



MANY SPARROWS

A NOVEL

LORI BENTON

AUTHOR OF A FLIGHT OF ARROWS

Praise for
Many Sparrows

“Stunning. *Many Sparrows* is everything I want in a book: settings that spring to life, characters I love, rich historical context, heart-wrenching drama, timeless spiritual insights, and prose that reads like poetry. Lori Benton handles the conflicted eighteenth century with sensitivity in this tender tale of hope and fear, faith and doubt, loss and new life. Truly, this is an inspired masterpiece sure to stir the soul.”

—JOCELYN GREEN, award-winning author of *The Mark of the King*

“Intense. Enlightening. Lustrous. *Many Sparrows* is a lesson in early American history wrapped up in a beautiful romance, one not only of the human heart but of God’s heart for His creation. I cherished Clare and Jeremiah’s quietly blossoming love and deeply felt their struggle to trust and reach that painful yet unburdening place of surrender. Many sighs. And many thanks to the author.”

—TAMARA LEIGH, *USA Today* best-selling author
of *The Vexing* and *Lady Betrayed*

“Lori Benton vividly portrays characters wrestling with a God they can’t explain but desperately need to trust. *Many Sparrows* is a heart-searching story where love trumps hate, and hard-won forgiveness leads to soaring hope. Held captive to the end by the characters’ inescapable conflicts, I shouted for joy when I read the masterful ending. Truly, this is history made personal and believable.”

—MESU ANDREWS, author of *Miriam*

“Lori Benton weaves a beguiling tapestry of prose, pathos, and faith in *Many Sparrows*, a story as hopeful as it is heartrending. Shedding light on the ferocity of a mother’s love and the beauty and complexity of Shawnee culture and community, Benton’s boundless talent shines ever brighter as a rich and mesmerizing story unfolds. Each character is wonderfully authentic and honestly drawn, but it is Jeremiah’s devotion to God, the tension between his two worlds, and the vow he made to a grieving woman that caught my breath many times over. Exquisitely told, *Many Sparrows* reaches all the deep spaces of the heart, abiding long after the last page is turned.”

—REL MOLLET, RelzReviewz.com

“*Many Sparrows* is a beautifully threaded tapestry, rich with spiritual imagery and relatable characters, set in the boiling-pot world of the pre–Revolutionary Ohio-Kentucky frontier. With her customarily poetic voice and singular ability to bring eighteenth-century America to sparkling life, Benton weaves a story of fierce loyalty, breathtaking love, and the battles waged when faith is in crisis and survival is unlikely. Another burn-the-midnight-oil piece of literary fiction from one of the finest writers in inspirational fiction.”

—RACHEL MCMILLAN, author of the Herringford
and Watts series

MANY
SPARROWS



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The Wood's Edge

A Flight of Arrows



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All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version.

The characters and events in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons or events is coincidental.

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This book is dedicated to:

*Doree Crawford Ross, whose many-times
great-uncle, William Crawford, was busy on the
Ohio frontier in 1774, taking care of business.*

*And Jeanette Puryear Johnson, a native Virginian
who made sure her children were born so too.*

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?
and one of them shall not fall on the ground
without your Father. . . . Fear ye not therefore,
ye are of more value than many sparrows.

MATTHEW 10:29-31



MAY 1, 1774

OHIO RIVER NEAR YELLOW CREEK

Jeremiah Ring had witnessed death as often as the next man on the Allegheny frontier, but in all his thirty years he had encountered no deaths more dismaying than those confronting him now.

The dead had been laid on the wet spring earth near Joshua Baker's tavern and trading post, made as decent as such desecrated bodies could be. Now the living moved among them as men whose joints had aged a score of years, tongues held captive by grief and outrage. Jeremiah's friend, the Mingo, Logan, wept in silence beside the body of a young woman, his sister Koonay.

Jeremiah felt his gorge rise as it had at first sight of Koonay. Someone had draped a blanket over her after cutting her down from the tree in which her body was found hanging, but they'd all seen what was done to her. Koonay had been heavy with her second child, but not even the unborn had escaped this slaughter. No one had yet found her firstborn, a daughter, two years old, though they knew she'd been with her mother in one of the canoes that crossed the Ohio River to Baker's post, a thing done in friendship many times before.

It wasn't only Koonay whom Logan grieved. Jeremiah choked back his own sorrow, watching the man absorb the slaughter of nearly all the blood kin he'd had in this world—his older brother, his mother, his nephew, his sister, her unborn child. The few warriors who'd accompanied them, slain along with his kin, had been Logan's friends.

For the first time since he'd met the man, Jeremiah felt chary approaching Logan, stony-faced even as he wept for his dead. Logan's warriors backed away, leaving them alone.

"Cresap." Logan didn't look at Jeremiah as he spat the name in a strangled voice. "He has done this."

Jeremiah felt his gut twist. Michael Cresap, trader and land hunter, had made it plain he meant to slaughter any Indians unlucky enough to cross his path. This was due in large part to rumors being spread by Major John Connolly, commander at Fort Pitt, who'd gone so far as to assert the Ohio Indians—Shawnees and Mingos—were on the verge of striking the frontier settlements in open war. Cresap had decided to strike first. But had the man grown so hard, so heartless, to have done *this*?

Whoever was to blame, the senseless killings were bound to escalate an already tenuous situation on the Ohio. Until now, Mingos like Logan, along with many Shawnee chiefs including their principle chief, Cornstalk, had counseled against open warfare with the whites invading their hunting grounds south of the river. These whites weren't traders, who'd come among them for years, beginning with the French. Nor were they missionaries, who'd settled among the Delawares and now had whole villages of Christian converts. These men came to blaze the trees and cut them down, to put up cabins and corn, kill the game and fill the land with cattle and hogs; an endless stream of settlers spilling down the Ohio like floodwaters.

Fiery young warriors, seeing their hunting grounds taken, couldn't always be controlled by elders who urged peace. Even the Shawnee war chief, Puckeshinwah, who'd spent the past months in talks with the Indian agents at Fort Pitt, was ready to raise the war club in the face of Virginia Governor Dunmore's inability to stem the tide of illegal settlement down the Ohio.

Three days ago, Jeremiah had left the frustrated Puckeshinwah and his Shawnee delegation in Pittsburgh and descended the Ohio with Koonay's hus-

band, the white trader John Gibson, hoping to discover whether the alarming rumors being spread about Indian attacks had basis in fact. Assured by a band of Shawnees met on the river that their warriors hadn't been out killing whites, Gibson felt sure the rumors were false. Major Connolly was attempting to excite alarm, likely to further some land-grabbing scheme of Governor Dunmore's to snatch up the Ohio territory before Pennsylvania could claim it. Gibson had traded canoes for packhorses and continued overland toward the Shawnee towns on the Scioto River to do his trading.

Less sanguine about the rumors, Jeremiah had turned his canoe for Yellow Creek. Surely Logan's warriors weren't raiding across the river—he was known widely as a friend to the white man—but perhaps he'd know if others were.

Logan had been away at a hunting camp when Jeremiah arrived, but what caused a true disquiet was learning Logan's family had crossed to Baker's post, lured by the invitation of some white men promising whiskey. Distant shots had echoed across the river almost before the news was shared. Jeremiah had gone over by canoe with the warriors sent to investigate, only to be repelled by more gunfire. Runners had been sent to Logan's hunting camp to bring him in. That morning they'd finally made it ashore, to find the dead lying scalped and mutilated, the killers long fled.

Jeremiah sought for words to fill a mouth gone dusty. He wanted to comfort Logan, caution him not to rush to blame, say something to turn aside what could easily follow this atrocity—a full-scale border war. To mind rose memory of Koonay's lifeless face, beaten almost beyond recognition, and he thought it would take a rare man, faced with such violation, to turn aside from vengeance.

"Maybe it was Cresap. Maybe not. Surely the Indian agents at Pittsburgh will . . ."

Jeremiah fell silent when Logan's gaze lifted, knowing nothing he could say would matter. What he'd seen this day would haunt Jeremiah for his next

thirty years, should he live so long. So would what he read in the tormented eyes turned on him now. Where once had leapt the flame of friendship for Jeremiah's race, there blazed a hatred mere words could never douse.

Alarm crawled over Jeremiah's scalp. Not for himself. In Logan's eyes he was no longer a white man. His alarm was for every settler fool enough to linger west of the mountains after today.

Logan seemed to read his thoughts. Lifting his shoulders until he stood lance-straight, fingers curving round the tomahawk thrust through his sash, the Mingo bound Jeremiah with that burning gaze.

"For every life here taken from me," he said though lips set tight with rage, "by my hand ten whites will die. *Ten*. In your hearing this day I vow it. Go and tell what has been done here if you will. Speak for these ones who have no more voice. But do not promise peace. Not from Logan."

MAY 6, 1774

VIRGINIA COLONY, WESTERN FRONTIER

Clare Margaret Inglesby, twenty-six years of age and eight months with child, wondered how she'd come to this: trapped in a jolting wagon advancing into perilous wilderness.

She clenched her teeth to prevent them rattling out of her head and to hold back the flood of grievance amassing on her tongue. Though in danger of losing hairpins, cap, and sundry other trappings to the bucking of their conveyance, that was nothing to the sense of impending disaster that had dogged her every mile they'd traveled from the place they'd last called home, the Augusta County farm belonging to Clare's uncle, Alphas Litchfield.

In seven years of marriage, the Inglesbys had never owned a home of their own, despite all Philip's promises.

And likely never shall, she thought, as the forest west of Redstone Fort enclosed them in its dark embrace for a second day of misery. The men of Redstone had warned Philip the track they followed was unsuitable for a wagon's passage, suggesting they go by canoe instead.

Philip had dismissed their advice. He was in a hurry to reach Wheeling Settlement and hadn't the patience to wait for a canoe to be built. James Harrod and his settlers, whom Philip meant to join up with, were said to be in Wheeling, but only for a short time before they departed downriver. If they could reach Wheeling quickly, Philip had maintained, they were bound to catch Harrod's party.

Always certain he could find a way or make one was Philip, no matter the inevitable disappointment that followed.

Inevitable. Precisely when had she transformed into a woman of such dark presentiment? Had this nagging expectation of doom been her companion before she became Philip's wife?

Perhaps she'd made passing acquaintance with it then, even as she and Philip ignored her father's cautioning and wed under the cloud of devastation that had settled over Philip and his mother with the self-perpetrated death of his father and the ruination of their fortunes.

Certainly she'd done so five years later when, reduced to tenancy after repeated failures to regain said fortune, she and Philip had cast themselves upon the mercy of Clare's uncle and left Richmond, with its cobbled streets, bustling shops, and established society—and painful memories—to move onto Alphas Litchfield's vacant farm in the Shenandoah Valley.

There'd been no place else to go, for Philip had flatly refused to seek the aid of her parents yet again.

"Only for a while," he'd assured her. "Until we get our feet under us." A year. Maybe two.

Clare, who'd taken to farming with a liking that surprised no one more than herself, began to hope they'd found their place at last, however modest. Perhaps one day Uncle Alphas, who operated a gristmill in nearby Staunton, might be induced to sell the land to them.

Six months later the name *Harrod* fell from Philip's lips. Hot on its heels came *Kentucky*.

She'd opposed his intention of uprooting them again and making for the Ohio frontier, where land was fast being surveyed and claimed despite King George's Proclamation meant to halt settlement at the crest of the Allegheny Mountains.

"The wording of the Proclamation isn't clear on that point," Philip had

argued. "There are grants to be made to veterans of the French War, land that must be found west of the mountains." The Proclamation Line could never have been intended as a *permanent* demarcation, Philip had reasoned. "It's only a matter of time before the Ohio country is officially open to settlement. We must be among the first!"

Clare had shuddered in the face of his enthusiasm. Who could say what fate awaited them across the mountains, or who might be nearby to aid them when that fate—bedecked in war paint—chose to descend upon them, hatchets raised? Though her own troubles had risen large in recent years, she was aware enough of the wider world to know the land for which they made wasn't truly unclaimed.

Had it ever ended well when the worlds of red and white men collided?

Such collision had occurred just miles from Uncle Alphas's farm. Years ago, raiding Indians had stolen a young pregnant bride right out of her cabin while her husband was away. The husband had abandoned his farm and gone tearing off into the wilderness after his wife. Neither ever returned. Clare couldn't recall their name: Bud, perhaps? Or was it Bloom? Regardless, the story haunted her.

Now here she was pushing deep into territory where such unspeakable things still happened.

"Why not stay on Uncle Alphas's farm?" she'd pleaded. "He requires someone to work it, and he's welcomed us here as long as needs be."

"No, Clare." As always, Philip's eyes had looked beyond what rested safe in his hand to something more he wished to grasp. "I cannot abide it, farming another man's land."

"Is it the lack of ownership or the farming itself to which you object?" she'd asked, having her suspicions. "If the latter, how will it be better where land must first be cleared?"

"Better in every way!" Philip had countered, sidestepping her primary

question. “The land east of the mountains is overworked. But the west—the *west* is untouched. Virgin soil. The yield there will be bountiful beyond anything we’ve seen. More yield for less toil. *Think* of it, Clare.”

She thought of the hardships of wilderness travel. She thought of hacking out a forest of massive trees to lay bare a patch of that virgin soil. Of raising a cabin with a hatchet and their hands. Of bearing her child in a wilderness.

It was all she could do not to weep. “Why not wait, at least until after the baby is born?”

“If we wait, the best land will be claimed. You’ve heard how many settlers are passing through Pittsburgh and Redstone, all with the same aim in mind as have we—”

“As have *you*.” Philip never seemed to grasp that distinction. “And what about Indians?”

He had waved away that most abiding of her terrors as if it were a gnat. “It’s been peaceful for months. Likely there’s so many of us coming downriver now they’ve thought better of provoking us. They’ll give way. Move west. They always have. It’s inevitable.”

Inevitable.

Rehearsing that conversation and others like it for the hundredth time, still trying to find the thing she might have said—might still say—to divert this disastrous course her husband had set, Clare scanned the trail ahead. It leveled into a wider, straight stretch with no trees or rocks to maneuver the cumbersome wagon around. She swiveled to peer deeper into the canvas-covered bed where their son, Jacob, rode cushioned in a nest of cornmeal sacks, tucked between the few cherished furnishings they’d had room to bring along.

At four years old Jacob was, according to Philip’s mother, the spitting image of his father at that age, with a mop of pale curls and dark brown eyes. Clare had adored him at first sight, squalling and pink-faced, and loved him with a devotion that gripped her at times with its intensity.

Equally intense was the rage that rose at the thought of anyone, painted or otherwise, harming her son because of his father's choices—a rage that found its target in Philip, who she hoped was prepared to use the rifle he'd bought at the outset of this sojourn, which rode now behind the wagon seat. If it came to it, she would spend her last breath defending her child with the hatchet that lay next to it.

“Jacob, would you like—”

It was all Clare uttered of the question she'd meant to ask before the right front wheel hit a rut she hadn't seen coming.

Lurched airborne, she yelped in startlement before her bottom jarred on hard wood. Pain shot through her hips and back, then arced around her belly in a tightening, terrifying band reminiscent of the pangs she'd felt at Jacob's birth.

But it was far too soon for that.

Behind her Jacob cried out, but only in reaction to her outcry, for when she righted herself and turned she could see he was unharmed. Still it was the final straw.

“Stop the horses, Philip. Now.”

Philip drew back on the lines. The wagon lurched to a halt.

Birdsong and a nearby stream's steady chatter filled the silence as trail dust settled. “Clare, what is it?”

“I am in pain, Philip,” she said through gritted teeth and saw her husband's face contract.

“The baby? Is it coming?”

“No!” At least she hoped not. “I've simply had enough *jolting*.”

“I'll take it more slowly—”

“If we take it any more slowly we might as well be going backward.” Exactly the direction Clare wished to go.

Philip clenched the lines as the horses waited, stamping and blowing, looking no happier than she.

“Let Jacob climb down to walk for a spell. I’ll walk with him.” She bit back harsher words, rubbing at her aching lower back.

“Clare, I’m sorry this is hard on you. We . . .” Philip caught her gaze again and didn’t finish the statement. Perhaps he’d been tempted to say they would stop early and camp. But they’d barely made one tedious mile, this second day out from Redstone, and the sun was still high.

It was a relief to be on her feet once she’d finally clambered down to earth. Ahead, the wagon creaked and groaned with every rut and rock its iron-bound wheels surmounted. At least for the moment they weren’t attempting to scale a ridge, or descend one. The latter was most harrowing, requiring Philp to chain the rear wheels and Clare to pray the wagon didn’t go plunging down the side of a ravine, taking the horses and all their worldly belongings with it. They’d seen the wreck and ruin of more than one wagon, shattered among rocks and trees far below the trail.

“Mama? Mama! Let me show you something!”

Thrilled with his freedom, Jacob had been darting back and forth in the wagon’s wake, ferreting among ferns and rocks and the massive boles of trees lining the trail, blithely ignoring her warnings about snakes. Now he held out a grubby palm, in the center of which rested a flat triangle of stone, grooved at its base on two sides, one point elongated and sharp.

Clare’s mouth went dry.

“Give me that.” She took the arrow point from him, intending to throw it into the woods as soon as Jacob was distracted, which occurred in short order when Philip called back to them.

“Jacob! Care to run ahead of the wagon and throw aside these rocks from the path?”

Fear came in a cold wave. Clutching the arrowhead, Clare grabbed her son before he could race away. “Philip, no. It’s not safe, his being ahead on the trail.”

Philip halted the horses and leaned out to view them past the canvas. "You worry excessively, Clare. He'll be in plain sight the whole while. I'll not let him range far ahead."

Clare felt the vibration of pent-up energy radiating through their son's shoulder. Jacob gazed up with hopeful eyes. "Please, Mama? I can help."

Though it went against her every instinct, she released him.

"All right, but be watchful." To her husband she called, "*Do* keep an eye on him, Philip. There may be snakes in the way."

The arrowhead bit into her clenched fist. *Or worse.*

"With all the racket we're making? I should think we've cleared the path of snakes and anything else for a mile at least." Philip smiled at her, a grin that had charmed her years ago, smoothing over many an initial disappointment and heartbreak.

It had long since lost its power to reassure.

Moving to where she could glimpse her son whenever he ran to the track's edge to toss a stone into the underbrush, Clare cupped her hands around her belly, feeling the babe stir beneath petticoats and shift.

Thankfully she thrived with the carrying of children. With Jacob she'd been ill nary a day, still able to complete her chores and walk the miles to Uncle's mill the evening prior to his birth. She'd enjoyed similar robust health with this one and expected there was time enough to reach Harrod's Kentucky settlement before her childbed was upon her.

A month, if she was lucky.

A month of this. Her gaze failed to pierce the gloom of the forest canopy around them. Childbearing didn't daunt her, but that impenetrable forest stole the strength from her knees and the breath from beneath her half-laced stays. She wished she'd taken the hatchet from the wagon when she'd clambered down. She'd feel better with it clenched at her side. Where she wanted Jacob to be. *Now.*

“Jacob!” She raised her voice to carry over the wagon’s rumbling. “Enough rock-throwing. Come back to me!”

She saw him toss a final rock and turn to scamper past the wagon, flashing a grin up at Philip as he did so. Her heart seized as his tiny frame passed by the rolling front wheel. He pressed nimbly through the space between it and the immense trunk of a tree, clambered over a sloping rock embedded in the trail, and slipped through the tight spot just before the heavy rear wheel reached it.

Clare drew one easing breath before calamity ensued.

The horses must have veered, for the rear wheel rode up high on the rock the front wheel had missed and crashed down on the other side. There was a crack of breaking timber before the wheel came away from the axle, hit the tree and spun into the forest, missing knocking Jacob flat by inches.

Clare rushed forward as the wagon tipped with a splintering, clanging, and thudding. Canvas split and contents spilled. Something struck her shoulder as, shielding Jacob, she got a hand on his arm and yanked him backward.

They went stumbling and reeling until they tangled in her petticoat and fell in a heap on the trail.

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