

The Tory's Daughter

Angela K. Couch

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Dedication

To all my readers and their love for this series.
Thank you!

Books by Angela K. Couch

The Scarlet Coat

The Patriot and the Rebel

The Tory's Daughter

The Return of the King's Ranger (coming soon)

What People are Saying

I felt as though I was in this small family, in this big war. I truly have a loss for words to describe how this book read for me. All I can say is that anyone can pick this book up, and they will fall in love with the book. They will want more. I want more. ~ Bibliophile Reviews for *The Scarlet Coat*

The Scarlet Coat...is captivating in the dilemmas it presents, in the characters it introduces, and in the romance it embraces. The history of the era becomes personal and dimensional, and there are moments so wrought with tension that it takes your breath away. ~ Reading is my Superpower reviews

1

May 1781, Mohawk Valley

Nine months...and he still felt like a rotted-out stump. Hollow. Joseph Garnet lowered to his knees on the soft soil and glanced at his baby girl, nine months old today. She sat at the foot of her mother's grave, gnawing on the end of the twig her brother had just handed her.

James, now two-and-a-half, searched the immediate area for more treasure. A pebble came to hand, and he brought it to Joseph. "Papa, look."

Joseph took the smooth rock and placed it near the roughhewn cross bearing Fannie's name. "Should we leave it here for Mama?"

Little James, named for his grandfather, nodded. "Want Mama."

"You and me both." Joseph filled his lungs. The air was laden with the scent of moisture and earth. Spring. The season had done little to dull the loneliness winter had festered within him. He was busy with planting, but that also meant he had less time with his children.

"Joseph!"

He sighed. Rachel had probably forgotten something for the children. His sister worried too much. Did she not trust him to manage his own young'uns for a couple of hours? That was all he'd asked for this Sabbath day.

His name echoed closer now.

Joseph stood and plucked Martha and her twig from the ground. He didn't need Rachel to find him here. Again. Judging from her frantic tone, he'd best hurry. A child in each arm, Joseph breached the edge of the grove to see Rachel rushing across the freshly turned earth of the garden, skirt pulled almost to her knees.

"The raiders. They're back."

Joseph faltered. "What? Where?"

Rachel pushed strands of blonde away from the perspiration moist on her face. "Down river, maybe ten miles. A boy came riding. They need help."

"The Frankfort area? Where's Andrew?"

She motioned behind to where her husband stepped from the small barn—hardly more than a shed—their own little girl in his arms. "You'll meet the others at the old fort." Rachel reached for the baby and James. "I'll stay here with the children."

Thoughts taking flight with his pulse, Joseph managed a nod before sprinting past her and shoving into the cabin. He grabbed the musket from over the door, and then snatched up his pistol and powder horn. His hunting knife he slid into his boot. Would there ever be an end to this fighting—this war? Joseph's stomach already turned. Hadn't there been enough bloodshed? Years ago he'd learned to despise this waste of life—even before a British officer became his closest friend...and family.

Andrew Wyndham met him outside with the horses. "Otetiani's raiders by the sounds of it." The rich tones of England still rolled from Andrew's tongue despite his four years' residence in the Mohawk valley. He handed Joseph the reins to Hunter, and then swung aboard the younger horse. "They rode from the lakes

and have been killing and burning their route southward."

Joseph mounted and clenched the reins.

The locals had come to call the Mohawk chief Bloody Bear for the death his warriors brought to the valley. The thought of the raiders coming anywhere near his home and family wrung a cold sweat from the back of Joseph's neck. Last summer had become so dangerous, they'd set up makeshift shelters in Old Fort Schuyler, only venturing out during the day to work and harvest the land.

Winter's reprieve was at an end.

With Joseph's baby daughter in one arm and little James holding his younger cousin's hand, Rachel shooed the children into the cabin, before she glanced back. Her free hand rose, but didn't quite manage a wave. Rachel's brown eyes mirrored Joseph's fear...and his weakness, exposing him.

He spurred Hunter toward the road.

"Please be careful. Come back to me. Both of you."

"We shall," Andrew said, and then clicked his tongue.

Joseph beat him to the road, having saved himself from answering. He would not make promises that couldn't be kept, and he'd learned all too well the extent of control he held over death.

The ex-British captain brought the sorrel gelding alongside Joseph's stallion and kept pace with the dust-churning gallop. He looked at Joseph with a gaze far too searching.

Joseph ignored him and encouraged Hunter's gait. Lives and farms were at stake—no time to wonder what went through the other man's head.

Minutes later the trail broke past the thick spring

foliage and the log walls of the old fort, a remnant of the French and Indian War, rose from the grassy meadow. The rush of the nearby river did nothing to drown out the raised voices of the seven men gathered near the gate.

"What's going on?" Joseph reined Hunter into the center of the foray.

"The raid is all the way down near Frankfort," Cyrus Acker grumbled. His grown son was also present, but, as always, remained in his father's shadow. "By the time we ride that far, Bloody Bear and his renegades will likely be gone. Meanwhile, we leave our families unprotected and our fields unplanted. How do we know he's not riding under Brant again?"

Even Brant's name was enough to chill Joseph's blood. No other Iroquois leader had caused so much devastation in the area, often commanding many of the other chiefs, and their warriors, against the Patriots who remained in the valley.

A couple of the men mumbled their agreement with Acker.

Others made known their opposition.

Benjamin Reid, Joseph's father-in-law, shook a finger at them. "And what of those families down river? Do we simply ignore them until the raiders reach our own settlement?" His hand rested on his cane which hung alongside his musket.

Voices again rose, and Joseph jerked Hunter's head, spinning him away.

"Where are you going, Garnet?"

"To fight some Iroquois." He kicked the animal to a run. He'd fight whoever came against this valley until there was no one left to fight. Talk wouldn't save lives. Whoever felt the same way would follow

or...he'd worry about that later.

By the time he slowed to ford a stream, Andrew was again at his side. The others followed behind. Frigid water splashed as they trotted through the knee-high current.

Andrew's head dipped forward.

"Praying for us?"

A moment passed before he glanced up, his green eyes sincere. "Always."

"Good." Joseph redirected his focus to the trail ahead. *We definitely could use Thy help, Lord.* Whether or not God would hear him remained in question. He believed in God, tried to do what was expected of him as a Christian, but had yet to see the hand of God work directly in his life for good. Not that he'd noticed, anyway. God hadn't stepped in to stop the life bleeding from his wife. Hadn't stopped Pa from being hacked to death by a tomahawk at Oriskany. Or Mama from failing with illness.

But Joseph had seen a British captain survive a devastating blow to the head, two musket balls, and dangling from a noose. Andrew Wyndham had not only survived, but had married and now had a daughter with the woman he loved so well. Was it his never-faltering faith that made the difference...or merely luck?

The path wound not far from the river, following the current through the valley. The chilliness of morning gave way to the warmth of the sun rising higher overhead.

If only he could blame the sun for the moisture on his forehead and soaking his shirt, but even the exertion of racing his horse toward a skirmish with the enemy was not wholly responsible. The real reason he

hadn't been able to stop and argue with the men who wanted to remain behind—the one hundred of his own excuses not to go.

The popping of distant musket fire rose above the rush of the river and the pounding of hooves. Only a matter of time before one of those balls, an arrow, or a tomahawk found its mark. How many times could a man ride into battle before death became inevitable? What would become of his family then?

A pillar of smoke billowed over the tops of towering spruce in the east, flanked by two more.

The band slowed, and men stuffed powder and musket balls down the long barrels of their muskets. Others loaded their pistols.

Joseph hitched his musket under his arm and glanced at Andrew who gave a nod.

They again sped their horses forward.

A gust of smoke carrying the stench of burnt animal carcasses assaulted the riders just before the woods gave way to the soft earth of freshly plowed fields. The Weber homestead. Joseph directed Hunter over the straight furrows toward a barn ensconced in flame. They were still three or four miles from Frankfort—six or seven from home. Only one wall of the cabin fed a blaze. The raiders could not have gone far. If they didn't lurk somewhere beyond the wall of new foliage.

"Whoa, boy." Joseph swung from his saddle and searched the surrounding woods for any sign of motion. He couldn't shoot an old tree at ten paces from off his horse.

"It is too quiet," Andrew said from beside him.

Other than the growing roar of the fire, Joseph had to agree. All the more reason for caution.

"Look there."

He followed the motion to large mounds laid out between the barn and cabin.

A cow, her coat a light brown except for the stream of red from the arrow protruding from her neck, and two pigs lay dead. No horses in sight. Either Mr. Weber had fled with them or they'd been stolen. The answer came as a lower, longer form came into view. The corpse of a man.

"Where is the local militia?" Benjamin had also dismounted, his cane in full use as he neared. "Where are the men?"

Not the question tormenting Joseph as he surveyed the area. "What about Mrs. Weber and the young'uns?"

They'd had three or four children. Had others come in time and pursued the raiders? Or maybe the men of the area were too busy trying to save their own farms and families. How far had the raiders already come today? How much farther would their destruction reach?

Thoughts of Rachel alone with the children sped Joseph past the blond-haired corpse to the cabin door, still untouched by fire. He yanked up on the latch and shoved his shoulder against the dense oak. Not a budge. The inside bar remained in place.

Someone was still in there.

"Mrs. Weber?" Joseph plowed his hip into the door. Pain jolted through him. "Are you there?" The solid planks only vibrated. Again and again. Even Andrew's added force did little. And the single window was much too small. But if they didn't get them out in time...

"Lord, help us," Andrew prayed.

With one motion, they slammed against the door.

Something snapped.

The sensation of falling ended abruptly, jarring the air from Joseph's lungs. The packed dirt floor felt almost as solid as the door. Not giving himself time to recover, he rolled to his feet. His arms rose, but did little to shield his head and neck from a blast of heat. His cocked hat, with its brim stitched up on three sides, was equally useless against the scorching air pressed against him. Joseph's eyes watered from smoke as he scanned the small room.

The woman huddled with two boys and a young girl beside the bed. They peeked out from under a tent of blankets.

Joseph grabbed for their arms. "Get out of here."

The mother struggled free of his grasp. "*Nein*. Not gone." Her eyes appeared wild in the light of the flames behind Joseph.

Andrew ripped one of the boys from her. "We have to—"

A shout from outside spun Joseph back to the door.

Guns discharged.

The section of the blazing roof over the table crashed down. Sparks flew.

Joseph coughed, and he lunged for the older boy. "Get them out!" he yelled over the roar in his ears. Better to face the possibility of an arrow, than the surety of being roasted alive. A gulp of air did little to dissipate the fog hovering over Joseph's brain. He was only partly aware of the woman and children being rushed around the cabin and out of sight.

Most of the men crouched wherever they could find cover and fired into the nearest stand of trees.

Joseph hit the ground and peered past the branches, searching the shadows.

Nothing.

"Let's not let them get away from us," someone cried, and men rushed their horses.

Joseph followed, but wished he knew what they were riding into. Had the raiders been watching the burning cabin for any survivors? He'd seen enough since the beginning of the war to know they would not have hesitated to kill even the youngest child, but would have no desire for an actual battle. They only wanted to terrorize. To murder.

With Benjamin and Andrew still behind with the woman and her young'uns, Joseph brought up the rear as the band charged into the forest. They met dense brush, fallen logs, and the ground heavy with deadfall and debris. Joseph broke his speed to safely navigate the maze. He checked his musket. Maybe this time they would catch up with the Tory raiders and make them answer for their crimes.

~*~

Lungs burning from deprivation, Hannah Cunningham watched from the shaded gap under a half-rotted log. Tiny red ants tickled her arm, but she didn't dare move even enough to bush them away. Not until the band of farmers were far from her hiding spot. If they found her...

Hannah gulped back the terror and buried her face in her cloth sleeve that already smelled of earth and decay. She should have listened to Otetiani and stayed far from the raiding. Or perhaps she should have never disguised herself as one of the raiders to follow them

back to the valley. But Otetiani, the son of her mother's brother, had refused to help her. She'd had no other option.

Still, she should have kept her distance—ignored the smoke rising like beacons, and put aside her curiosity for once. It wouldn't be long before her mare was found by the farmers, and then how would she find her brothers? Or survive this wilderness, miles and miles from her home among her mother's people? Any soul she could call a friend had long ago been driven from the Mohawk Valley as her own family had. She could expect no help, or even mercy, from those who called themselves *patriots*.

They rushed past, muskets raised and fury on their faces. For the anger, she could not fault them. She knew it well enough—had felt the same when her family's cabin had been put to the torch. And so many times since.

The farmers disappeared through the woods, and Hannah wriggled out of her hiding spot. She brushed the leaves and dirt from the shirt she had traded her feminine tunic for. Though designed for a man and hanging large over her frame, the belt she'd furnished out of a strip of rawhide kept it from encumbering her movements. She kept low and followed the direction the patriots had gone. Hopefully they'd somehow overlook the small mare.

The hush of the forest was cut by the familiar thunk of an arrow biting wood. And then a cry and the booming of guns.

She dropped and scrambled against the wide trunk of the nearest spruce. Knees hugged to her chest, she listened. Men yelled. Branches snapped. Guns fired. Had Otetiani and his warriors returned on her

account? She had not stayed put as he'd ordered her to after discovering her identity. If men died, it would be her fault. Hannah crept from her shelter. She needed to know what was happening, but every twig that snapped under her moccasins, every brush of leaves against her leggings, sounded in her ears. Her heart pounded.

Most of the farmers had dismounted and ducked down wherever they could find cover, but it already looked as though the warriors were withdrawing. The Patriots had likely taken them by surprise.

A low nicker startled Hannah, almost dropping her on her back end, and she twisted to a tall chestnut not ten feet away. His large brown eyes had a gentleness to them, and a familiarity. She knew this horse, had always admired him. James Garnet's stallion.

Her passage away from here.

Without pause, Hannah sneaked to Hunter and unwrapped his reins from a branch. "Easy. You remember me, don't you?" Her fingers trembled as they slid down his thick neck to the saddle. After slipping her toes into the stirrup, one smooth motion lifted her onto the animal. She hugged his neck and nudged him away from the skirmish. One step...then two. Almost safe.

2

The musket bucked against Joseph's shoulder. A cloud of smoke billowed back on him. He dropped behind the log and scrambled for more powder and another ball. The ramrod made smooth time down the shaft and out again, but before he could slip it back into place, a motion drew his gaze to where he'd tied Hunter. Reins hooped the animal's neck and turned him away. A buckskin clad leg hung from the saddle—almost the only thing visible of the Mohawk brave astride.

"No." Joseph almost jumped to his feet to pursue the renegade, but that would make him an easy target for the man's friends. And he couldn't shoot without risking the horse. He dropped his musket and scrambled along the length of the log. Under cover of the new foliage that surrounded him, he raced to intercept Hunter and the brave.

The man hunched low over the saddle was in the motion of kicking Hunter into a run when Joseph caught up, coming at them from the side. He gripped the shirt hanging around the man's middle and yanked him off the animal's high back.

The brave proved quite a bit lighter than anticipated, and his body flew against Joseph's, slamming him to the ground. With a twist, Joseph threw him off and aimed a fist into his face. The warrior, not more than a youth, reeled back, and

Joseph rotated over him to pin him to the ground.

Like a bobcat, claws slashed across Joseph's face.

He caught the offending hand, while his own dropped to search the boy's person for a knife or other weapon. The waist was surprisingly slim compared to the hips and... A decidedly feminine gasp jerked Joseph's hands back.

A mistake.

The brave's knuckles wiped across his face, followed by a sharp knee to the ribs. Joseph grunted and pushed himself away. Worse mistake—the equivalent of holding a cougar by the tail, leaving all other appendages free to attack. All he could do was fall on his back in an attempt to fend *her* off. The little Iroquois warrior was female!

How was he supposed to fight a girl? He almost felt bad for punching her, and probably would if she wasn't determined to return the favor a hundred fold.

Abruptly her attack broke off. She grabbed toward the knife in his boot.

"No, you don't." Joseph tried to jerk his leg away, but only succeeded in helping her draw the blade. He lurched backward just as a shot rang from only yards away.

The girl spun and fell in the same motion.

"Joseph?"

Even Andrew's call couldn't pull his gaze from the girl as she pawed at her sleeve and the growing crimson stain. Her hand shook as it hovered over the wound, never actually touching it. High pitched squeaks, like an unhappy mouse, were the only sound she made despite the obvious pain. The problem was, she didn't do anything to hinder the bleeding, and it wouldn't stop on its own.