



PENELOPE
MARZEC

Patriot's
COURAGE

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Penelope Marzec

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Patriot's Courage
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Patriot's Heart

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Hoping for Joy

The Cowboy's Miracle

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Ohio Territory
August 20, 1794

Ryan McGowan's blood ran hotter than the summer morning. He swiped his hand along his woolen jacket to remove the dampness so he would not lose his grip on the stock of the rifle. He ground his teeth together.

Vengeance is the Lord's. A long-ago sermon intruded upon his anger, but he blocked the thought immediately. He narrowed his eyes and stared into the forest, watching for any movement.

Rivulets of sweat poured down his face. The early rain failed to lessen the temperature in the air, but Ryan and his fellow soldiers were forbidden to remove any part of their fine uniforms despite the heat. He stood rigid, but mentally, he reviewed each of the grueling, relentless drills drummed into the troops by General Wayne until every soldier knew as much as his superior. All were aware of the stakes in this fight. They must be victorious.

Ryan's nerves tightened, ready to snap. On duty as a sentinel last night, he almost stumbled when the general rode by on his horse.

“Get some rest, Sergeant. I’ll take your watch.” The general did things like that. He’d even slept on the ground with the troops a time or two, though he was often plagued by gout.

Still, when Ryan went back to his tent, he couldn’t rest. Losing his twin brother, Lewis, had been like losing half of himself. He smiled with a sense of malicious satisfaction as his plans to retaliate swirled in his mind.

“An eye for an eye,” he muttered beneath his breath. That was Scripture, too. He puffed out his chest, justified in his revenge. When he and Lewis heard about the available land in the Ohio Territory, they’d left their home and family in New Jersey and set out on their quest. Barely eighteen years of age, they’d claimed forty fertile acres and built a rustic cabin. They bartered with neighbors until their homestead boasted two pigs, one rooster, and a varying population of chickens.

Despite their best efforts, the crops did poorly, so when Ryan was offered a job as the local schoolmaster for the winter, he’d taken it. While he was at the schoolhouse one day, a band of Indians raided the farm. They burned everything to the ground, took the livestock, and murdered Lewis. Ryan’s grief grew so bitter he could think of nothing but killing every Indian in the territory.

He glanced at his men along the line. Their fierce, determined faces filled him with pride. He trusted them all, with the exception of Duncan, on his right. Duncan stood a few inches taller and had the build of an ox, but he bristled at orders. Even more disturbing, he caught songbirds and crushed them to death in his hand. His sadistic streak sickened Ryan.

Drawing in a calming breath, he told himself Duncan could swat an Indian out of the way with a sweep of his iron fist. When the Indians saw Private Duncan, they would turn and run. Today, the Indians would be sorry for killing his brother. Today they would suffer.

Drums and bugles shattered his thoughts. The Kentucky militia advanced first into an area of felled trees, blown over by a fierce storm in the past. There, the Indians waited in ambush. The vanguard faced a hail of bullets from Indian rifles and when they fell back, the Indians came after them.

Astride his horse, General Wayne appeared as fierce as a lion with his wild, powdered hair. He ordered Ryan's unit to come around at the foe on the left flank. The men advanced with bayonets fixed. The Indians flinched when they saw the sharp blades of gleaming steel. Without time to reload, they turned and ran. Ryan and his men aimed at the backs of the fleeing savages. On Ryan's command, the men fired. Despite the smoke, he thought a few Indians went down.

"That's for Lewis," Ryan shouted. There was no time to gloat for he and his fellow soldiers were ordered to pursue their enemies. In leaping over the trees, Ryan came upon one of the savages undoubtedly felled by the volley he ordered. The Indian lay in a direct line of sight from the place where his men stood and fired. The sight of the massive, bloody wound and mangled flesh sent a sick swirl through Ryan's stomach. The awful realization of the carnage immobilized him for a moment. He and his men slaughtered a man, not a chicken or a pig. *Thou shalt not kill.* It was a Commandment.

That man was his enemy. A savage murdered Lewis but this particular Indian might not be the culprit. He may have been innocent.

Ryan's mind whirled with guilt. He clamped his lips together and feared he would retch.

"Sergeant McGowan!" one of his men shouted. "Over here!"

He shoved the horror to the back of his mind. His men needed him. He ran forward. In leaping over one of the huge timbers in his path, his foot caught in a root. He fell forward and his chest collided with the trunk of one massive fallen tree. A sharp, excruciating pain went through him, and he collapsed upon the ground unable to take a deep breath. Other soldiers leaped over him as the relentless drumbeats urged them onward to defeat their enemies.

~*~

Màxkchulëns, also known as Red Bird, stopped grinding corn and listened. Her proud husband, Running Beaver, felt confident the white men would be defeated as they had been three years ago. But now an eerie silence hovered in the air as the distant drums ceased pounding. The repeated sounds of gunfire ended. The birds resumed their songs. The river gurgled along the banks.

"It is too soon." Her aunt frowned.

Fear wound through Red Bird. Last night's strange dream seemed to be a warning, frightening her so badly she mentioned it to no one.

The other women quit working and gathered together on the outskirts of their village. They waited, for the calm did not bode well. Red Bird took out a

smooth, round white stone from her medicine bag and rubbed it. Running Beaver gave it to her when they were both children. He was a strong, brave warrior who did not fear death. Yet, Red Bird trembled. She loved Running Beaver. When she first came to the village, he coaxed her out of her fright. His gentle, kind manner and patience eased her misery.

Sudden shouts alerted her and the other women as the young boys returned with news of the rout and the failure of their British allies to open their fort and give aid in the fight. The boys claimed many warriors lay dead on the field of battle.

Màxkchulëns, haunted by her alarming dream, started toward the battlefield. Other women followed.

Her aunt tried to drag her back. "There may still be white soldiers there. It is dangerous!"

Red Bird refused to listen. She shoved her aunt's arm away and walked onward until she came upon the appalling site of the brief battle. Dead and dying men with ghastly wounds littered the area. Blood coated the earth. The sound of wailing women rent the air with grief. The sharp smell of gunpowder mingled with a putrid stench in the heavy, humid air. The odor turned her stomach.

Red Bird drew a cloth over her nose. Her heart thundered as she stared into the faces of dead men, hoping to find the one that mattered most to her.

The yellow hide soldiers went about the task of picking up their wounded and dying. She stayed as far away from them as she could, but the task proved difficult for huge fallen trees covered the area and men lay in between the many trunks.

After some time, she found Running Beaver. She reeled at the sight of the grievous wound in his back.

His face lay in the dirt while his body pressed against a huge, felled tree. She knelt beside him and reached for his still, cold hand. Last night in her dream, he walked along the white road of stars on his journey to the village of the Great Creator, *Kishelemukong*.

She could not tell her husband of her fears, for he would have scoffed at her. No brave warrior would refuse to fight in a battle simply because his woman asked him to do so.

She glanced around, uneasy. In her nightmare, another warrior, Dancing Squirrel, pulled her from Running Beaver. She'd woken from her dream shaking and in a cold sweat. She never trusted Dancing Squirrel. Once, he wanted her to be his woman, but she refused him as was her right. Since that time, he sneered at her in a threatening manner whenever he saw her.

Now that Running Beaver was dead, would Dancing Squirrel ask to have her as his woman once more? Tears gathered in her eyes, but she tried to hold them back as she caressed her husband's shoulder and sang the death song to him. Sorrow welled up and choked her words. Her shattered hopes raked her soul until it was raw.

A soldier approached. He laughed at her. She scooted back against the bark of the fallen tree. The tall man stood over her. His hulking, muscular build rivaled that of any of the strongest warriors. He muttered something, reached down, grabbed her arm, hauled her upright, and squeezed her bosom.

Red Bird screamed and struggled to get away, but his strength overwhelmed her. He pulled at her braided hair and gave a raucous laugh.

She tugged the braid out of his hand.

Another soldier, carrying his bright, woolen jacket on his arm hobbled toward them. With his face creased in pain, he leaned on a sturdy branch. He spoke to Måxchulëns's abuser in a low tone layered with harsh severity. The abuser stopped fondling her but continued to hold her arm so tightly she thought he would break it. She screamed until her voice grew hoarse. The man leaning on the branch spat out sharp words, winced, and turned ashen. Other men hurried to drag her abuser away.

The man with the sturdy branch offered his jacket to her. She did not want it, but she assumed wearing it would mark her in some way as protected. She accepted the woolen coat.

As she donned the garment, another wave of fear and grief consumed her. She collapsed over her husband's body and wept, well aware she remained at the mercy of the horrible soldiers. She didn't care. Running Beaver no longer breathed and would no longer smile. He must leave her behind as he went on his long journey to *Kishelemukong's* village. Mired in her misery, she wished for death to come soon. Perhaps one of the soldiers who killed Running Beaver would kill her as well.

After a while, she lay exhausted and spent from her weeping. The flow of tears ended, leaving her hollow. The rumble of a heavy wagon sounded nearby. She glanced to the side and watched as the yellow hides lifted their wounded into the back of the vehicle. The man who gave her his jacket spoke to several other soldiers. He plainly suffered from the effort of speaking but the other men scurried about in obvious obedience. She wondered if he was a chief.

Two soldiers lifted her off her feet. Red Bird did

not struggle or scream this time. If they were to kill her, she would die as courageous a death as any warrior. The men placed her in the wagon beside the man who must be their chief. He drew her hand in his. She did not pull hers away. He spoke to her in a whisper, but she did not understand his language. Perhaps he was telling her how she was to die.

The other women of her tribe stood with their heads bowed as the wagon lumbered by them. None of them came to her aid, and she did not expect them to put themselves in danger. A brief swell of panic nearly consumed her, but she fought against it. She would be strong, she would be courageous, and she would soon join her husband on the white road of stars.

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Waves of pain radiated through Ryan as he strove to keep his breathing shallow. Yet, whenever he thought of Private Duncan and the way he mauled the woman at his side, he fumed, and his pain increased. He would report the miscreant to his superiors.

He wondered about her relationship with the man she grieved over. The woman was clearly not an Indian with her red hair and blue eyes. The tribe must have raised her. The Indians adopted many whites. One of the best scouts, William Wells, was the son-in-law of Little Turtle. The Indians trained their adopted children in all their ways.

The woman's lamentation tugged at Ryan's emotions. He was responsible for that Indian's death. He ordered his men to fire, which is what he planned to do. That is what he was supposed to do. It was what he longed to do. Indians murdered Lewis. It was only

right to pay them back. Or was it?

An eye for an eye?

Combined with the shooting pains in his midsection, he now doubted the wisdom of his angry plot to kill every savage in the territory. Especially since he could barely take a breath.

He suffered with every rut in the trail as all the wounded were taken to Fort Deposit. One of the lieutenants placed the red-haired woman with Miss Chance, the camp's laundress, whose hut stood against the stockade—a safe, secure location.

Ryan wondered if the Indian killed by the volley he'd ordered was the woman's adopted brother. Witnessing her grief brought back the memory of the horrible shock he'd suffered when he found Lewis's body. The tragedy continued to haunt him.

Still, he considered death an easier event in comparison to his current agony. Every simple movement stabbed him like a knife. A ball from an Indian's musket right through his chest would have been preferable. He spent the rest of the day and the entire night in misery.

The following morning, a doctor determined his pain and difficulty breathing stemmed from a few broken ribs. He gritted his teeth as his chest was bound with strips of cloth. In all his days, he never suffered such wretchedness. He longed to take in a deep draught of air, but the torment that followed would incapacitate him. A slight cough or a hiccup sent him into spasms of agony.

"Will I be dismissed?" he asked the doctor. He doubted he could hold up a rifle, and if he could, the recoil would put him in excruciating pain.

The doctor gave a noncommittal shrug of his

shoulder. "The Indians won't be attacking any time soon. They counted on their British allies to harbor them safely in Fort Miami, but the British wouldn't open the gates."

Ryan was annoyed at missing the glorious rout of the Indians, but worse than that was his embarrassment at his own clumsiness. He would be a hero if the enemy shot or stabbed him. Yet, he found some comfort in saving that woman from Private Duncan's clutches. He made sure to report the incident to his superiors. Duncan deserved to be upbraided.

The doctor fastened the end of the bandages. "There. That should keep the bones from shifting around."

"This is debilitating." Ryan doubted the efficacy of the doctor's treatment.

The doctor handed him a brown bottle. "If the pain keeps you from sleeping, use this sparingly. Don't exert yourself. The bones take time to knit together."

Ryan glared at the brown bottle. His cousin's husband, a surgeon, lectured him on the dangers of laudanum. There were soldiers who used it and kept wanting more and more of it until they were hollow-eyed and hopeless.

Nevertheless, that night he was desperate enough to try it, for he suffered greatly and could get no rest. His ribs ached, and he resorted to a small dram of the powerful soporific. He nodded off afterwards, but his dreams grew into a grotesque nightmare in which Lewis led him farther and farther into the forest where Indian drumbeats swelled in intensity. Heedless of the overwhelming sound surrounding them, Lewis ran ahead. Ryan called after him insisting they must get away, but Lewis disappeared into the dense woods.

Ryan discovered he was lost even though he'd learned at a young age how to track in the woods.

The woman he'd saved from Duncan and had brought back to the fort appeared in the dream. She paddled a canoe in the river and called to him. She told him to come with her and she would save him, but as he rushed toward the river, lightning flashed all around him, blinding him for a moment. When the lightning ended, he no longer saw the woman or her canoe. She vanished as mysteriously as a ghost did.

Ryan woke to the crashing sounds of a fierce thunderstorm. Miserable, drenched in a cold sweat, and lightheaded, he was sick to his stomach. Had the laudanum caused his distress or was it his own tortured mind?

He blamed his conscience. The guilt for the death of the distraught woman's brother or friend lay on his shoulders. He'd ordered his men to fire, and one of the bullets from the volley killed the Indian. While the man was a savage, the woman remained devastated by the loss. Well acquainted with grief, Ryan regretted his part in causing it.

Thou shalt not kill. Murder went against every Christian principle. But he was a soldier, and there were times when men were compelled to fight. His father and his uncle fought in the War for Independence. His cousin's husband, the good reverend, fought as a British soldier in that war as well until he was wounded. However, the War for Independence focused on different ideologies. The absolute tyranny of the king in his faraway land caused many injustices, subjugating the colonists and fomenting their revolt.

In this war, the settlers wanted more land, but the

Indians occupied it. They fought to keep their territory, land they lived on long before the white men came along. Soil they tilled for generations, which they claimed belonged to them. Crazy by Lewis's death, Ryan joined in the cause to annihilate them. If he had not been filled with rage, would he have signed on to slaughter the natives?

Love your enemies... The verse filled his mind. How could he love those who tortured his twin? He sighed. The Holy Bible devoted many passages to war. Perhaps he needed to study them.

Nevertheless, he believed taking the woman back to the fort was the right thing to do. She should be with her own kind.

Two weeks went by, and the stabbing ache in his ribs rendered him useless, but he refused to take any more laudanum. Often, he dulled the pain with whiskey. He discovered he slept better if he did so sitting up. One of his fellow sergeants confiscated an extra feather tick and formed a supportive cushion for him. As long as he didn't cough, he was able to rest.

Time weighed heavily. He wrote a lengthy letter to those at home in the little town of Leedsville, New Jersey. He did not include a single detail about his injury, for the incident shamed him. Still, he included the triumph of the battle being won. He also mentioned the woman who must have been raised by a tribe. While he left out any reference about her cause for grief, he noted her fine beauty.

He forced his pen to keep a jaunty tone, though he found himself growing melancholy as he thought of all those left behind when he and Lewis set out on their adventure. In truth, Lewis dreamed up the enterprise. Ryan's cousins' husbands—both learned men—

believed Ryan and his twin should continue their education. Lewis balked at that idea and convinced Ryan it was time for them to set out on their own along with their father's script for one hundred acres of land, which he received in payment for his time in the fight for independence.

Their father died without ever obtaining the land and though Lewis and Ryan were only given a portion of the original promise, it was enough. Despite the hardships, the physical labor, and the lack of money, they enjoyed their venture until the Indians destroyed the farm and killed Lewis.

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After three weeks of recuperation, Ryan's condition marginally improved. A messenger came to his quarters with an order. The captain wished to speak with him. He gritted his teeth and endured the shaft of agony as he got to his feet. Was this the end of his career as a soldier? What would he do next? The farm was gone. He no longer possessed the will to endure starting over without his brother. Lewis's dream died along with him.

Ryan walked painfully to the captain's quarters.

When he arrived, the captain pointed to a chair. "Please sit down, Sergeant McGowan."

"Thank you, sir." He was grateful for the respite. Since his injury, he suffered bouts of lightheadedness from a lack of air. He faulted the doctor for winding the bandages too tightly.

"We have some difficulties to discuss about the woman you brought here," the captain stated.

"I'm sorry if she's caused any trouble, sir, but she's

obviously not an Indian—”

“The general visited her and believes she’s the daughter of a friend of his, a man who served alongside him during the Battle of Stony Point. Though wounded in the battle, the man recovered and the general kept in touch with him for many years.”

“Sir, that is good news. When will she be returned to her family?” Ryan sighed with relief. He hadn’t realized how much the woman had weighed on his mind. She would be much better off with those who loved her. Time with her blood relatives would heal her grief.

“That’s the problem,” the captain stated. “From what the general has told me, there are no other family members—at least, not in this country.”

Ryan frowned. He thought of the woman’s red hair. She could be Irish or Scottish with her fine features. He envisioned her appearance wearing a more civilized style of dress.

His brief flight of fancy was shattered when the captain drummed his fingers on the table.

“Sergeant, I understand you were a schoolmaster before you joined our legion.”

“Yes, sir, last winter.” The formation of young minds proved an interesting task, which he enjoyed, but mainly, his service provided extra food for him and Lewis. Though from the moment his twin was murdered, he could no longer concentrate on anything but revenge. It gnawed at him and only the constant drilling with the other soldiers eased the bitterness in his soul along with the hope that he would repay those savages for his brother’s death.

For it is better to suffer for doing good...than for doing evil.

Ryan winced as he recalled part of the Scripture verse. Was killing Indians good or evil?

The captain motioned to his aide and three figures walked into the room. Ryan recognized one of their Indian scouts, Bright Moon. Beside the scout was the white woman with the red hair. She was still dressed as an Indian, though instead of his jacket she wore a shawl draped modestly over her torso. The weather cooled since autumn blew into the territory over the past three weeks. She no longer marred her face with paint, allowing her natural beauty to shine forth despite her red-rimmed eyes.

Remorse filled Ryan and guilt coursed through him. The poor woman must have cried for weeks.

The indomitable, stalwart, but ever-cheerful Miss Chance stood beside the younger woman.

"What does the lady call herself?" the captain asked the scout.

The scout spoke to the woman in her own language.

In a near whisper, she answered. "Màxkchulëns."

"It means Red Bird," the scout stated.

Red Bird? Like a cardinal? Why didn't the Indians use ordinary names? People weren't animals.

The captain chuckled. "Interesting."

Ryan let out a soft sigh, which caused his ribs to ache. He winced. He longed to sink into the comfort of his soft, featherbed nest. He longed to take a deep breath, and he prayed he would not cough or hiccup.

"Does she remember how old she was when the Indians captured her?" The captain motioned to his aide who poured liquor into a large metal cup.

Once the scout translated the captain's question, the young woman spoke in her language with a hint of

anger in her tone.

"The Turtle clan saved her life," the scout explained. "She might have been around four years old at the time. Her parents were killed during a powerful windstorm, which knocked down their cabin. She was pulled from underneath the rubble and adopted by an Indian family whose daughter died at about the same age."

The captain nodded at the scout's words. Ryan supposed it was lucky for the woman the Indians didn't scalp her, though they undoubtedly took anything of value they could find from the homestead.

He thought of Lewis again, and an ache went through him. Though not caused by his broken ribs, the pain cut as deeply.

"What was her given name before she was adopted?" the captain asked.

The scout used a soft voice in speaking to the woman, but she put her hands over her face as if she was torn with emotion.

"Come now. I haven't got all day. Surely, she can remember her English name. If she was four years of age, she should be able to recall it." The captain's voice reverberated around the dark room, and the young woman startled.

For the first time, Miss Chance questioned the younger woman. "Alice?"

The young woman shook her head.

"Betty?" Miss Chance suggested.

The captain slammed his hand on the desk. "This is not a guessing game."

Miss Chance drew herself up, and with narrowed eyes glared at the captain. The captain appeared to wince.

Ryan blinked in surprise.

The scout cleared his throat. "You must give her time."

The captain clenched his teeth and ordered his aide to refill his cup. Miss Chance continued her list of names until after several minutes, the young woman nodded.

"N-N-Nell. Nellie." Her word was almost a squeak.

"And your surname?" the captain questioned in a more moderate tone.

The woman wailed and spun around to flee, but the scout and Miss Chance grabbed her, preventing her escape.

Ryan stood. "Sir, begging your pardon, but..."

"Sit down, Sergeant," the captain ordered.

"Yes, sir." He resumed his seat.

"According to the general, her surname was Evans. So her name is Nellie Evans." The captain appeared satisfied with his decree as he quaffed down his drink.

"Màxkchulëns!" The woman sobbed in hysteria. "Màxkchulëns."

Ryan squirmed. The distraught women's anguish disturbed him. He remembered how his little sister used to run to him when she was upset, and he would always soothe her fears. He wished he could do the same for this woman.

"All right." The captain scowled. "For now, we'll call you Nellie Red Bird, but the general will undoubtedly change that soon enough. In the meantime, Sergeant McGowan, you will teach this young woman to read and to write English while you're continuing to recover from your injury."