

*Road to
Deer Run*

ELAINE MARIE COOPER

ROAD TO DEER RUN

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ISBN: 978-1-936501-29-8

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Editor: Debra L. Butterfield

Cover Artwork: © Andiz275 | Dreamstime.com - Winter Forest Photo. © Jackie Dix - Cover Model Photo.

Cover model: Tanner Weishaar

Model Costume: Special thanks to Janet Alexander, costumer for Robidoux Resident Theatre, St. Joseph, Missouri, for help with costumes.

Printed in the United States of America.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my daughter,
BETHANY JEANNE COOPER
December 12, 1978 – October 20, 2003

In a family of writers, her creative star shone the brightest.

Acknowledgments

There are so many who have contributed advice, technical expertise, and enthusiasm for this novel. I could not have accomplished this lengthy effort without you.

First and foremost, I acknowledge the support and patient efforts of my editor-husband and soul mate, **Steve**. Your understanding of the written word and your tireless efforts to help this undertaking have been so appreciated, and your humor has been a welcome relief from the strain of editing. Thank you for believing that this work could really be accomplished.

To my wonderful editor, **Debra L. Butterfield** and my publisher, **CrossRiver Media**, thank you for your help to bring new life to this novel. I am so grateful to you!

To **Elaine Germano**, Certified Nurse Midwife, DrPH, FACNM, of the American College of Nurse-Midwives, I say a hearty “thank you.” Your expertise in midwifery gave credibility to an eighteenth-century scenario. Bravo to you, brave midwives!

To my treasured **readers** through the years, thank you for your encouragement and faithfulness. I am so grateful to all of you.

No acknowledgment would be complete without thanking the two very special grandparents of mine from the eighteenth century, **Daniel Prince** and **Mary “Polly” Packard**. They are the inspiration for this story. Their love overcame the difficulties brought on by being on opposing sides during a time of war. Theirs was the ultimate example of a courageous and romantic love story.

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I also owe a debt of gratitude to **Karen Kingsbury**. Although we are not directly acquainted, her wonderful fiction has inspired me and shown me the impact a novel can have in one's Christian walk.

And special thanks as always to my Lord and Savior **Jesus Christ**, from Whom all blessings flow.

Prelude

Ode to a Soldier

Soldier boy, so far from home,
Walking paths that are unknown.
“Will I live or will I die?”
The soldier boy’s lonely cry.

I trained to fire my musket gun,
To shoot so straight at someone’s son.
But when I saw his face turn gray,
I longed to be so far away.

This path is full of fear and strife,
My next turn may just end my life.
So let’s be cautious in our zeal,
’Cause death’s dark door is very real.

Soldier boy, so far from home,
Walking paths that are unknown.
“Will I live or will I die?”
Only God can hear his cry.

From the diary of Mary Thomsen



Daniel

The road never ended.

Nor did the thoughts that haunted the young British lieutenant Daniel Lowe night and day.

How did I ever get to this place?

Although just twenty-two years of age, Daniel felt as ancient as the granite stones lining the dirt highway. This war had long ceased being an adventure. He had seen enough bloodshed, starvation, and disease to last his entire lifetime. Only last night he held one of the regimental soldiers as he gasped his last breath, one more victim of the food shortage. The lad was only seventeen, the same age as Daniel's brother had been. He would never forget the young man's bones poking through his clothing.

"Lieutenant, sir." Another soldier's greeting interrupted his thoughts.

"Yes, Smythe." Daniel glanced sideways at the thin-faced recruit.

"How much longer, sir... 'til we get to Boston, that is?" Smythe's eyes widened with anxiety.

Daniel tried to appear encouraging, but he didn't know what to say. After all, they were prisoners of war. Although the Continental Army had stated the prisoners would be put on ships to return to England, as long as they never took up arms against the colonies again, he knew better. There was no way the Colonial rebels would allow them so easy an escape. The "Lobsters," as the King's soldiers were called by the colonial rabble, would be confined to a putrid camp where disease would rage and death would soon follow.

But this poor soldier looked for any hope he could hang onto, no matter how slim. Without hope, Daniel knew the young man would not survive.

“I do not know the distance, Smythe. It is a long way to the boats... and it’s a long way home. But you are still strong, and you’ll make it.”

“Thank you, sir.” The younger man fell behind his lieutenant once again in the ragged line of prisoners.

Daniel breathed in a shallow breath of frigid air and tried desperately to ignore the mounting pain in his left leg. He held little hope for his own survival. While attempting to save his regiment, he gave away enough of his allotted food to jeopardize his own health. Not that the weevil-infested sea biscuits were sufficient for even one man. His muscular frame shrank from weeks of deprivation and miles of forced marching. His filthy and tattered uniform hung loosely on him. And then there was that wound.

That last battle near Saratoga brought his first encounter with rebel lead. The ball found its home, shearing a large hole in his thigh muscle. He treated the injury as best he could without clean water and bandages.

As Daniel glanced down at his leg now, he sickened at the sight of green pus draining through the old bandage. As each step became more excruciating, he knew his limb was in serious trouble.

“Move along you wretches,” a Colonial guard yelled at the slow-moving prisoners. “No time to coddle the lot of you.” The remnants of the army of British General John Burgoyne were being marched by the Continentals to Boston, still a rebel stronghold. It was late October, and Daniel knew the chill in the air promised an early winter.

Snow flurries dusted a thin layer on the bare oak and hickory trees along the dirt road. The stark outlines of gnarled branches and the dead leaves surrounding every tree trunk only added to the grim and lifeless scene as hundreds of men dragged their legs forward one step at a time.

The freezing wind whistled through the creaking tree limbs, eliciting painful groans from the poorly clad soldiers.

Daniel’s long hair came undone from the ties that usually held it in place. Each gust of wintry air whipped the strands into his eyes, stinging each time. Weariness had drained his strength and any inclination to retie his hair.

Enticing aromas from nearby hearths beckoned at Daniel’s nostrils.

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The intense hunger of the men played vividly on each face as the scents of unobtainable bread and roast venison only heightened their sense of hopelessness. Daniel glanced at the eyes of his fellow soldiers. Most of them were filled with tears from the cold wind as well as from despair. He waged the same battle of disheartenment.

This is a death march to be sure.

The excruciating pain in his limb grew overwhelming. Nausea welled in Daniel's stomach as he forced himself to put one foot in front of the other. But he knew he couldn't keep up much longer. He devised a plan. At some point, he would slip away into the thick woods along the highway.

Better to crawl under a tree to die than fall on the road and be shot by some impatient guard.

When the exhausted army of prisoners trudged through a local town, Daniel saw a chance for escape. Several youngsters from the village threw rocks at the British soldiers while shouting, "Dirty Lobsters!"

As the bellowing voices of the angry colonists distracted the guards, Daniel sprang for the woods, the pain in his leg overshadowed by the fear of being caught. His heart raced. His lungs sucked in deep pockets of cold air that fairly choked him. In his frantic escape, he lost all sense of time.

"Prisoner escaping!" shouted the guards, but he kept running. He threw off his red uniform — it would only be a target for a Continental marksman. Without his coat, the cold air gripped his torso. But he didn't stop. The sound of musket fire and the whistling of lead forced his legs to move faster than he thought possible. But he wasn't thinking about his actions. He responded to a visceral desire to survive.

His race ended in an abrupt and anguished halt as his leg gave way. Falling on the ground, he dragged himself behind some thick berry bushes that were long since void of fruit. The thorns dug into his chapped hands, but he hardly noticed the pain because his leg screamed for attention.

For a brief moment, he sensed something had changed. He forced himself to lie still. All was quiet.

The musket fire has ceased. They've stopped their pursuit.

Despite Daniel's relief, the throbbing pain in his limb reached a

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crescendo. Nausea thrust him in to spasms of heaving, but there was nothing in his stomach to expel.

As the retching ceased, he lay on his back in complete surrender. He stared at the cold gray sky through the trees overhead and hoped for one last glimpse of life, but even the forest birds had hidden themselves from his sight.

It didn't matter. After all, he deserved all of this. And nothing could change all that had occurred in these last months of war. Nothing could erase his many transgressions.

Now, all he had to do was close his eyes and let the inevitable shadow of death completely darken his already blackened soul. All was lost anyway. His war, his troops, his health, and, worst of all, those he loved.

Believing his life was ebbing away, Daniel held little hope of reaching heaven. But he couldn't take this hell on earth. He closed his eyes and waited for the reckoning of his Maker.