

THE
PATH
FINDERS
BOOK TWO

A
FLIGHT
of
ARROWS

A NOVEL



LORI
BENTON

CHRISTY AWARD WINNER

Praise for
Flight of Arrows

“Lori Benton has written another stellar novel set during the Revolutionary War period. The well-drawn characters leap off the pages and take up residence in readers’ hearts, making history come alive. Her research is monumental, yielding a vibrant story that will keep you glued to the pages and eagerly awaiting her next novel.”

—LAURINE SNELLING, best-selling author of the Red River
of the North saga

Praise for
The Wood’s Edge

“Meticulously researched. Alive and engaging. *The Wood’s Edge* is a journey through the footsteps of America’s formative years, with characters so wonderfully complex and a story of redemption so deep, only Lori Benton could tell it. I was transfixed from the first absorbing page to the last.”

—KRISTY CAMBRON, author of *The Butterfly and the Violin*
and *A Sparrow in Terezin*

“From the opening scene to the last line of the book, I was captivated by *The Wood’s Edge*. Rich in history, with characters to weep for and to cheer for, this is a novel that will linger in my heart for a long time to come.”

—ROBIN LEE HATCHER, best-selling author of *Love Without
End* and *Whenever You Come Around*

“Open *The Wood’s Edge* and see the secret. Then, hold it—page after page—breathless. Rich in history and lush in story, Lori Benton’s novel brings to life a cast of characters in a tale that spans two generations, two

cultures, two worlds. In an era underrepresented in Christian historical fiction, Benton takes on the challenge of presenting the message of faith in its purest form. Love, grace, rebirth.”

— ALLISON PITTMAN, author of *On Shifting Sand*

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BOOKS BY LORI BENTON

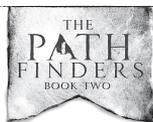
The Pursuit of Tamsen Littlejohn

Burning Sky

The Pathfinders Series

The Wood's Edge

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*For all the warriors who stand between, in body
and in Spirit, through every generation.*



*And for Ashley, Tyler, and Graham,
Vladimir and Zarina,
Zac, Bruce, and Eli.
Bright arrows of my sisters.*

As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man;
so are children of the youth. Happy is the
man that hath his quiver full of them: they
shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak
with the enemies in the gate.

— PSALM 127:4–5

Look and listen for the welfare of the whole
people and have always in view not only the
present but also the coming generations, even
those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of
the ground—the unborn of the future Nation.

— *Gayanashagowa Haudenosaunee*,
THE GREAT BINDING LAW OF THE
IROQUOIS CONFEDERACY

NEW YORK & IROQUOIS COUNTRY, 1757–1776

LEGEND

- FORTS
- ▲ INDIAN SETTLEMENTS
- EUROPEAN-AMERICAN TOWNS
- ✕ BATTLEGROUND



OCTOBER 1776—JULY 1777
THE MOHAWK VALLEY, NEW YORK
MONTREAL, QUEBEC
LAKE ONTARIO

*S*atahuhstiyost—Listen. Open your ears to a story I will tell you. It is the story of a warrior, and some of it you know. But you do not know the whole of it. Bear with me a while and you will.

Are you listening? Iyo—good. Here is a thing I have learned. It is not in a man's nature to forgive. A little wrong, the small ills of another's inflicting . . . maybe a man can bury that hatchet. Maybe that hatchet will stay buried and forgiveness will root itself in his soul and grow up tall and strong like the Great Tree of Peace. But forgiving is a hard thing, and even great trees topple.

The wrong done to the warrior of whom I speak was not a small thing. He had a son taken, on the day of that son's birth, as the child lay beside the one born-together with him. That son was taken up by the hands of a redcoat officer who left his dead child in place of the living. When the warrior learned of it, darkness entered his heart. He wanted his son back, but some believed he wanted more to kill the redcoat who took him—and all whom that redcoat loved. To hang their scalps over the door of his wife's lodge. To wipe all memory of that redcoat from the earth upon which they both went. He cherished his hatred as a tender shoot of corn coming up from the ground. He lusted for it to ripen into revenge, craved it like food for the belly.

What did that hate lead to? You may well ask it. It led to raging. It led to despair and much weeping. It led to jugs of trader's rum emptied

into that pit of pain. It led to a lonely son—that one not taken—who came to fear his father, to feel shame when that warrior failed to care for his family. It led to that warrior's wife being struck down in the field where she grew her family's corn by the hand of this one who could not forgive or forget the taking of his firstborn. When she could stand again on her feet, the woman put that warrior and his belongings out of her lodge. He lost everything. Not just the one son, but the other also. He lost his home. His wife. His heart. His manhood.

It is a thing to think long about, the consequences of one act that follow many down the paths they take to escape it, driving them like the lashes of a gauntlet. But listen.

After that warrior's wife put him out of her lodge, he did a thing that raised the brows of all who knew him. He went to the missionary, the Jesus-sachem who lived among them, and he asked this man how to go back and undo the bad things he had done in the darkness of his rage against the redcoat. How to go back and reclaim the good things he had squandered. He hoped for a charm, a prayer to turn back the circle of time, but Creator has not given such power even to holy men. Only He is Master of Time, standing with one foot outside the circle and one in it. And so this warrior did not get the answer he sought. There was no changing what was done. The way to walk a right path from that point was to repent of sin—those were the missionary's words—and to ask for Creator Father's forgiveness through the blood of Jesus-on-the-cross. Those words sent the warrior away with a heart of stone, blind to his need for forgiveness and so unable to forgive. In his soul he was as weak as the newborn son who haunted him, giving him no peace, though that son was no more an infant but a boy living across an ocean, raised by a woman not his mother, among a people not his own.

Becoming a white man in his heart.



October 11, 1776

Aubrey farm, near Schenectady

Wrapped in a shawl and drawn by the heartstrings, Anna Doyle let herself out of the white stone farmhouse before anyone else had awakened and strode briskly down a cart track past the harvested cornfields, headed for the strip of mist-draped woodland marking the creek near the farm's western boundary. It was her birthday, and the list of absent people she wished to share it with had lengthened, stretching those heartstrings to near unbearable strain.

North to her papa, Reginald Aubrey, gone from them these past two months. West to Two Hawks, the love of her heart, roaming forest paths for his Oneida people and for the garrison at Fort Stanwix.

Farthest of all to William, her brother, somewhere in Quebec—or so they thought. No one could yet be certain about William.

They weren't the only missing ones tugging at the cords of her heart that chill morning that sounded of geese calling and smelled of wood smoke and the earthy, sorrowing scent that was autumn in the Mohawk Valley. Anna crossed the creek on the new footlog Two Hawks had set in place and pressed on into the misty, golden wood beyond, thinking of a woman whose face she couldn't recall, whose name she didn't know.

The woman who'd been her mother for the first months of her life.

"Mama," she murmured, emerging into a clearing not far from the wood's edge. It was a name she'd never called another woman, though more than one had stood in a mother's place for her: Maura Doyle,

housekeeper, surrogate grandmother; Lydia van Bergen, friend and mentor; and lately Two Hawks's extraordinary mother, Good Voice. But what of the woman who birthed her? How old had she been that August day Fort William Henry fell and she escaped the siege only to die at the hands of French-allied Indians on the road to Fort Edward? Anna's own twenty years? Younger?

Jerking her thoughts from the terror of her mother's last hours on earth, Anna crossed the clearing toward the hill that rose beyond. The creek tumbled from rocks and rhododendron at its crown, creating a little waterfall beside a stone shelf midway up.

She'd brought her basket from the house, but it wasn't for gleaning medicinal herbs that she'd crossed the creek. Two Hawks's absence had become too great an ache to bear, shut up in the house. Since the summer he'd come and gone, ping-pong like a shuttlecock between her world and his, scouting for his people, reporting what he learned along a chain of communication that began with Reverend Kirkland at their town of Kanowalohale and ended with General George Washington and General Philip Schuyler—and, she hoped, Brigadier General Benedict Arnold, with whom Papa was currently employed building a navy fleet at Skenesborough, on the southern shore of Lake Champlain.

Unless Papa was on his way home. He'd left them in early August, promising to return before her birthday. So had Two Hawks promised. He'd been gone a fortnight. As for William . . . three months had passed with no word from him at all.

She'd meant to stop at the waterfall. Instead she left her basket on the stone shelf and, gathering her petticoat, began the rocky climb to the little cave behind its rhododendron screen. Two Hawks had discovered the cave when they were still children, one of those times he'd waited days for her to cross the creek and find him.

So much waiting. Anna pushed aside the boughs shielding the cave's narrow mouth. Sweeping her heavy braid over her shoulder to prevent

its snagging, she slipped inside, reminding herself that these weeks of waiting—for Two Hawks, Papa, news of William—paled before the years of waiting Two Hawks and his parents had endured.

Inside the chill cave, light filtered through rock fissures in a ceiling high enough for her to stand erect. Looking around, she felt a rush of disappointment at its emptiness. What had she expected? Two Hawks had never left behind evidence of occupation, save the blackened spot where over the years he'd built small fires. Not even his presence lingered.

"Jonathan." The cave's confines muffled the name Two Hawks had taken at his baptism, when he was just fifteen. She waited, hoping, but there was no comfort here. She was turning to leave the forsaken little cave when a clatter of pebbles without reached her ears.

"Bear's Heart?"

She sprang back from the cave's opening with a shriek, as startled as if the rattling stones had spoken her name—the name Two Hawks had given her. Then she tore her petticoat—and lost her cap—in the rush to get out into the chilly morning where Two Hawks crouched among the rocks, peering in at her. He stood as she launched herself into his arms—arm rather; the other held his rifle, the butt of which he planted among the rocks to brace himself. She leaned back in his embrace, taking in the sight of him: dark eyes alight with pleasure in her eagerness to greet him; long black hair shiny even in the dimming mist; skin bronzed from the sun; and his mouth, wide and supple and smiling down at her.

"How did you know I'd be here?"

He nodded toward the waterfall below. "I saw your basket. I knew it did not bring itself to this place."

"Clever." She cupped the back of his head, pulled his face down, and kissed him—too happy for restraint. She felt surprise jolt through him before he returned the kiss, his mouth warm and urgent. Her thoughts spun away in heady delight that he was there, holding her, until he pulled back from their embrace. In his eyes was a struggle.

“You know we cannot do this. We agreed we would not.”

“Not under Papa’s roof.” She reached for him again, heart pounding with wanting. And warning. “We aren’t under his roof. We’re under God’s sky.”

“Anna Catherine . . .” Two Hawks’s protest faltered when she smoothed her hand over his chest, warm under her palm even through his shirt. He closed his eyes, as though reaching for strength.

They’d had need of strength these past months, with Two Hawks’s parents living at the farm while Stone Thrower’s leg, broken by a musket ball, healed. The strain had been almost unbearable before Papa left to answer the call for carpenters at Skenesborough. Worse for Anna was his censure of her love for Two Hawks—unwisely voiced the night she confronted him about William’s true identity. They’d steered clear of the subject since, but Papa’s disapproval had been so thick before he left that Mrs. Doyle might have sliced it and served it up for supper.

She struggled to keep her voice light, teasing. “I’ve missed you so. Have you not missed me?”

Two Hawks took her hand in his, white and small against the fingers curled around it, pressing it against his chest.

“Not at all,” he said.

She caught the echoing glint of teasing in his eyes before he captured her mouth again with his, giving her his true answer. Then there was nothing beyond the meeting of their lips, the desire building inside her, and the thought of the cave that lanced through her like a fiery arrow. It would be chilly, far from comfortable, but he’d a blanket tied at his back. Of course they mustn’t, but . . .

Two Hawks stepped back, letting go her hand. “You are thinking of that cave. Stop.”

“How did you . . .?” Her face flamed as his eyes spoke to hers. He’d been thinking of it too. They should leave it, get far away.

Neither moved.

“You’ve been scouting?” she asked, because if she couldn’t be in his arms, then she wanted to know everything he’d seen and done for the past fortnight. Because she wanted to put off going back to the farm, where many eyes would be upon them and they must go shy of each other for fear the merest telling glance would strain forbearance.

The Doyles had promised Papa to keep an eye on them.

“Much scouting,” he said. “I was with Ahnyero—the blacksmith, Thomas Spencer. And with Skenandoah.”

“Skenandoah. He’s a war chief, yes? An old man?”

Two Hawks laughed, a soft sound in his throat. “Never let him hear you call him so, but yes, that one has seen seventy winters.”

Despite their light words, Anna’s insides had seized at his mention of “much scouting.” So far Two Hawks had never crossed paths with violence on these missions into the wilds. None that he’d admitted to. “You didn’t have to fight, did you?”

“Let us go and see my parents. I will tell all of it once.” Two Hawks took her hand to lead her down from the rocks, then hesitated, gazing at her head. “Did you have a cap?” She retrieved it from the rhododendron that had snagged it off her head but didn’t put it on. Two Hawks put a hand on her shoulder, his expression grave. “You must not come here again alone. Even here at the wood’s edge is not safe now.”

She blinked up at him, overwhelmed with loss. Of all the places on the farm, that clearing, that creek, that cave held her sweetest memories.

“I came here this morning to feel near you. I’m glad I did, because here you are, and we’ve had these moments together, stolen though they be.”

Two Hawks drew her close, pressing a kiss to her forehead. “One day we will no more steal them,” he told her, the words suffused with longing. “Father in Heaven—and yours on earth—willing.”



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