to become embroiled in the political fallout from the Ticonderoga fiasco, reluctantly bowed his apologies and followed Hamilton through the room. They passed through the ornately worked portal, leaving the faux woodlands on the walls behind.

Jake had been to the Pastures before the war, and knew its interior passages fairly well. He took Hamilton to the east door, passing down the steps onto the broad brick walkway. They walked onto the lawn, away from the house and the nearby bushes.

The moon was at its fullest. The two men might have had a proper game of skittles, perhaps the duel Hamilton had promised, had the situation been different. Both remained silent until they reached a point where eavesdropping was impossible.

"General Washington must see you immediately," said Hamilton. "It is a matter of the greatest urgency."

Though softly spoken, the words could not have elicited a sharper reaction in Jake had they been shouted in his ear.

"I've ridden all day and half the night without stopping, except for fresh horses," continued Hamilton. "The general has removed you from Schuyler's command. You're to report to him immediately. No excuses."

"I have none."

"Schuyler is in disrepute for abandoning Ticonderoga without a fight," Hamilton added. "His Excellency had one of his famous fits when he heard the news. Several chairs were damaged."

"As I have heard it, Schuyler's not entirely to blame. St. Clair neglected to reinforce Sugar Loaf Hill, as he did not think the British could send artillery there."

"A costly mistake, for which Schuyler will be justly blamed," said Hamilton. "The commander must take responsibility."

"I haven't heard he's ducking it," said Jake. He was honor-bound to defend his commander even if his assignment had been temporary.

"Arnold is being sent north, along with more reinforcements. The matter will be taken in your hand. You and I have more pressing problems."

"More pressing?"

"Come, we have a long ride before us."

"Wait." Jake caught Hamilton by the arm as he started away. He was only three years older than Hamilton, but had seen enough danger since the war started to make them seem like two decades. "Let me change from this uniform first. And I have to say goodbye to Sarah."

"No time. Besides, the suit looks quite dashing."

"The breeches are too damn tight."

"You can find other clothes after we reach the general. We're to meet him below Newburgh by noon, and even if we start now I'm not at all sure we'll make it."

"Let me just catch Sarah's eye. And a Dutch friend of mine is here who has proven himself useful in difficult situations; the general may want to make further use of him."

"Colonel — sir." Hamilton's grip on Jake's arm was as powerful as any British grenadier's, but there was a note of respect and even supplication in his voice.

And something else.

Ordinarily, Hamilton was happy to rely on the commander-in-chiefs' authority and address even major generals as if they were privates. But speaking now to Jake, genuine admiration was mixed with fearful worry; his words nearly trembled in his mouth.

"I would like nothing better than to stay on a few hours myself. But the entire British army has disappeared from the Jerseys, packed themselves into ships, and rode out to sea. If we don't discover their intentions within the next few days, we risk a disaster that will make Ticonderoga look like milk spilt at a maids' picnic. No one must be informed of our business, not even the closest friend. You would know that much better than I."

Duty having clamped her heavy arm on Jake's shoulder, he nodded and followed Hamilton to the horses without comment.

* * *

The Dutchman whose value Jake had mentioned would have welcomed an interruption. It happened at that moment to be deeply engaged in discussion with Colonel Flanagan. Not

itself unusual, except that he was spending considerably more time listening than speaking.

Ordinarily, van Clynne would use any meeting with a close confidant of the commanding general of the Northern Department to press his claims for the return of his ancestral land stolen from the family by English interlopers. But it happened that a month earlier the squi had been engaged by the colonel to sell a variety of items, including a very fine carriage.

"What a coincidence. I was planning to work on that transaction tomorrow," said van Clynne.

"That would be very good — I could use the thirty crowns, believe me."

Van Clynne ignored the note of sarcasm in the colonel's voice. In actual fact, the wagon had fetched forty crowns at Half Moon some weeks before, just before the Dutchman ventured north to assist Jake in his dealings with the Mohawk. But such a large interval had transpired the meantime that his memory of the details of the business had faded.

Or so he would claim if pressed. For the moment he frowned, allowing as how there was a great shortage of money and an oversupply of wagons, which made achieving a favorable price difficult. Perhaps, he hinted, his usual broker's fees could be boosted as an incentive to a deal.

"I doubt that," said Flanagan. "We have a contract. Your word is your bond, you said."

"As it remains, stronger than any rope. Indeed, stronger than the chain across the Hudson - which I saved, by the by, and which I am due to, er, inspect directly."

Flanagan caught van Clynne's cuff as he attempted to retreat. "I saw a carriage that looked very similar to mine in town just the other day. Another coincidence?"

"As I said, there is quite an oversupply." Van Clynne looked eagerly for a diversion. He saw one in the person of a servant who entered the room carrying a tray of Port. "Here we are, Colonel. Something to drink?"

"No."

"Of course, you are a beer man. As am I, in fact. Indeed, I had set out in search of some ale when you bumped into me. Here . . ." He called over to the servant. "Two cups of your finest ale. Wait — better make it porter; my friend and I have just been discussing some stock business."

"Excuse me, sir, but I am serving the wine."

"Just so," said van Clynne, "but it is a venial offense and I won't hold it against you. Hurry now; the colonel is a military man and has many important things to attend to."

As the waiter retreated, van Clynne took a step to follow.

"Hold it, Claus." Flanagan extended an arm and hooked his finger in a buttonhole on the Dutchman's vest.

"I promise to give the carriage my top priority."

"There is another matter I'd like to discuss. General Schuyler told me you have recently been among the Mohawk. I would like to know their strength and plans."

"Yes, the Maquas." Van Clynne frowned, running his eye up and down Flanagan's dark blue uniform. Undoubtedly, Flanagan was merely making a pretext, planning a return to the obnoxious topic of his wagon as soon as possible. "My friend Mr. Gibbs would do better to find you in. He was gathering intelligence, while I served primarily as facilitator and interpreter. The interviews were not all together pleasant, as I'm sure he will tell you with his usual flair."

"Jake left a short while ago," said Flanagan. "And you're here now."

"Where did he go?" demanded Sarah Thomas, who had been silently observing the conversation.

"I'm sorry, Miss Thomas, but I saw him leave the room a short while ago," said Flanagan.

~~Tears welled in Sarah's eyes as anger flushed her cheeks. "He's gone to see Betsy I'll be back in a moment."~~
She claimed to have a headache and went upstairs."

Flanagan had a daughter about Sarah's age and well understood her consternation. "I saw him go outside with another officer," he explained. "Not with Betsy."

"Colonel Hamilton?"

The words were scarcely out of Sarah's mouth when van Clynne began to bluster. "Hamilton?" he demanded. "Alexander Hamilton? Are we speaking of the young officer who handles much of His Excellency General Washington's correspondence? A man who answers to Washington's beck and call every hour of the day?"

Before Flanagan or Sarah could answer, van Clynne was asking which door they had taken and throwing himself hastily in that direction. The Dutchman ran into the hallway, seeking out his friend with loud entreaties and a sprinkling of even louder curses.

A personal meeting with General Washington had always been a prominent feature of van Clynne's strategy to win back the rights to his property — and here was his chance to arrange one. Surely Jake would tell Hamilton that the Dutchman's plea was a righteous one. Surely the young aide would escort him directly to the general.

But they were nowhere to be found. The landless squire expended a considerable portion of his energy in vain complaints and not a little wheezing before he discovered a stable-hand who had seen them and their mounts head south from the estate. With a great shout, van Clynne realized that his Opportunity was about to slip off his doorstep.

Not if he could help it. Nor did van Clynne let the fact that the man had only a hazy notion of where the two were going delay him. He trusted to his wits and Fate to reunite them, ere Jake met the general.

Assuming he set off right away.

"A horse, a horse!" he demanded. "My land for a horse."

What Shakespeare might have thought of this plagiarism will not be recorded here. A horse was produced nearly as quickly as the gold from one of the Dutchman's four purses. He thundered into the night, pushing the beast with more fire than Paul Revere displayed the night of his famous tour of the Boston suburbs.

Chapter Three

Wherein, Jake and Colonel Hamilton make the acquaintance of several shady fellows.

The cool night air and the rush of excitement at being summoned by General Washington invigorated Jake. He urged his horse southward with the enthusiasm of a boy released from school the day stripers start their river run. Hamilton was right beside him; the two men took advantage of the strong moon and clear night sky to thunder at full speed through the Hudson Valley hills. They reached the small settlement of Coxsackie, some twenty miles below Albany, in barely the time it would take to spell the name. The horses Hamilton had chosen were slender but sturdy beasts, identically colored — roan, with a single white daub at the left eye. Their muscled legs seemed capable of outrunning the wind.

As fast as the horses strode, Jake's mind went quicker. He began to fear what might lie ahead. It was not fear for himself. Until presented with a specific danger, Jake Gibbs was not the type to dwell on contingencies. But he realized that the Revolution had reached a tremulous point. Already, there were rumblings of discontent in the army, and the chronic shortage of funds was becoming acute. While delegations had been sent abroad to seek foreign support, European powers such as France would not back a cause that appeared headed for defeat. Another major setback — the loss of Boston or Philadelphia, or even Albany—could easily end all hope of assistance.

The area Jake and Hamilton rode through had been among the first visited by white men after the continent's fortunate discovery. The Dutch, including members of the van Clynck family, had made this land their own, exploring, farming, and trading for furs. It was sparsely settled, however, for various reasons beginning with the geography. Hills and mountains rose up in jagged lines from the river; between them, all manner of ponds, creeks, and streams flowed in crazy-quilt patterns, now shimmering in the moonlight.

A few miles south of Coxsackie, a stream crossed the roadway to mark a perfect X on the darkened landscape, and it was here that the two Continental officers stopped to refresh their horses and stretch their own arms and legs.

The spot was idyllic, but the choice was unfortunate, for no sooner had the men slipped off the backs of their mounts than they were warned to stand away, with their hands held out to their sides.

"You will do what I say, or I will kill you," said the voice sharply. "Identify yourselves."

Jake, his barely healed wounds smarting from the bumping they'd been treated to on the ride, stretched his arms stiffly and studied the shadows. A man with a gun was standing to the right.

"Excuse us, sir," said Hamilton brightly. "We are on our way to New Paltz."

"No one travels at night on this road," said the man. Tall, he cast a wedged shadow forward from the woods. His accent was odd, though his words were perfect English. The intonation

reminded Jake of the Iroquois, among whom he had just spent several harrowing weeks.

"We are good patriots," answered Hamilton. His service as an artillery officer had taught him the caution that was second nature to Jake. This was secure patriot country, after all, and his assumption that the men must be part of the local militia was logical. "I am Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton, and this is my friend, Colonel Gibbs."

"A pair of colonels," said another voice, this one to their left. There was no mistake about his accent — it was direct from one of London's cruder neighborhoods.

Jake quickly surveyed the nearby woods, looking for a safe line of retreat. His only weapon was his Segallas pocket pistol secreted at his belt. And Hamilton's larger officer's pistol was snug in the holster on the side of his saddle on his horse.

"If you've come to rob us," said Jake, "it will do you no good; we've got no money."

"We're not interested in your money," said the man with the Indian accent, who seemed to be the other's leader. He took a step from the shadows.

"Come now, friends, who is your commander?" said Hamilton, taking a step forward.

Jake groaned. "Alexander," he said as he put his hand to his vest, "I believe my stomach is acting up."

"As well it should," said the leader. "Bring up the light."

A third and then a fourth man emerged from the shadows near the bushes, the last holding a candle lantern. Its flame was hardly enough for anyone to read by, but it gave Jake enough light to see there were no other reinforcements.

"Gentlemen," he said, still feigning illness as he stepped forward, "I must speak to you alone."

"That's an old trick," said the first man who had accosted them, standing to their right. The dim light illuminated white skin, but his forehead and cheek were tattooed with unmistakable markings of an Iroquois warrior. His head was completely shaven, except for a scalp lock; tied with a large golden feather and brass ring, it hung down the side of his head to his shoulder. His clothes were a curious mixture of European and Indian dress. He wore a black tailored jacket, but no shirt. A long red ceremonial slash cut a diagonal across his chest. His breeches were leather. In the darkness it was impossible to tell what, if anything, he wore on his feet.

Jake had come across painted whites before. Some called them changelings, men who had been adopted or stolen as youngsters to live among the Indians and converted to their way of life. Others called them renegades, race traitors, and worse.

It was difficult to generalize about where such men's loyalties lay. But these had already given themselves away. Jake guessed the white Indian and his escorts must be messengers working between the British northern and southern frontiers; they were too far and too misplaced to be scouts.

"This is not a trick," said Jake. He had used his feigned stomach ailment to put the Segallas pistol into his hand, and now contemplated how best to use its store of bullets. "The name I have used until now is false, a fiction to make travel among these rebels safer. I am Major Doctor Keen, assigned to General Bacon's intelligence service. I am on my way to our lines with valuable information."

Keen's name was unfamiliar to them, but the mention of Black Clay was enough to give the quartet pause. Bacon ran the British intelligence service headquartered in New York City under the command of General Howe. They were ostensibly if indirectly under his command.

He was also a man who must not be crossed in the least way. The Englishmen took a step backward, nearly as a group.

The tattooed man was not impressed. He spat on the ground.

"Egans, let us examine him," suggested the Londoner. "He should bear a token if he is a messenger."

"I did not say I was a messenger," answered Jake, working his way slowly toward the man with the candle lantern. He tried to use the same haughty tone Keen would have used. The spy felt safe in usurping Keen's identity well as his voice, as he had watched the doctor sink to the bottom of the Mohawk River a week before.

"What are you then?" demanded Egans. Jake's guess about the man's origins was correct - he was an adopted member of the Oneida nation, among whom he had proven his worth and earned the name of a warrior some years before.

"I would not talk to one who pretends to be an Iroquois," said Jake, as savagely as if his mother had been accused of being a whore. The white Indian at first did not react, but his anger quickly grew as Jake began to rattle off a series of curses in pidgin Huron. While these ill-pronounced words represented all he knew of the tongue, still they were of sufficient slander to accomplish Jake's purpose. No matter that the stress and accent were wrong; the hate for the Huron nation's eternal enemies, eaters of people and robbers of skins, was perfectly clear.

"I have spent many weeks among the Huron," Jake told the Englishmen as they strained to hold back the infuriated Egans. He embellished his preposterous tale with a boldness that made it sound plausible. "Working on an alliance. You will help take me to Howe."

"What about him?" said the candle-holder, gesturing toward Hamilton.

"Oh, he's just a convenient rebel," said Jake, walking to him. "We shall take him along for ransom. I doubt he's really a colonel, though," he added. "I should be surprised if he's even a captain."

Hamilton might have objected at this demotion, but he was too busy flying to the ground. This sudden action was dictated by Jake's shout as he upturned the lantern into its bearer's face. In the next instant, he fired the Segallas at the next closest Englishman.

Jake's finger inadvertently nudged both of the gun's small triggers, and thus two poisoned bullets instead of one struck the man in the chest. Cursing, Jake dove at the last Briton, whose pistol discharged as they tumbled backwards.

Egans took a step backward, calmly drawing back the lock on his musket. He caught the bare outline of Hamilton springing to his feet and fired in the young officer's direction, ducking as a projectile flew at him. The missile was a medium-sized rock, which missed Egans's head by a half-foot. Fortunately, his bullet missed Hamilton by the same margin.

Jake and the Englishman fell together into the stream, the Segallas dropping by the wayside. The patriot had just spotted a jagged rock to thrash his man's head against when he felt his leg warm considerably. This sensation was followed by a strong, sharp poke, which the patriot recognized only too well - his enemy was endeavoring to stitch his name on Jake's leg, if not his abdomen, with a small but still considerably sharp knife.

The Englishman's head was thrust three times on the stone, each time harder than before, so that with the third blow his brains burst in a gruesome mess from the skull. Jake jumped to his feet as the man's ghost ran from him.

The patriot had just enough time to duck as the candle-bearer charged straight at him. The maneuver sent the man flying face-first into the stream. It also brought Jake within reach of the

dead man's discarded knife, which he appropriated before wading after his prey.

While his first approach had ended in a comic flip, the Englishman aimed quickly to redeem himself. He had equipped himself with a hatchet, and took two quick swipes at Jake to halt his advance. Knee-deep in water, the two men faced each other in the moonlight oblivious to all else around them.

Hamilton, meanwhile, had managed to take a few strides for his horse, where his pistol was waiting. Egans got there first, shoving him aside and grabbing at the saddle holster for the gun. Though of average height, Hamilton could extend himself when enraged, and he was rarely so hot as he was now. He flew headlong at the man, knocking the gun from his hand just as the lock was pulled back. The woods exploded with the misfired shot, but neither Hamilton nor the adopted Oneida was injured. Egans slipped and the pair rolled in the mud beneath the animal's hooves, the horses pulling and yanking at their tied reins.

Fury aside, Egans was more than a match for Hamilton. But Hamilton was persistent. They continued to grapple together, until the white Oneida spotted the fallen pistol a short distance away. Then began a desperate game of leapfrog, each man trying to reach the weapon first.

Meanwhile, Jake and his opponent thrashed back and forth on the creek bed. Twice the American took a feint with his knife, falling back under the weight of a vicious flail from the Englishman's ax. On his third try, Jake's luck seemed to run out — he slipped on the muck and fell backwards in a tumble. In the next instant, the Englishman fell upon him, hand curled back with the heavy hatchet.

The weapon fell aside harmlessly. Jake had employed a simple ruse to take his enemy off his guard, plunging his knife full into his stomach as he charged. He held the hilt firmly as the man first pushed then pulled, triumphant charge turned to desperate retreat.

On his knees in the water, Jake levered the blade through the man's organs, holding him tight with his left hand. No lover's grasp was as sturdy as this death grip; by the time he let the man collapse backwards into the moonlit water, his soul had long since escaped its earthly bounds.

And now Jake turned his attention to the shore where Hamilton was deep into his own hard struggle. Egans's superior skill and strength were showing; he managed to grab the pistol from the dirt and brought it back in a crash across Hamilton's head.

Jake scooped up his Segallas and spun its barrels to fire, but both bullets whizzed wide of his mark. Oblivious, the white Oneida pulled Hamilton's empty pistol back for a second blow with a hammer when Jake crashed into his back. Knocked to the ground, Egans managed to tumble around and spring to his feet, and Jake found himself staring down the barrel of a gun.

It took a moment for him to realize the weapon had already been fired. By that time, Jake was diving to his right, out of aim. The Indian smiled brightly and leapt to the nearby horse.

Jake took a step to give chase, but Hamilton caught him by the shirttail.

"Our mission is too important to risk following him," he said between winded puffs for a moment. "We've already lost too much time."

* * *

"That's quite a little pistol you have there," said Hamilton when he had caught his breath. "Does it fire four shots?"

"Two, then you have to twist the barrel around to fire two more," said Jake, inspecting the dead men's bodies for papers or other signs of their mission. He found nothing incriminating besides a small collection of coins, which he left in their pockets. "The bullets are small but effective at close range. These were poisoned by an old acquaintance."

The irony encased in the last word escaped Hamilton. The poison had been supplied by one of Jake's most severe enemies — the now-deceased Keen.

"Effective. The men seemed to be farmers."

"That's just their dress. They are British soldiers, except for the one they called Egans."

"Why would a white dress as an Indian?"

"Possibly adopted as a boy. Or simply a renegade. It doesn't make much difference, at the moment."

Under different circumstances, Jake would ride to the nearest militia unit and alert them of Egans's presence. But there was no time to alert anyone or even bury the dead men. He restored his pocket pistol to its hiding place and dragged the bodies to the side of the road. Then he bowed his head.

"Don't tell me you're praying for them," said Hamilton, incredulously. "They're the enemy."

For every hard inch of callus applied to Jake's body by these years of struggle, another part of his inner self had softened. Enemy or not, he could not help but feel remorse at the death of a fellow human being.

Someday, this growing well of sorrow might prevent him from fighting, despite the great justness of his cause. For now, he merely finished his silent memorial and walked to where Hamilton was sitting on his horse. As Egans had made off with the animal Jake had been riding, their remaining horse would have to be pressed into double duty. Fortunately, they were to change mounts only a few miles down the road, and then press on to New Paltz, where another fresh pair awaited.

Jake grabbed hold of Hamilton and hauled himself up behind him. "If you have any influence with this horse," said the spy, squeezing onto the saddle, "ask him to avoid the bumps. My ribs feel as if they've just been broken again."

"I'm afraid we've only just met," said Hamilton, spurring the stallion.

Chapter Four

Wherein, a carriage and traveler stop along the road, with unpleasant consequences.

Helios had not long strung his bow in the eastern sky — nor had the sun been up very long — when a mahogany-paneled carriage happened to pass on the road near where Jake had placed the bodies. As the patriot spy had surmised, the dead men quickly caught the attention of the passers-by, and an order was given from within for the driver to halt.

The large, gilded wheels skidded to a stop in the dirt as the horses were curled back sharply at the bit; though he had held his position as driver and guide only a short while, the Indian whose hands were wrapped around their reins knew his master was best obeyed promptly.

Even so, the door had swung open before the carriage stopped. As if caring little for his fine, bright blue jacket and buckskin breeches, the vehicle's occupant dashed into the swirling dust. His energy belied his age, which was now past fifty. Though he had lately spent considerable time recuperating from a variety of wounds, he sprang forward with great energy to inspect the dead men. Brandishing his walking stick, he waved it over them as if it were a bishop's scepter, imparting some blessing to the already vanquished souls.

But the man had not stopped to administer Christian niceties. He was instead a connoisseur of death, congenially interested in examining the nuances of each individual tragedy, hoping to increase his already considerable stock of knowledge on the subject. For the man who now pushed the bodies back and forth like so many laboratory specimens was no less than Major D. Harland Keen.

The very same man Jake had seen fall over the Cohoes Falls to the bottom of the Mohawk River less than a fortnight before.

* * *

The reader is entitled to some explanation for the shock of that last line, and we shall here deliver it as succinctly as possible, to avoid losing the thread of our present tale.

As a young man, Harland Keen had left his native London to tour the world, gathering the esoteric knowledge that would supplement the skills he learned at Edinburgh and render him one among the most brilliant practitioners of the medical arts in Europe. He had not yet become the evil-hearted assassin who would eventually forget his fraternity's oath against causing harm, though already his character shaded toward Life's darker vales.

It was during a stay in Venice that he came upon an old woman, reputed of Borgia stock, who had gained great fame as a reader of the Egyptian cards. On a cloud-besotted day on an obscure piazza overlooking the Grand Canal, the woman plucked the Magician from the deck and nodded approvingly. But then she found Temperance inverted, and crossed severely by the

Moon. Keen himself shuddered when the next card of her divinatory layout proved to be Death. ~~mounted aboard a white charger with the red rose as his banner.~~

Even a reader unfamiliar with the portents must sense the message the cards foretold. As the reading proceeded in a progressively darker vein, Keen felt his anger grow. He had never been superstitious, yet something in the woman's manner convinced him not only to believe what she said, but to take it as a curse rather than an objective interpretation of Fortune's wheel. He pounded the table and upset the cards, demanding to know what, if any, good news she had for him.

"You shall not die a water death," proclaimed the woman. "You cannot be killed by water."

Suddenly, he was seized by a fit. "Let us see if the same is true of you," he shouted, picking up the woman and throwing her into the canal.

Immediately, he repented, threw off his boots and coat, and dove into the dark water to save her. But despite the long hour he searched in the putrid stream, he could not retrieve her body.

The full explanation for the dark roiling of his soul is perhaps more complicated, involving other choices and decisions as well as personal reverses. But it is nonetheless true that his path took a severe turn that afternoon. The woman died without relatives. Keen found himself not only free but in possession of her considerable texts and potions, and in a few hours gained knowledge his instructors at Edinburgh could not have dreamed in a lifetime.

His career progressed, and at length he returned to London and became doctor to the highest elements of society, including the king himself. Despite his fame, his experiments brought him disrepute. He was accused of heinous crimes before King George III exiled him to America, in exchange for his life. By then, he had joined the king's secret department, sworn to carry out assassinations and other assignments in utter secrecy.

Once a member of the department, there is no resignation short of death. Keen continued to carry out assignments under the direction of General Bacon, who besides being the intelligence chief was the king's personal representative at the head of the clandestine order of assassins.

A few months after his arrival in New York, Keen was given the red-jeweled dagger signifying a mission — and told to kill Jake Gibbs and his friend Claus van Clyne. The doctor was bested by the pair below the great iron chain that spans the river at Peekskill, but he did not despair. Instead, he traced the two men north, and as they worked on a mission among the Mohawk he struck again.

Keen believed van Clyne perished in a burning building, where he had left him tied and gagged. In fact, the Dutchman had escaped through a basement passage used by an earlier occupant as a beer cellar.

Jake, meanwhile, proved harder to find, let alone kill. Keen joined forces with the local Mohawks, and was able to trick the American spy into a meeting just above the Cohoes Falls. The two men fell upon each other and engaged in a death struggle. Keen, aided by drugs that increased his stamina and natural strength, throttled Jake, then had him bound and gagged, placed into a canoe and sent tumbling over the falls.

But the doctor himself became tangled in the tackle trailing from the boat, and plunged over in the torrent. The canoe, loaded with heavy supplies, sank at the foot of the falls — as Jake had seen.

Jake saw this because he had not been fooled by Keen, but rather played the trick back to ensnare the doctor. With the aid of a confederate ... ah, but we do not wish to give the plot away to those who have not read the adventure. Suffice it to say Jake watched Keen fall, and

observed the commotion on the riverbank below as the doctor's Indian allies debated what to do. By the time Jake left to complete his mission, Keen had been underwater ten minutes at least; no one, he thought, could have survived the tumult without drowning.

But he had not counted on the Borgia curse or prediction — whichever it might be. Nor did he know that Keen had found a pocket of air within the overturned canoe. The British assassins reached the shore intact. His Indian cohorts were dumbstruck to see him. As fooled as Keen by Jake's plot, they assured him the white man had died, and after a lengthy search produced a blond scalp to back up their claim.

The hair now rested on the bench of Keen's carriage. He was fully confident that it belonged to his nemesis. But how to explain that one of the dead men bore the unmistakable signs of having been killed by a poison few men besides Keen himself could concoct?

A poison that had been on the bullets when Gibbs stole his Segallas pistol back in the fateful fight before the falls?

There might be many theories. Perhaps one of the Indians had managed to find the gun on the body and then used it here.

But why? The man's rough outer clothes were not exceptional, but he had on a simple undershirt. That and his pocketful of coins suggested he was an English agent, but not a robber or victim.

Very few people in this province would not ransack a body before death. Keen knew full well Gibbs was one. He felt his blood rising against the rebel's sham virtue.

But he was dead, wasn't he?

The doctor saw the death wounds of each man before returning to the carriage, where his Mohawk assistant waited. The man had lived among whites for many years, and had acted as an interpreter during Keen's recent travels.

"Clouded Face," said Keen, addressing him as he stood by the side of the carriage, "come down a moment."

"Doctor, sir?"

"Simply say 'doctor.' I am not a knight, nor do I aspire to be. Knighthood, in fact, is out of the question. Come down here."

There was nothing specifically venomous in Keen's voice, yet the assistant trembled as he put down the reins. He slipped to the ground, then held his hands in a tangled, sweating grip before him, where they would be conveniently situated should he have to beg for mercy.

"Clouded Face, you assured me Jake Gibbs was dead, did you not?"

"Yes, sir, yes, Doctor, yes I did."

"And you did that because of the scalp?"

"I saw him go over the falls myself," said the assistant. "And heard the death wail. I kicked the body with the others on the shore below. You have the hair."

"The ribbon is the same. The color, of course. But tell me . . ." Keen tapped the man's uncovered head with his cane. "Tell me if a scalp could be taken without a man being killed. Or if the wrong scalp could be taken and dressed with another man's ribbon?"

"Impossible."

"Let us try the first, then, and see," said Keen, producing a knife. "Your knot is convenient."

The Indian made the mistake of starting to run. Until that moment, Keen had not completely decided to kill him — he was still largely a stranger to this country, and if Gibbs were truly alive, a guide would prove useful. But he could no more allow an assistant to run from him than

he could let this Gibbs continue to live. He pointed his stick and pressed a hidden button near the end of the shaft. The ornate gold head flew off with a tremendous burst of velocity, striking Clouded Face in the back of the head. The man fell forward immediately, his brain partially shattered.

"I think that I have my answer," said Keen. "I don't suppose it will be of much use to scare you then, but I will do so anyway, for the practice."

Chapter Five

Wherein, more of Mr. Egans's particular history is explored, with unsatisfactory results.

While Jake and Alexander Hamilton continued south, Claus van Clynne headed in the same general direction. But even though he took every shortcut he knew and urged his horse forward with epic entreaties and a few unvarnished threats, his progress was not half as sharp. Indeed, as the sun dawned, it found him just seven or eight miles south of the spot where Jake had left the dead Englishmen, on a dusty but sturdy road whose dips and turns ran somewhat in harmony with the nearby river.

His lack of speed was partly caused by the fact that he had to stop every so often and search for signs of his friends and their direction; their trail was difficult to trace. But a more substantial portion of his problem was due to his horse's slow gait, which was in direct contrast to its advertised attributes. This was especially annoying as van Clynne had paid dearly for the animal. Under ordinary conditions the Dutchman would not have allowed himself to be so ill-used, nor would he have concluded a deal without several minutes', if not hours', worth of haranguing. He did not wish this taken as a sign of weakness, as he explained to the beast in great detail as they rode. Only the prospect of seeing General Washington and presenting his case made him accept the outrage as the price of doing business.

Van Clynne's tongue was no less prolific because he was traveling alone; indeed, he found it easier to give full range to his feelings, as he was not constantly being interrupted by a companion. After he finished complaining of the high price of transportation, his topic naturally moved to the injustice of Jake's flight southward without him. Occasional jabs at the patrons, who unlike him had managed to keep the vast land holdings he was riding through, led to the subject of injustice in general, whereupon the British bore the brunt of the complaint.

He soon turned to the Esopus Wars, the great conflicts of the seventeenth century during which the Dutch had tamed the native inhabitants near Kingston, only to find themselves tamed in turn by the English invaders. Without following the entire path of van Clynne's logic, let us say that it left him in a sympathetic, nay, charitable frame of mind when he came upon a dusty Indian fellow traveler sitting astride a horse on the river road not far from Murderer's Creek.

The traveler was Egans, who had restored both his strength and his anger during the several hours that had passed since encountering Jake and Colonel Hamilton. He had also recovered sufficient composure to cloak his business in the guise of a semi-innocent wanderer.

"Good morrow to you," said van Clynne. "Which way are you going?"

"To the river," replied the man.

"Not far to go, then." Van Clynne stroked his beard a moment and attempted to puzzle out the man's ancestry. Though his skin was white, his wardrobe was just the sort of mixture an Iroquois might consider his Sunday best. Obviously this was a European adopted by natives at some point in his past.

Such men had an unsurpassed ability to slide between the two worlds and were invaluable in business. They were generally easy to enlist, and rarely understood the nuances of European exchange rates. Van Clynne hated to miss an opportunity that might lead to future profits. B

his beard scratching brought him back to his true priority: finding Jake and winning an appointment with Washington.

"I wonder if you have seen a man about six foot tall and heading south on horseback," he asked the stranger. "An early riser two towns ago thought he caught sight of him hurrying the way. He has blond hair, a fine Continental uniform, and a habit for getting involved in difficult situations, from which I inevitably rescue him."

"I have seen no one," claimed Egans.

"He would have been in the company of another man, a Colonel Hamilton. My friend's name is Gibbs — a remarkable individual. I have no doubt posterity will learn a great deal about him, though the edges of his story will have to be rounded for easier consumption. Modesty prevents me from describing my role in his adventures, but it has been considerable. The times I have plucked him from Hades' vestibule are too many to count."

"You look familiar," suggested the white Indian. "What is your name?"

"Claus van Clynne, at your service," said the Dutchman. "You, too, seem familiar," he said. Now that he'd had a chance to think about it, he placed the man's signs and jewelry definitely among the Oneida. There were not many white men who would wear the simple stone and symbolic tree, and fewer still who would have been accorded the honor of the eagle feather tied to his scalp lock. He searched the cubbyholes of his brain and retrieved the name: "You are Egans, are you not?"

Despite a secret hatred of the Dutch — van Clynne's ancestry was easily deduced from his clothes, to say nothing of his name and accent — Egans's stoic mask dropped for a moment. "How do you know me?"

"You are quite famous," said the Dutchman. He slipped off his horse and approached Egans, holding out his hand. "You were a white child kidnapped by the Mohawk, and then adopted by the Oneida during the troubles thirty years ago. Your white family came from land not far from mine, and your adopted uncle and I have made one or two suitable arrangements regarding furs and corn in the past, before the war. I believe you were baptized Christof—"

"My Seneca name is *Gawasowaneh*."

"Yes, yes, Big Snowsnake," said van Clynne, waving his hand as if he knew a thousand men with the Indian name. The Oneida were a touchy lot, and he did not want to provoke even an adopted son. Van Clynne was temporarily weaponless, his customary tomahawks left behind in Albany and his unloaded pistol resting comfortably in his saddlebag. "You have earned it for your role in the ceremonies."

"I have earned it for my role as a warrior," said the Oneida. Indeed, his ceremonial name could not be uttered except at the council fire.

"Just so, sir, just so. Would you prefer I use *Gawasowaneh* in addressing you? I myself am known by many Indian names." Van Clynne did not add that most of these might be translated loosely as "Big Tummy and Longer Tongue."

"Call me what you will."

"Thank you, sir, thank you. I know your entire life story; I congratulate you on your endurance. What brings you here?"

Egans did not answer his question, but van Clynne was undaunted.

"One of your native uncles and I had quite an arrangement three summers ago," continued the Dutchman, the memory of the profitable deal warming his heart. "I delivered certain blankets to the great chief Corn Planter, in exchange for wood carted down the mountain path

An unusual arrangement, but favorable to both sides. With your connections to the Iroquo Federation—strong friends of mine, I might add. I have recently spent much time among the Mohawk, turning them from the English path into more profitable areas. Perhaps we have mutual acquaintances?"

"As it happens, I am to meet my uncle at the river," suggested Egans. "Ride with me."

Van Clynne wondered what a seventy-year-old Indian whose home was far to the northwest would be doing near the river. A belated if sharp sense of danger hastened him to postpone further talk of a business arrangement indefinitely.

"I have urgent business further south," he noted, bowing and then reaching to pull himself back onto his horse. "Perhaps in a few days we can meet in some local inn."

"I think you will come with me now," said Egans, pushing aside his coat to reveal a secret pistol.

"I should think it cold without a shirt beneath your coat. There is a fine tailor not too far from here. Perhaps if we took that road, I might be able to shave a few pence from the price."

"I think not," said Egans. "We are almost at the river now."

"Does your uncle know that you have allied yourself with the English?" asked van Clynne, steadying his horse as it climbed down the obscure, rock-strewn path. They were far from the main roads, approaching a wooded bluff overlooking the Hudson. The water was so close that a Dutchman could catch glimpses of the gently rocking waves through the trees. "I would think he would have something to say about it."

"I have not seen my uncle in many years, fat man."

"I would think, sir, that personal insults will not forward our relationship in the least. But let me mention that your uncle still grieves your family's loss."

"No other man has lost two fathers," said Egans suddenly, turning on van Clynne. "And now I suggest that you keep silent, or I will fill your mouth with lead."

"As you wish, sir," said van Clynne. "Though, I would think you much wiser to align yourself with the patriotic cause, as it is one that argues for freedom and should be more compatible with the native lifestyle. These English —"

"Enough! It was a Dutchman who killed my second father. Do not tempt me to take revenge."

With great effort and a strong glance at the pistol lodged against his nose, van Clynne stopped his tongue. Egans's red father had in fact been killed by a German — the story was well known in the inns near the family's old homestead—but his friend was not in a mood to be corrected.

Egans was a wily fellow, and he made sure to stay several yards behind van Clynne. He had also taken the precaution of removing the squire's pistol from his saddlebag, as well as confiscating his four purses. The pistol was of little account, as it hadn't been loaded, but the purses had a certain sentimental value — the Dutchman nearly cried over the bills they contained. True, he had taken the precaution of leaving nearly all his coins with Sarah Thomas's father for safe keeping before attending the ball, and had a good supply of New York pounds and a few British notes besides hidden in his heel. But this he considered emergency money and of dubious authenticity besides.

What van Clynne really wished for was a tomahawk. He was well known as one of the best ax chuckers in the province; were one in his hand right now, Egans would be wearing his hair much differently.

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