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A S E T T L E R ' S P A S S I O N

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Chapter One

A blood-curdling scream shot through the settlement causing the men to race for their muskets as the women gathered the children into the nearest hiding place. Even the dogs ran for cover, sensing impending danger.

Then another howl came, but closer this time.

As the colonists scurried about, they spotted Lieutenant Smithson coming through the gate dragging a muddy-faced boy behind. When he got to the center of the fort, he pulled his dagger and aimed it at the boy's neck, causing a thin line of blood to trickle down his chest.

"Unhand the boy," Thomas shouted from across the settlement.

Hearing the commotion, he quickly shoved his way through the crowd where he noticed the child was being held at knife point. He was spitting mad. He couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"The boy is a savage," Smithson spat, keeping his focus and his dagger steady on his captive.

"I said unhand the boy," Thomas insisted as he grabbed Smithson's forearm trying to pry it away.

"You have no authority here, Harcourt," he responded hoping things wouldn't escalate into a physical altercation, one he knew he could never win.

"PUT. YOUR. WEAPON. DOWN." Thomas was so close he could smell ale on the man's breath.

As the two men stared at each other, whispers floated around as to who held the moral high ground. Some stood with Thomas, believing a working relationship with the natives was the best way to establish a lasting colony in the New World, while the others sided with the lieutenant in protecting the settlement from those deemed to be enemies of the Crown.

As Thomas was about to give the man an ultimatum, he saw Commander Randall marching toward him. He couldn't help notice everything about the man spoke to his military breeding. Even his walk had purpose and polish.

“Where was the boy found, Lieutenant?” Randall asked as he approached.

Smithson yanked his arm from Thomas’s grip. “He was lurking at the western edge of the settlement. Over near the tree line.”

“He was there at my direction,” Thomas jumped in.

“I beg your pardon?” Randall snapped back, trying to stay calm. It would be safe to say that there was nothing about Thomas Harcourt that he could stomach. Absolutely nothing. He was a man of rules. Someone who lived by the law. He believed discipline was necessary for a civilized society to function; that people left to their own devices would ultimately perish. Whereas Thomas led by his gut. His feelings; his instinct. All of which, in Randall’s opinion, made the man a damn fool.

“Thomas speaks the truth,” Samuel said in defense of his friend.

The boy continued to wail, his high-pitched screeches sounding eerily inhuman, causing the hair on the back of Randall’s neck to stand on end.

“The boy has been entrusted to my care,” Thomas argued. “It was agreed that he was to come here to learn our language.”

Commander Randall was finding it increasingly difficult not to draw his pistol and rid himself—and the colony—of Thomas and his never-ending self-indulgent tirades. However, he knew he had to control himself. Trade was essential to the settlement’s survival and unfortunately Thomas seemed to be the only Englishman the tribes trusted. The only one they would trade with. It wasn’t that long ago when the settlement had nearly been abandoned due to starvation and he had no intention of that happening again. Not on his watch.

“I have no idea how you have come to believe, without expressed consent, that you can bring a savage, or anyone else for that matter, into this fort, but somehow you have taken it upon yourself to do so,” he said, thinking the fool might consider these people friendly, but he knew they were cold-blooded killers.

“It was at the request of Chief Comoco.”

“He has no authority here either!” Randall was nearly at his breaking point. “You have placed this colony in a very dangerous position. Because you agreed without expressed consent, we have no choice but to allow the boy to stay. And what if something happens to him because you decided to make an unauthorized arrangement?”

“Such an arrangement is within my position as emissary.”

“Your position be damned.” Randall was dizzy from a gush of blood rushing to his head. “Let me to very clear, Mr. Harcourt. The boy is your responsibility should anything happen.”

Thomas was about to continue his argument but decided to just let it go. There was no need to respond. He knew what was at stake. This wasn’t the first time he’d been threatened by Randall.

“Samuel, Ahanu’s going to stay with us. Can you please take him to the bunkhouse and get him settled in? I’m going to head over to see Agnes,” he said as they watched Randall stomp off.

Making his way to the kitchen, he passed Lady Elizabeth Rotheley, the one person he hoped he wouldn’t have to deal with today, or any day for that matter. He prayed she would for once hold her tongue, but he knew better. She was like a lily of the valley—strikingly beautiful but extremely poisonous.

“My heavens, Mr. Harcourt. What are you up to this time?” she asked as he passed. It was no secret she disliked the man. On their first meeting she found him to be arrogant, self-involved, and highly outspoken. That he must live in a world where he believed everyone and everything should revolve around him. The only thing she felt he had going for him was his chiseled body and piercing green eyes. What a waste, she thought. “You seem to have the entire settlement in an uproar again.”

“I’m sure it’s nothing that would interest you,” he said gritting his teeth.

“You’d be surprised by what interests me.”

“Oh, I’m sure I would.”