

Camille ran to join the escort party. His fellow Frenchmen and their Indian allies encased a dozen and a half British prisoners. While a few needed help walking, most of them made it off the battlefield just fine. A short and stocky captive led the incarcerated with a puffed-out chest and hard-set jaw. They drudged back up the hill, towards Fort Duquesne. Capitaine Lignery and his officers intercepted them at the gates on horseback.

The rank and file parted to allow le capitaine to address the proud Brit. They squeezed Camille backwards to make room. Tall, azure-jacketed shoulders concealed the captives from view. The officers became the only discernable faces, towering above all others. As Camille squirmed to see, he knocked into a native soldier. The Indian stared him down before Camille could do anything to apologize.

“To whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?” Lignery asked in English, addressing only his captives, his officers, a few natives, and Camille.

“Major James Grant of the 77th Regiment of Foot.”

“Regiment? Major, I do believe you’re short a few hundred men.” Lignery’s officers flashed devilish grins, Camille’s father most of all.

“Aye, you have your native dogs to thank for that one.” Another prisoner’s voice joined in. “Huntin’ us through the woods like we were foxes.” A few of his fellow captives barked and bayed. The natives around Camille did nothing to acknowledge the jab. They stood like red clay statues.

“Enough!” Lignery reared his horse. “Major, I will not have your men offend our allies. I would ask you to control them.”

The major murmured something to his subordinate, who replied with a “Bah!”

“Now then, Major. Your forces have suffered undue casualties today, and I would prefer to not have more bloodshed within my walls. I will house and feed your men as prisoners of war, until such time that your country ends its petty squabble.” Lignery pranced his horse in a circle. “Troupes de la marine!” He called to all the men. “Vive la Nouvelle-France!”

“Vive la Nouvelle-France!” Camille joined the chorus.

The troops dispersed into the fort. A contingent of marines and natives escorted the prisoners into the empty storehouse below the bastion, except for Grant, who was taken to the smaller of the two barracks.

Camille plodded towards the other barracks. Duquesne’s floor of mud sucked at his boots, impeding his progress. Gigantic footsteps strode beside him, accompanied by a shadow that engulfed him and sapped his warmth.

“I see you survived the battle today, cadet.” Camille’s father said from atop his horse.

“Oui, Père.”

A whistle arced through the air to end with a snap on Camille’s rear. The cold, flat side of his father’s sword burned into his leg. His body tensed to accept the hit, rather than cry or flinch in the middle of the yard.

“While we are in the theater, you shall address me as ‘Lieutenant,’ and nothing else. Understood, cadet?”

“Oui, Lieutenant.”

“Bonne. Now, le capitaine is expecting us in his quarters soon. I expect that filth off your shoes and everywhere else so that you look presentable.”

“Oui, Lieutenant.”

In his barracks, Camille had to squeeze past numerous soldiers to get to his bed and belongings. The small longhouse was packed with the entirety of Duquesne’s forces.

“C'est des conneries.” A soldier propped against the wall muttered to another.

“Did le capitaine have to give that bâtard britannique the entire barracks, while we sweat in here?”

When Camille managed to slide through the crowds of men, he found his bed shared by two marines, with another occupying the floor beside them.

“Excusez-moi. I need to get to my pack.”

“Ouais? Why should I care?” The soldier rolled to face away from Camille.

Camille tapped the toe of his shoe against the man’s spine, wiping Duquesne mud on his shirt.

“Hé, petite merde!” The man turned over to grab Camille’s ankle. “Don’t make me go down to the river to clean this again, or I’ll toss you in the Allegheny with it.”

Camille attempted to shake his foot loose. “What does it matter how you look? You don’t have to see le capitaine, unlike me. Let me go, and I won’t tell him how you made me late.”

The grunt growled, released him, and walked away. “Stupid, cadet.”

Camille dove under his bed to grab his second jacket and a shoe brush. After scraping Duquesne’s leavings off his soles and changing uniform, he rushed to the officers’ quarters, careful to not sink back into the mud on his way. The quarters shared the plain, outer appearance of the other wooden structures, but the inside housed fineries

that would not be found in the barracks: polished wood furniture, shined silver and plate ware, and framed portraits.

Camille hurried down the hall to le capitaine's office and knocked on the door. It swung open, with Camille's father's glare on the other side.

"Ah, cadet, thank you for honoring us with your presence." Lignery chortled behind his desk.

Camille sunk his head as he entered the room. He stood beside his father, who stood as rigid as a board. "I'm sorry, Capitaine."

Lignery turned his attention back to Camille's father. "As I was saying, Lieutenant, I believe your cadet may help us with getting information from Grant."

"How?"

"Cadet, you speak English, do you not?" Lignery asked, in English.

The change in languages made Camille stumble to an answer. "Oui."

Lignery chuckled again. "You see, Lieutenant Gaille? He already understands the plan. A cadet of thirteen, and he is a better strategist than most of the men in Duquesne. We know he can speak English, but Grant does not. With just the cadet standing watch, hopefully Grant will be less guarded."

"But sir, unless he's prone to speaking to himself, I don't believe he'll just start talking about the British position."

"I already have that arranged. One of the injured prisoners was just seen by the surgeon. He was able to talk his way out of being scalped by one of our natives on the battlefield. Maybe he'll be friendly enough company to make Grant start talking. Have someone escort him to the barracks."

“Understood, Capitaine.”

“Good. I’ll have some rations given to you and your cadet. Make sure Grant and his roommate are fed too. They might be less apt to talk if they knew we have more men than food in the storehouse now.”

“Oui, Capitaine.”

Camille followed his father’s motion to leave. When they exited the quarters, his father grasped his shoulder to talk.

“Cadet, you have been given a great responsibility. Take advantage of those English tutors I paid for you. Pay close attention to what Grant and this other man say. Do not fail le capitaine, or moi.”

“Oui, Lieutenant. When will we collect our rations?”

“I will withhold your rations until you deliver usable information to le capitaine. Now, go to the barracks to stand guard. Relieve whoever is on duty.”

“Oui, Lieutenant.” Camille wandered over to the emptied barracks. The two marines standing guard outside smirked as Camille approached.

“What do you want, little cadet?”

“Le capitaine wants me standing guard inside.”

One of them chuckled. “Why would le capitaine trust you with watching our prisoner?”

“Leave him be. Le lieutenant just told us that he is allowed in.” An approaching marine said. He and his partner supported a prisoner walking between them. The Brit had one leg wrapped, which he suspended above the ground.

Camille brushed past the two idle guards to open the door for the others. On the other side stood the last guard and his lone prisoner, who rested on one of many vacant beds in the empty barracks. The major sat up as the group filed into the room.

“Kirkwood!”

“Allo, Major.”

“Taisez-vous!” One of the escorts barked. “The cadet is standing guard now, marine.”

The guardsman perked at the order. He handed Camille his rifle and exited the room. Camille steadied the gun so the butt rested on the floor and its bayonet aimed skyward. The escorts led the Brit to a bed adjacent to the Major. They lowered him onto the mattress and left. Camille stood at attention by the entrance while his captives made themselves at home.

“I’m glad you survived the battle, Kirkwood.”

“Didn’t have much choice in the matter. One of the natives decided to spare me. Seemed that way, at least, when his friends started studying me with their scalping knives.”

“Damn savages.”

“Major, I don’t believe I heard you join the chorus when Mackay and the others started barking at the gates.”

“Just because I didn’t make a fool of myself doesn’t mean I don’t agree with them.”

Someone knocked on the door. Camille opened it by only a fraction, and the guard outside handed him a hemp sack.

“Rations for the prisoner.” The guard stated.

“Where are our rations?” The other guard asked.

“Damned if I know. If I were to guess, everyone’s food is being split between the officers and the prisoners.”

Camille closed the door to their complaining. The sack, while not full, weighed as though it held at least six men’s rations. Camille held a bounty in his hand. The prisoner’s eyed him as he contemplated over the food. He traipsed to them to hand over the sack.

“Vivres.” Camille held the bag up to Kirkwood while holding tight to his rifle.

“Thank you.”

Before any English could slip out of his mouth, Camille marched back, empty handed, to guard the door.

“Hmph, they must not think we’re much of a threat, having just a boy watch us.”

“Maybe they’re trying to fatten us up.” Kirkwood pulled out a roll. He handed the bag over to Grant, who fished out a hunk of cheese, the last probable bit in the whole fort. At first, they nibbled at the food, eyeing Camille as he stood guard. After the second and third rolls, the prisoners became more amicable.

“What do you think these Frenchmen will have done with us?” Kirkwood asked, nibbling on the cheese leftover by Grant. The creamy curd had been reduced from a wedge to a morsel.

“Ransom us. Kill us. Give us to the savages.” Breadcrumbs showered from Grant’s mouth as he chomped on a roll.

Camille tried to focus on what they said, but he could only follow the new roll that Kirkwood waved through the air as he spoke. He glanced over at Camille, who

stiffened his pose and focused instead on the rough-hewn wood of the wall on the far side of the barracks.

“Boy.” Kirkwood called out to him.

Camille ignored him.

“Boy.”

He could not understand English, no matter what they said.

“Boy!”

No British distractions could stop him from aiding le capitaine and receiving his rations.

Kirkwood’s shouts stopped, replaced by a steady beat on the hard, wood floor. Camille glanced at the prisoners to see Kirkwood limping over to him. Camille grasped the rifle with two hands, pointed the bayonet towards Kirkwood, and struck a defensive pose.

“Whoa, boy.” Kirkwood held up his hands, grasping the ration sack in one. “I just wanted to give this back to you.”

Camille stood, unaltered.

“There’s still one in there, if you want it.” Kirkwood shook the bag at Camille. Then he attempted to crouch to place the bag, but he winced after bending his knees a few inches. He dropped the bag to the floor and limped back to his bed.

“Are you sure you should be walking on that leg, Private?” Grant called.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine.” Kirkwood flopped onto the bed.

Camille pointed his rifle at the bag for several moments to continue the ruse. He regained his composure before pacing over to the bag. He grabbed it and returned to his

post, where he dug at the bottom to find a-- still partially soft-- bread roll. He tore at the crust, savoring its buttery, flaky chew. His rifle threatened to fall out of his grasp.

“That was a better meal than what we shared with Forbes’ men.”

“Well, six thousand is a lot of mouths to feed, Major.”

Camille paused his meal mid bite.

“Six thousand men? Are you sure of it?” One of the officers asked.

“Oui, Lieutenant.” Camille answered to the collected officers in le capitaine’s quarters. All of them huddled around Camille, while Lignery watched him from behind his polished desk.

“Capitaine, we don’t have enough men to defend Duquesne against a force that large.”

“We’re going to have even less soon. The natives are threatening to leave. They have no reason to starve like the rest of us.”

“Which we certainly will if Forbes’ men arrive and start a siege. They won’t even have to lose a soldier.”

Lignery leaned back in his chair with his hands poised beneath his chin.

“Maybe if we bargain with them by releasing Grant, we can find some sort of recourse.”

“That is not going to work.” Camille’s father stated. “Grant has seen our garrison. Nothing will stop the British if they know the forces we carry.”

“What do you suggest, then, Gaulle?”

Camille’s father paused momentarily, hands clasped behind his back. “The best option may be to retreat from Duquesne.”

“What? Flee?”

“You expect us to walk off like cowards?”

“I certainly don’t expect us to survive against numbers such as those.”

“I say we give them Grant and see what happens. Capitaine?”

Lignery hadn’t moved during the conversation. “Before we consider deserting her, I think we should try defending her, Gaulle. I believe granting the major a parole might help us.”

Camille’s father dropped his hands to his side, fists clenched. “You expect Grant to help us?”

“I expect to use Grant to help us. Let us see what happens.”

Camille’s father exhaled through his nose. “Oui, Capitaine.”

Lignery nodded. “Cadet, that you for bringing us this information tonight. Everyone is dismissed.”

The officers shuffled out of the room. Camille and his father were the last to leave. Once, Camille clicked the door shut, his father stamped through the hall and out into the dusk. Camille hurried to follow, but the half eaten roll sustained him with little energy.

“Misérable chien paresseux!”

“Lieutenant?” Camille piped. “When could I receive my rations?”

His father spun around, revealing the snarl on his face. “Rations?” He grabbed Camille by the collar. “You’ll get your rations when you hear those prisoners say something that will make le capitaine forget this ridiculous idea. And if you can’t do that, I guess you are watching them the entire night. Now get back to the barracks.” He threw Camille to the ground.

Camille dashed away from his father as quick as he could. He reentered the barracks and relieved the guard of duty, once again. Kirkwood and Grant did not speak much during the evening. They simply rested on their beds, watching the ceiling. Camille wished they would sleep, if only for him. As the night drew on, Camille kept blinking more frequently as the weariness weighed heavier on his eyelids.

“Boy, get up.”

Camille awoke to Kirkwood nudging his shoulder as he lay in one of the empty beds in the barracks.

“Sleeping on a bed is better than on the floor over there, eh?”

“Kirkwood, you’re lucky no one came in while that boy was asleep. No doubt he would’ve gotten flogged for that.”

“He would’ve gotten beat anyway, if they found him propped up against his gun like that. Besides, he’s up now. C’mon, get up.” Kirkwood tugged at Camille’s jacket.

Camille leapt out of bed, straightened his uniform, and walked to his rifle, which rested on the wall beside the door. As he wiped the sleep from his eyes, the door opened. Lignery, Camille’s father, and two marines strode into the room.

“Major Grant, you have been paroled. I am sending you with two of my men, one of whom speaks English. They will escort you back to your commandant. From there, I hope you express to them your gratitude for your treatment during your short stay here.”

Grant looked to Kirkwood and then to Lignery. He nodded.

“Bonne. Now, my men will take you to your horses.”

The pair of marines walked over to Grant, who stood up to meet them. He glanced at Kirkwood one last time before being led out the door by his escorts. Lignery followed.

“Come with me.” Camille’s father said to him, in French. “The cripple doesn’t need to be guarded.”

The pair left Kirkwood to be forgotten in his cell.

“It took a good part of the night, but le capitaine now understands that Grant’s parole will do nothing.” Camille’s father paced across the yard. “We are evacuating the fort tonight. Be ready to leave after we have dealt with the fort and the prisoners.” Le lieutenant broke from his son to head back to the officer’s house.

Camille dashed into the barracks, emptied of marines, and searched through the rows of bunks. He found a random marine’s pack filled with a spare blue jacket. He ran to find his own pack and stuffed the jacket inside. He then went to help where he could to distract himself from the approaching night.

When night fell, marines began collecting wood for a giant pyre in the center of the yard. Men continued to pile wood when Camille snuck back to the barracks to retrieve his pack. He hoisted it on his back and made for Kirkwood’s prison. Only one marine guarded him now, the same one with whom Camille traded shifts before.

“Le lieutenant wants you to help with the men outside. He says that I can guard the prisoner for now.”

The guard left him the rifle and exited the barracks. Camille waited a few minutes to make sure that he wouldn’t return.

“Nice to see you again, boy.”

Camille dropped his bag in front of Kirkwood, dug out the spare jacket, and tossed it on his bed.

“What the?”

Camille doffed his tricorne hat and plopped it in Kirkwood's lap.

"What is this about, boy?"

"They're burning Duquesne, and they're going to kill you before we leave."

Camille warned in English.

"You speak English?"

"Oui. Please put this on, so we can try to get you out."

Kirkwood stared at Camille's makeshift disguise. "Boy, I don't think this is going to fool anybody."

"We need to try. They'll kill you regardless."

Kirkwood thumbed the felt hat. He placed it on his head, slid his arms into Camille's jacket, and shrugged the rest on with his shoulders. "Blue is not much my color." He grasped Camille's shoulder. Camille moved alongside Kirkwood to brace his limp. He hissed when his leg grazed the ground. Together, they hobbled to the door.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Because you don't treat me as an enemy."

"Well, you're not exactly my enemy. My enemies are your kin."

"My enemies are my kin too."

Outside, the marines had started to light the pyre. Men began lining up with unlit torches. Once the tinder had taken light, the entire fort would soon be ablaze. With the final preparations underway, no one could notice the cadet assisting the limping marine dressed in poor regalia and obscuring his face with his hat.

"Do you know how we're getting past the walls?"

"Non."

As they staggered across the field, a lone native walked towards them. Camille attempted to avoid him, but he stopped in the middle of their path. Camille cursed himself for leaving the rifle in the barracks.

“You need to go.” The native soldier spoke in English.

“We were just leaving before the torching started.”

“Not you. Him.”

Kirkwood raised his head, revealing his eyes beneath the tricorne. A smile crept up on his face. “Well, if it isn’t my friend from the battlefield.”

“You need to leave now. Before they put you with the others.”

“The others? What happened to the other men?” Kirkwood leaned forward when he asked, causing him and Camille to wobble.

“It is too late for them. We need to leave.”

Camille nodded in agreement. He redistributed Kirkwood’s weight to a different part of his shoulder.

“I will help him. You must lead us out.” The native took Kirkwood from Camille, quickening their escape.

Marines sped by them as they passed through the foothills of the fort. Men packed horses and carriages, removed supplies and belongings from the buildings, and marched all of it outside the fort in spurts. They attempted to pass with men dribbling out of the gates, but they kept a distance from the others so no one would notice the non-French marine.

A marine standing by the gate wandered over. “Hey, what’s wrong with him?”

Kirkwood hung from the native, drooping his head to conceal his face. The Indian watched the guardsman, unimpaired by the added weight from Kirkwood.

“He’s just injured. We’re evacuating him early.” Camille replied.

The guard bent low to whisper into Camille’s ear. “Do you want someone to help instead of that native savage?”

The Indian continue to watch the exchange between Camille and the guard.

“No, let him work.” Camille offered.

The guard smirked. “Good thinking, cadet.” He stepped away from Camille.

The trio passed through the gates onto the open field. The byland widened as it marched east from the fort, bordered by the Allegheny and Monongahela to the north and south. Woodlands concealed the other end of the battlefield a mile away.

“Where are you taking him?”

“We have boats on the shore of the Monongahela. We will go to the other side, and he will be free to go where he pleases.”

“I’ll probably go back to Forbes’ expedition.”

“I will help you get there.”

Kirkwood offered up a weak smile. The trek down the fort must have sapped what little strength he had. “Thank you. And you, boy, thank you. What is your name?”

“Camille.”

“Thank you, Camille. I will not forget the kindness that can be offered by those who would be my enemies.”

“Nor will I.”

Camille waited until Kirkwood and the native had made it down to Monongahela's shore before dashing back up the fort. He sped back towards the empty barracks to make sure that no one had discovered Kirkwood gone. He raced up to the door and jerked it open. On the other side stood his father.

"Where is the prisoner?" Lieutenant Gaulle pushed Camille back through the threshold.

"I don't know, Lieutenant."

"Do not lie to me." Gaulle backhanded Camille across the cheek. "Where has he gone?"

"I have not seen him, Lieutenant. Je ne sais pas."

Gaulle regained his composure. "Very well." He dragged Camille by the wrist over to the empty storeroom where the other British had been kept. A marine stood by the entrance.

Camille stumbled to the ground as le lieutenant tossed him to the Frenchman. "Make sure le cadet helps with the prisoners."

"Oui, Lieutenant." The marine helped Camille up to bring him inside.

Several natives and a few marines stood within the empty storehouse. They wielded cudgels, knives, and hatchets, marred with fresh blood. A bruised and mangled body knelt on the ground. Broken teeth, a missing ear, and a swollen eye muddled his features. Bodies piled the back of the larder and mopped the floor with blood.

The torturers paused as Camille and the marine came into the room. When the door clicked shut, they returned to tearing the man apart. The prisoner had his hands bound, so he could do nothing to stop the barrage. Bat and blade broke bones and tore

flesh. The man's pain came out, not as words, but as blood. Every inch of him became less distinguishable as the monsters acted their perverse work. Only some of them had been referred to as savages, but they all shared that title as the prisoner slumped onto the ground with a wet thud.

“Lieutenant Gaulle wants le cadet to help.”

One of the Frenchmen drew his sword and pointed the hilt towards Camille, but he made no motion to take it.

“Cadet, if you do not help us, we cannot promise what le lieutenant might do.”

The monsters standing on the mass of broken bodies watched as Camille grasped the hilt. He dragged the sword along the ground as he approached the dying prisoner. The man's lay face down, so he didn't have to look him in the eye.

“Just aim for the neck.”

Camille held the blade at the neck and then hoisted it above his head. He pictured Kirkwood lying dead in this room before him, if Camille hadn't saved him. But now that he did, the room encased him. Camille imagined Lieutenant Gaulle. Only Gaulle could do this.

Camille dropped the sword at the exposed neck, spraying blood all over the blade. It didn't make a clean cut. Camille hacked with the thin blade, trying to finish it quickly. The head bounced away from the shoulders as he severed the connection. Blood covered the blade, the hilt, and Camille's hands. The sword clattered to the ground. Camille bent over and backed away from his work, heaving out his empty stomach.

“Good job, cadet. We'll put this one on a pike at the front of Duquesne, just for you, so all of the British know where we stand.”

Camille marched with six hundred men away from Duquesne. The flames of the fort danced like ghosts in the night sky. A fireball billowed up into the air as the blaze discovered the casks of gunpowder left in the magazine. Camille broke formation to watch Duquesne die in the flames one last time. No doubt Lieutenant Gaulle would punish him for that too.