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SHARPE'S TIGER
By Bernard Cornwell

The Sharpe novels
(in chronological order)

SHARPE'S TIGER
Richard Sharpe and the Siege of Seringapatam (1799)

SHARPE'S TRIUMPH
Richard Sharpe and the Batde of Assaye, (1803)

SHARPE'S RIFLES
Richard Sharpe and the French Invasion of Galicia (1809)

SHARPE'S EAGLE
Richard Sharpe and the Talavera Campaign (1809)

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The Starbuck Chronicles
REBEL
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THE BLOODY GROUND

HarperCollinsPublishers

BERNARD CORNWELL

Sharpe's Tiger

Richard Sharpe and the Siege of Seringapatam, 1799

The Author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work

ISBN 649035 2

Map by Ken Lewis

Set in Postscript Monotype Baskerville by

Rowland Phototypesetting Ltd,

Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Caledonian International Book Manufacturing Ltd, Glasgow

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Sharpe's Tiger is for

Muir Sutherland and Malcolm Craddock, with many thanks

CHAPTER 1

It was funny, Richard Sharpe thought, that there were no vultures in England. None that he had seen. He thought about vultures a lot, and he had a lot of time to think because he was a soldier. He and Mary. Run away. Desert. He was thinking about it now, and it was an odd thing

the white rib sticking out of the faded red cloth. 'You could hang your hat on that,' Hawthorn said. Now he was in India. He did not know why he was invading Mysore and how did he participate. Though where to run in India? Half the natives seemed to be in British pay and those who

would be yanking the guts out of your belly like a bunch of blackbirds tugging worms out of a man's back. That was why he was thinking about vultures. He was thinking that he wanted to run, but he couldn't. The vultures were always there, sometimes circling on long wings that tilted to the sun.

And this hot March day promised food in abundance and the vultures seemed to sense it. Ahead, from the low rise of land where a second group of horsemen was silhouetted against the sky.

'A bleeding camel farted, what the hell do you think it was?' a corporal answered. 'It was a bloody awful shot, ' Sharpe said. 'My mother could lay a gun better than that.' 'I didn't think you had a mother, ' Private Garrard said. 'Everyone's got a mother, Tom. ' 'Not Sergeant Hakeswill, ' Garrard said, then spat a mix of dust and spittle. The colour of the ground. Sharpe wondered whether Tom Garrard would run with him. Two men might survive better than

one or two Indian languages which could be useful if he and Tom did run. The cavalry off to Sharpe's right spurred into a trot again and disappeared beyond the horizon. 'No talking now!' Sergeant Hakeswill's voice screeched suddenly. 'Save your godless brains.' 'Not me, Sarge. Ain't got the breath. '

'You ain't got the breath?' Sergeant Hakeswill came hurrying down the company's ranks anyway. 'The Sergeant's malevolent eyes flicked to Sharpe. 'Was it you talking, Sharpie?' 'Not me, Sarge. ' You ain't got orders to talk. If the King wanted you to have a conversation I'd have t Sharpe handed his musket to the Sergeant. It was Hakeswill's arrival in the company t Yet to look at Hakeswill was to see the perfect soldier. It was true that his oddly lu

Sharpe stood motionless as the Sergeant untied the scrap of rag that Sharpe used to pr The men shuffled their feet together and straightened as the three officers galloped p 'You'll not find 'owt wrong with it, Sarge, ' Sharpe said. Hakeswill, still standing at attention, did an elaborate about turn, his right boot th 'No, Sarge. ' 'No, Sarge. No, you did not. Flogging offence that, Sharpie. ' Hakeswill's right cheek

missile served to distract Hakeswill who turned to watch as the ball rolled to a stop. 'Poor b The three officers had stopped their horses at the head of the column and now used tel 'I'm a Scot, ' a sour voice spoke from the rear rank. 'I heard that! Who said that?' Hakeswill glared at the company, his face twitching unc

womenfolk, so if so much as one of you turns his back I'll have the skin off the lot of you! E The Sergeant waited for an answer and eventually Private Mallinson offered one. 'The o 'The officers! The officers!' Hakeswill spat his disgust at the answer. 'Officers are

gruff with emotion, 'that's what I am, marked by God!' 'Mad as a hare, ' Tom Garrard muttered. 'Did you speak, Sharpie!' Hakeswill whipped around to stare at Sharpe, but Sharpe was The compliment to Sharpe had astonished all the Light Company. 'He's in a rare good mo I heard that, Private Garrard!' Hakeswill shouted over his shoulder. 'Got ears in the Lieutenant William Lawford curbed his horse and nodded at Sergeant Hakeswill. Lawford 'No, sir. Must save their breath, sir. Too bleeding hot to talk, sir, and besides, the

waste breath on chit-chat, not when there are black-faced heathens to kill, sir. Says so in th 'If you say so, Sergeant, ' Lawford said, unwilling to provoke a confrontation, then h Ensign Fitzgerald, who was only eighteen, strolled back from the column's head. He was 'Saving their breath, Mister Fitzgerald, sir, ' Hakeswill snapped. 'They've got breath enough to sing a dozen songs and still beat the enemy, ' Fitzgerald 'We'll beat the bastards, sir, ' Tom Garrard said. 'Then let me hear you sing, ' Fitzgerald demanded. 'Can't bear silence. We'll have a c

desire, was being steered towards Bessie the cow, the whole company was bawling the song enthu They never did reach the end. Captain Morris, the Light Company's commanding officer, 'Half-companies it is, sir! At once, sir. Light Company! Stop your bleeding noise! You Hakeswill's face shuddered as the front ten ranks of the company marched twenty paces

Major Shee, the Irishman who commanded the 33rd while its Colonel, Arthur Wellesley, h 'Loud and clear, sir!' Hakeswill shouted. 'Shot, sir! Shot like the coward he is. ' He 'Scotsmen, ' a voice growled behind Sharpe, but too softly for Hakeswill to hear. 'Irish, ' another man said. 'We ain't none of us cowards, ' Garrard said more loudly. Sergeant Green, a decent man, hushed him. 'Quiet, lads. I know you'll do your duty. ' The front of the column was marching now, but the rearmost companies were kept waiting

needed more oxen to carry their own supplies. Lieutenant Lawford had once remarked that the enemy was the Tippoo Sultan. The tyrant of Mysore and the man who was presumably directed by the British. Captain Morris leaned on his saddle's pommel. He took off his cocked hat and wiped sweat from his forehead. 'Forward half-company!' Hakeswill shouted. 'Forward march! Smartly now!' Lieutenant Lawford, given supervision of the last half-company of the battalion, waited for the signal.

The redcoats inarched with unloaded muskets for the enemy was still a long way off and Sharpe was ignorant of the Lieutenant's glance and would have laughed had he been told that the British were not ready for a fight.

pany was now commanded by Captain Morris who did not care how clever or quick his men were, only that they would fight. Except he would not run today. Today there would be a fight and Sharpe was happy at that. The seven battalions marched towards the ridge. They were all in columns of half-companies.

the British troops but instead marched bare-legged. They did not wear the leather stocks either. An enemy cannonball at last found a target and Sharpe saw a half-company of the 33rd British Battalion. 'When are we going to load?' Private Mallinson asked Sergeant Green. 'When you're told to, lad, when you're told to. Not before. Oh, sweet Jesus!' This last was a curse. 'So what are we bleeding supposed to do?' Mallinson complained. 'Just march straight up the ridge.'

'If you're told to,' Sergeant Green said, 'that's what you'll do. Now hold your bloody muskets.' 'Quiet back there!' Hakeswill called from the half-company in front. 'This ain't a bloody joke. Sharpe wanted to be ready and so he untied the rag from his musket's lock and stuffed it into the barrel. Then he forgot any prospect of deserting, for suddenly the landscape ahead was filling with smoke. 'Thirty-third!' a voice shouted from somewhere ahead. 'Line to the left!' 'Line to the left!' Captain Morris echoed the shout. 'You heard the officer!' Sergeant Hakeswill bawled. 'Line to the left! Smartly now!' 'On the double!' Sergeant Green called. The leading half-company of the 33rd had halted and every other half-company angled to follow.

swinging door, the column, that had been marching directly towards the ridge, was now turning to the right. 'Two files!' a voice shouted. 'Two files!' Captain Morris echoed. 'You heard the officer!' Hakeswill shouted. 'Two files! On the right! Smartly now!' All the running half-companies now split themselves into two smaller units, each of two files. The Light Company was the last into position. There were a few seconds of shuffling as they got into their positions. 'You may load, Major Shee!' That was Colonel Wellesley's voice. He had galloped his horse up to the front. 'Load!' Captain Morris shouted at Hakeswill. Sharpe felt suddenly nervous as he dropped the musket from his shoulder to hold it across his lap.

'Handle cartridge!' Sergeant Hakeswill shouted, and each man of the Light Company pulled out his cartridge. 'Prime!' Seventy-six men trickled a small pinch of powder from the opened cartridges into the barrels. 'Cast about!' Hakeswill called and seventy-six right hands released their musket stocks. 'Draw ramrod!' Hakeswill shouted and Sharpe tugged the ramrod free of the three brass rings.

'Ram cartridge!' Hakeswill snapped. Seventy-six men thrust down, forcing the ball, wadding and powder into the barrels. 'Return ramrod!' Sharpe tugged the ramrod up, listening to it scrape against the barrel. 'Order arms!' Captain Morris called and the Light Company, now with loaded muskets, stood at attention. 'Talio!' Sergeant Major Bywaters's voice called from the centre of the line. 'Fix bayonets!' 'More of them than us,' Garrard muttered, staring at the enemy. 'The buggers look steady. The enemy indeed looked steady. The leading troops had momentarily paused to allow the

men stoically endured the punishment as their officers made certain that the column was tight. Sharpe licked his dry lips. So these, he thought, were the Tippoo's men. Fine-looking. 'Private Sharpe!' Hakeswill's sudden scream was loud enough to drown the cheer that th. 'Nothing wrong with it,' Sharpe protested. He was in the front rank and had to turn an. Hakeswill snatched the musket and gleefully presented it to Captain Morris. 'See, sir!

thought, sir! Bastard sold his flint, sir! Sold it to an 'eathen darkie.' Hakeswill's face twi. Morris peered at the flint. 'Sell the flint, did you, Private?' he asked in a voice th. 'No, sir.' 'Silence!' Hakeswill screamed into Sharpe's face, spattering him with spittle. 'Lying. 'It is a flogging offence,' Morris said with a tone of satisfaction. He was as tall an. 'Nothing wrong with that flint, sir,' Sharpe insisted. Morris held the flint in the palm of his right hand. 'Looks like a chip of stone to me. 'Common grit, sir,' Hakeswill said. 'Common bloody grit, sir, no good to man or beast. 'Might I?' A new voice spoke. Lieutenant William Lawford had dismounted to join Morris.

steel. Even in the day's bright sunlight there was an obvious spark. 'Seems like a good flint. Morris gave Hakeswill a furious look then turned on his heel and strode back towards h. 'Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.' Lawford and Fitzgerald walked away as Hakeswill, humiliated, thrust the musket back at. 'I'll have the leather as well, Sergeant,' Sharpe said and, once he had the flint's se. Hakeswill turned back.

'You want this, Sergeant?' Sharpe called. He took a chip of stone out of his pocket. He. 'Worth being in the army to see that,' Garrard said, and all around him men laughed to. 'Eyes to your front, lads!' Ensign Fitzgerald called. The Irish Ensign was the younges. Sharpe pushed back into his file. He brought up the musket, folded the leather over th.

just a hundred paces away. They were shouting rhythmically and pausing occasionally to let a t. 'Cutting it fine, aren't we?' a man complained. 'Wait lads, wait,' Sergeant Green said calmly. The enemy now filled the landscape ahead. They came in a column formed of sixty ranks. He could see the enemy's faces now. They were dark, with black moustaches and oddly wh. 'Thirty-third!' Colonel Wellesley's voice called out sharply from beneath the regiment. Sharpe put his right foot behind his left so that his body half turned to the right, t.

it seemed as though the whole British line had half turned and the sudden movement, coming fro. Seven hundred muskets came up to seven hundred shoulders. The muskets were tipped with. Arthur Wellesley had waited six years for this moment. He was twenty-nine years old an. Colonel Jean Gudin sighed, then, for the thousandth time in the last hour, he fanned h.

Gudin's French for the Tippoo's Persian tongue. The Tippoo did understand some French and he s. 'Colonel?' The Tippoo was a short man inclined to plumpness, with a moustached face, w. 'It might be wise, Your Majesty,' Gudin suggested hesitantly, 'if we advanced cannon a.

then the British regiment would be forced to shrink into square and thus deny three quarters o. The Tippoo shook his head. 'We shall sweep that scum away with our infantry, Gudin, th. 'And if it does not please Allah?' Gudin asked, and suspected that his interpreter wou. 'Then we shall fight them from the walls of Seringapatam,' the Tippoo answered, and tu. 'If Allah pleases,' Gudin said resignedly. Officially he was an adviser to the Tippoo,

fighting on his side this afternoon, or else he was so consumed by his famous victory over the

Gudin slapped at flies again. It was time, he thought, to go home. Much as he liked In
The enemy regiment waited with levelled muskets. The Tippoo's men cheered and charged
Gudin wondered whether his woman in Seringapatam would like Provence, or whether Provence would
For, beneath him, the killing had begun.
'Fire!' Colonel Wellesley shouted.

Seven hundred men pulled their triggers and seven hundred flints snapped forward onto
The brass butt of the gun slammed into Sharpe's shoulder. He had aimed the weapon at a
'Go on, boys!' Sergeant Green called. 'Steady now! Don't run! Walk!'
'Damn your eagerness!' Ensign Fitzgerald shouted at the company. 'Hold your ranks! Thi
The regiment marched into the musket smoke which stank like rotting eggs. Lieutenant L
The front rank advanced clear of the stinking smoke fog and suddenly there was nodiing
The seven hundred lead balls had converged on the front of the column to strike home w

and dying men who writhed on the ground. The rearward ranks of the enemy could not advance over
'On the double! On the double! Don't let them stand!' Colonel Wellesley called.
'Give them a cheer, boys!' Sergeant Green called. 'Go for them now! Kill the buggers!'
Sharpe had no thought of deserting now, for now he was about to fight. If there was an
Sharpe howled as he ran. The sepoy battalions were closing up on the left, but there w
The Tippoo's infantry fled. A few, the lucky few, scrambled

back up the ridge, but most were caught in the open ground between the 33rd and the ridge's sl
Sharpe advanced no farther. Orner men ran past, screaming as they pursued the fleeing

of the choking, bubbling sound that the officer was making as he died. Sharpe ripped off the y
The man gasped, made a choking sound, then his whole body jerked as his heart finally
The cavalry was finishing off the remnants of the Tippoo's infantry. The Tippoo himsel

Sharpe twisted the bayonet off his musket, wiped it clean on the dead man's sash, scoo
If only he could decide where it would be safe to run.

CHAPTER 2

Sergeant Obadiah Hakeswill glanced about to see what his men were doing. Just about al
'See this, Hakeswill?' Fitzgerald, sublimely unaware of Hakeswill's glowering thoughts
'See what, sir?'

'Damned blade is made in Birmingham! Will you credit that? Birmingham! Says so on the
Hakeswill dutifully examined the legend on the blade, then fingered the sabre's pommel
'Nonsense!' Fitzgerald said cheerfully. 'Best rubies! Bit small, maybe, but I doubt th
If you did kill him, Hakeswill thought sourly as he stumped away from the exuberant En
She was a rare beauty, Mary Bickerstaff. A beauty amongst a pack of ugly, rancid women

who had won the brutal lottery that had taken place on the night before the battalion had sail
The women spread out among the dead and dying Mysore-ans. If anything they were even m

the air so that they choked slowly as their piss-soaked legs jerked in the death dance of the
A groan sounded near Hakeswill and the Sergeant snapped out of his reverie to see a ti
The man blinked slowly, then said something in his own language.

'I'll let you live, you bugger,' Hakeswill promised, leering at the wounded man. 'Not t
The man must have understood for his hand fluttered weakly towards his chest.
'Good boy, now,' Hakeswill said, smiling again, then his face jerked in its involuntar

some coins to his chest with a cotton sash. He undid the sash and pocketed the handful of copper. He saw Sharpe kneeling beside a body and hurried across. 'Got a sword there, Sharpie?' 'I killed the man, Sergeant.' Sharpe looked up. 'Doesn't bleeding matter, does it, lad? You ain't permitted to carry a sword. Officer?' Sharpe edged away from the sword and stood up. 'I ain't got a quarrel with you, Sergeant.' 'But you do, boy, you do.' Hakeswill grimaced as his face went into spasm. 'And you know it.' Sharpe backed away from the sword. 'I ain't got a quarrel with you,' he repeated stubbornly. 'I think our quarrel is called Mrs Bickerstaff,' Hakeswill said, and grinned when Sharpe

'Mister Lawford ain't nothing to me,' Sharpe said. 'That's what you say, but my eyes tell different.' Hakeswill giggled. 'Sweet on each other?' 'She ain't your business,' Sharpe said. 'Ain't my business! Oh, listen to it!' Hakeswill sneered, then prodded the sword forward. 'Sergeant Bickerstaff's dead,' Sharpe protested. 'So she needs a man!' Hakeswill said. 'And a sergeant's widow doesn't get rogered by a soldier?' 'She can choose who she wants,' Sharpe insisted. 'Choose, Sharpie? Choose?' Hakeswill laughed. 'Women don't choose, you soft bugger. Women choose for you.' Sharpe swore uselessly at Hakeswill's back, then turned as

a woman hailed him from among the heaped bodies that had been the leading ranks of the Tippoo's army. He walked towards her and, as ever, was struck by the beauty of the girl. She had black hair and blue eyes. 'You.' She spat, then crouched again to the body she was searching. 'He can't touch you, Richard.' 'The army's not like that. And you know it.' 'You've just got to be clever,' Mary insisted. She was a soldier's daughter who had grown up in the army. Sharpe laughed. 'Me? A sergeant? That'll be the day, lass. I made corporal once, but that's all.' 'You can be a sergeant,' she insisted, 'and you should be a sergeant. And Hakeswill can't touch you.' Sharpe shrugged. 'It ain't me he wants to touch, lass, but you.'

Mary had been cutting a tiger-striped tunic from a dead man, but now she paused and looked at Sharpe. 'Married!' Sharpe said, flustered by the word. Mary stood. 'It ain't easy being a widow in the army, Richard. Every man reckons you're a widow.' 'Aye, I know it's hard,' Sharpe said, frowning. He stared at her as he thought about the girl. 'Me too.' She smiled and, awkwardly, Sharpe smiled back. For a moment neither had anything to say.

handed Sharpe a red stone, half the size of a hen's egg. 'You reckon it's a ruby?' Mary asked. Sharpe tossed the stone up and down. 'I reckon it's glass, lass,' he said gently, 'just like the one I had.' 'I'll more than watch you, Dick Sharpe,' she said happily and put her arm into his. She was a soldier's daughter. While on the edges of the killing place, where the looted and naked bodies lay scattered about, the allied armies camped a quarter of a mile short of the place where the dead lay. The common soldiers had no tents. They would sleep on the ground close to their fires,

the throat-burning skins of arrack which could make a man drunk even faster than rum. Some of the tents were green. Captain Morris expected to visit the famous green tents of Naig, the bhinjanie whose son was a sergeant. 'Anything I should know?' 'Not a thing, sir. Just like last week's, sir. Ensign Hicks made up the roster, sir. A list of names.' 'You mean he does what you tell him to do?' Morris asked drily. 'Learning his trade, sir, learning his trade, just like a good little ensign should. Ugh.' Morris ignored the sly reference to Fitzgerald and instead dipped his quill in ink and wrote. 'They needs the practice, sir.' 'And you need your sleep, Sergeant?' 'Punishment book, sir,' Hakeswill said, offering the leather-bound ledger and taking back the quill. Morris leafed through the book. 'No floggings this week?'

'Will be soon, sir, will be soon.'

'Private Sharpe escaped you today, eh?' Morris laughed. 'Losing your touch, Obadiah.'

'I ain't losing nothing, sir,' Hakeswill answered equably. 'If the rat don't die first'

'Are we done?' Morris asked when he had signed the sick report, but then a tactful cou

'Busy, Charles?' Lawford asked Morris.

'Always pleased to see you, William,' Morris said sarcastically, 'but I was about to g

'There's a soldier to see you,' Lawford explained. 'Man's got a request, sir.'

Morris sighed as though he was too busy to be bothered with such trifles, but then he

'Private Sharpe, sir.'

'Troublemaker, sir,' Hakeswill put in.

'He's a good man,' Lawford insisted hotly, but then decided his small experience of th

'Let him in,' Morris said. He sipped from a tin mug of arrack while Sharpe negotiated

stood to attention beneath the ridge pole. 'Hat off, boy!' Hakeswill snapped. 'Don't you know

Sharpe snatched off his shako.

'Well?' Morris asked.

For a second it seemed that Sharpe did not know what to say, but then he cleared his o

Morris grinned. 'Marry! Found yourself a bibbi, have you?' He sipped more arrack, then

'Full complement, sir! No room for more, sir! Full up, sir. Not a vacancy to be had. S

'This girl's on the complement,' Lieutenant Lawford intervened. 'She's Sergeant Bicker

Morris stared up at Sharpe. 'Bickerstaff,' he said vaguely as though the name was stra

'Yes, sir,' Hakeswill answered.

'Didn't know the man was even married,' Morris said. 'Official wife, was she?'

'Very official, sir,' Hakeswill answered. 'On the company strength, sir. Colonel's sig

Morris sniffed and looked up at Sharpe again. 'Why on earth do you want to marry, Shar

Sharpe looked embarrassed. 'Just do, sir,' he said lamely.

'Can't say I disapprove of marriage,' Morris said. 'Steadies a man does marriage, but

'Very good advice, sir,' Hakeswill said, his face twitching. 'Words of wisdom, sir. SH

'Mary Bickerstaff is a good woman, sir,' Lieutenant Lawford said. The Lieutenant, whom

Morris cut a cigar and lit it from the guttering candle that burned on his camp table.

'Half bibbi and half Christian, sir,' Hakeswill said, 'but she had a good man for her

Morris offered Hakeswill a cynical glance. 'Don't be absurd, Sergeant. Most army widow

'But Jem Bickerstaff was a friend of mine, sir,' Hakeswill said, sniffing again and ev

'He bloody hated you!' Sharpe could not resist the words.

'Quiet in front of an officer!' Hakeswill shouted. 'Speak when you're spoken to, boy,

Morris frowned as though Hakeswill's loud voice was giving him a headache. Then he loo

Sharpe hesitated, wondering whether he should thank the Captain for the laconic words,

thing, Hakeswill was bawling in his ear. 'About turn! Smartly now! Hat on! Quick march! One tw

Morris waited till Sharpe was gone, then looked up at Lawford. 'Nothing more, Lieutena

Lawford guessed that he too was dismissed. 'You will talk to Major Shee, Charles?' he

'I just said so, didn't I?' Morris glared up at the Lieutenant.

Lawford hesitated, then nodded. 'Good night, sir,' he said and ducked under the muslin

Morris waited until he was certain that both men were out of earshot. 'Now what do we

'Tell the silly bugger that Major Shee refused permission, sir.'

'And Willie Lawford will talk to the Major and find that he didn't. Or else he'll go s

Hakeswill sat on a stool opposite the camp table. He scratched his head, glanced into

Morris looked dubious. 'The girl will only find herself another protector,' he said. '

'What me, sir? No, sir. Not at all, sir. I'll have the girl, sir, just you watch, and

Morris stood, pulled on his jacket and picked up his hat and sword. 'You think I'd sha

'Pox, sir? Me, sir?' Hakeswill stood. 'Not me, sir. Clean as

a whistle, I am, sir. Cured, sir. Mercury.' His face twitched. 'Ask the surgeon, sir, he'll te

Morris hesitated, thinking of Mary Bickerstaff. He thought a great deal about Mary Bickerstaff. 'So when will you free Mrs Bickerstaff of Sharpe?' Morris asked, buckling his sword belt. 'Tonight, sir. With your help. You'll be back here by midnight, I dare say?'

'I might.'

'If you are, sir, we'll do him. Tonight, sir.'

Morris clapped the cocked hat on his head, made sure his purse was in his coat-tail pocket. 'Sir!' Hakeswill stood to attention for a full ten seconds after the Captain was gone. Nineteen miles to the south lay a temple. It was an ancient place, deep in the country. The temple was surrounded by a wall through which one gate led, though the wall was not high. But this night, the night after battle, a man entered the temple. He was tall and thin.

and the godly lessons that had been whipped into his young, earnest soul had never been forgotten. His soul was old in experience, but even so it was offended by the idols that reflected the light. He wore the red coat and the tartan kilt of the King's Scotch Brigade, a Highland regiment.

It was his search for that particular answer that had brought Colonel McCandless to the temple. He climbed the steps to the central shrine, passed between its vast, squat pillars and entered the inner shrine. 'If you were not in that uniform,' a voice said a few moments later, 'I would think you were not here.' 'The uniform does not disqualify me from prayer, any more than does your uniform,' the man replied. The man who faced McCandless was younger than the Scot, but every inch as tall and lean.

years before, he had been an officer in one of McCandless's sepoy battalions and it was that officer who had been killed. 'Still alive, and a full colonel now,' McCandless answered in the same tongue. 'Shall I see you?' Appah Rao grunted, then sat opposite McCandless. Behind him, beyond the sunken courtyard, the Tippoos' General was dressed in his master's tiger-striped tunic, but over it he wore a red coat. 'I was,' McCandless said. Malavelly was the nearest village to where the battle had been fought. 'So you know what happened?' 'I know the Tippoos sacrificed hundreds of your people,' McCandless said. 'Your people, sir.'

Appah Rao dismissed the distinction. 'The people follow him.'

'Because they have no choice. They follow, but do they love him?'

'Some do,' Appah Rao answered. 'But what does it matter? Why should a ruler want his people to love him?' McCandless smiled, tacitly yielding the argument which was not important. He did not know the answer.

'I have a gift,' McCandless said, changing the subject, 'for your Rajah.'

'He is in need of gifts.'

'Then this comes with our most humble duty and high respect.' McCandless took a leather bag from his pocket.

it. 'Tell your Rajah,' McCandless said, 'that it is our desire to place him back on his throne.'

'And who will stand behind his throne?' Appah Rao demanded. 'Men in red coats?'

'You will,' McCandless said, 'as your family always did.'

'And you?' the General asked. 'What do you want?'

'To trade. That is the Company's business: trade. Why should we become rulers?'

Appah Rao sneered. 'Because you always do. You come as merchants, but you bring guns and powder.'

'We come to trade,' McCandless insisted equably. 'And what would you prefer, General?'

And that, McCandless knew, was the question that had brought Appah Rao to this temple. Appah Rao had not answered the Scotsman's question, so McCandless phrased it differently. 'There are others,' Appah Rao said evasively.

'And the rest?'

Appah Rao paused. 'Fed to his tigers,' he eventually admitted.

'And soon, General,' McCandless said softly, 'there will be no more Hindu officers in the Company's service.' Appah Rao shrugged. 'There are already Frenchmen in Seringapatam. They demand nothing more.'

'Yet,' McCandless said ominously. 'But let me tell you what stirs in the wide world, G
'No.'
'Then let me translate for you. One of our agents copied the letter before it was sent
'I believe you,' Appah Rao said, ignoring the proffered letter. 'But why should I fear
'Because Bonaparte's ally is the Tippoo and Bonaparte's ambition is to take away the C

ship. Bonaparte needs allies in this land, and without Mysore he will have none.'

Appah Rao frowned. 'This Bonaparte, he is a Muslim?'

'He's friendly to Muslims, but he has no religion that we know of

'If he's friendly to Muslims,' Appah Rao observed, 'why should he not be friendly to H

'Because it is to the Muslims that he looks for allies. He will reward them.'

Appah Rao shifted on the hard floor. 'Why should we not let this Bonaparte come and de

'Because then he will have made the Tippoo all powerful, and after that, General, how

'And you will restore the Wodeyars?'

'I promise it.'

Appah Rao looked past McCandless, gazing up at the small light reflecting off the sere

'A mistake,' McCandless admitted candidly. 'We thought he could be trusted to keep his

bitten by a snake once does not let the snake live a second time.'

Appah Rao brooded for a while. Bats flickered in the courtyard. The two men in the gat

Appah Rao finally shook his head, then raised an arm and beckoned. One of the two men

McCandless looked into Kunwar Singh's eyes. 'Do your job well, my friend. Your master

Kunwar Singh smiled and then, at a signal from Appah Rao, he took a roll of paper from

McCandless leaned forward. The scroll was a map and it showed the big island in the Ri

summer palace and the mausoleum where the fearsome Hyder Ali was entombed.

Appah Rao drew a knife from his belt. He tapped the island's northern bank where it fr

'We have cannon too,' McCandless said.

Appah Rao ignored the comment. Instead he tapped the knife against the western rampart

Appah Rao shrugged. 'Hundreds of pounds of powder, McCandless, just waiting for you. A

'So we must attack anywhere but in the west?'

'Anywhere but from the west,' Appah Rao said. 'The new inner wall' - he demonstrated o

'I never expected you to,' McCandless said. 'You have my thanks, General.'

'I don't want your thanks. I want my Rajah back. That is why I came. And if you disapp

Tm a Scot.'

'But you would still be my enemy,' Appah Rao said, then turned away, but paused and lo

'I will tell General Harris.'

'Then I shall look to see you in Seringapatam,' Appah Rao said heavily.

'Me and thousands of others,' McCandless said.

'Thousands!' Appah Rao's tone mocked the claim. 'You may have thousands, Colonel, but

McCandless burned the copy of Bonaparte's letter, waited another half-hour and then, a

Few men of the 33rd slept that night for the excitement of fighting and beating the Ti

Mary Bickerstaff sat with Sharpe and listened patiently to the tales. She was accustom

'Nothing, lass.'

'Are you worried about Captain Morris?'

'If he says no, we just ask Major Shee,' Sharpe said with a confidence he did not enti

temporarily appointed as one of the army's two deputy commanders and had thus shrugged off all

'So what's worrying you?'

'I told you. Nothing.'

'You're miles away, Richard.'

He hesitated. 'Wish I was.'

Mary tightened the grip of her hand on his fingers, then lowered her voice to something. He leaned away from the fire, trying to make a small private space where they could talk. 'Don't do it!' Mary said fiercely, but laying a hand on his cheek as she spoke. Some of the men were looking on. 'Not if we run far enough.' 'We?' she asked cautiously. 'I'd want you, lass.'

Mary took hold of one of his hands and squeezed it. 'Listen,' she hissed. 'Work to become a sergeant. Sharpe smiled and traced a finger down her cheek. 'You're mad, Mary. I love you, but you're mad.'

'I can teach you,' Mary said. Sharpe glanced at her with some surprise. He had never known she could read and the knowledge was a great advantage. 'But you can be a sergeant,' Mary insisted, 'and a good one. But don't run, love. What if you get caught? Is that the lovebirds?' Sergeant Hakeswill's mocking voice cut through their conversation. Sharpe and Mary sat up and disentangled their fingers as the Sergeant stalked through the camp. 'I can marry?' Sharpe asked eagerly. Hakeswill threw a sly glance over his shoulder as he led Sharpe towards the picketed line. Sharpe felt his hopes crumbling. At that moment he hated Hakeswill more than ever, but he had to play along. 'I'll tell you why, Sharpie,' Hakeswill said. 'And stand still, boy! When a sergeant orders you to stand still!

still! Tenshun! That's better, lad. Bit of respect, like what is proper to show to a sergeant. I've heard of him,' Sharpe said. 'Fat bugger, Sharpie, he is. Fat and rich. Rides a hefephant, he does, and he's got a fine horse.'

the Indian officers! Naig tells me they'll pay a month's wages for a white. You following me, Sharpe said nothing. It had taken all his self discipline not to hit the Sergeant, and he was not a man to let himself be provoked. 'I'll find a place and time,' Sharpe said angrily. 'Place and time! Listen to him!' Hakeswill chuckled, then began pacing around Sharpe. 'Mary stays with me, Sarge,' Sharpe said stubbornly, 'married or not.' 'Oh, Sharpie, dear me. You don't understand, do you? You didn't hear me, boy, did you? You were kicked by a horse in the night? You can try, Sharpie, but you're not man enough, are you? You can try, Sharpe said, 'and be put on a flogging charge? I'm not daft.'

Hakeswill made an elaborate charade of looking right and left. 'Ain't no one here but you and me, Sharpe. Sharpe resisted the urge to lash out at his persecutor. 'I'm not daft,' he said again, 'But you are, boy. Daft as a bucket. Don't you understand? I'm offering you the soldier's life. I'm not falling for your tricks, Sergeant,' Sharpe said. 'There ain't no trick, boy,' Hakeswill said hoarsely. He stepped two paces away from Sharpe.

Lieutenant Lawford's lily-boy. Maybe that's why you ain't got the guts to fight for your Mary! The last insult provoked Sharpe to hit Hakeswill. He did it hard and fast. He slammed his fist into Hakeswill's nose. 'Guard!' the voice called. 'Guard!' 'Jesus!' Sharpe let go of his enemy, turned and saw Captain Morris standing just beyond Hakeswill. Hakeswill had sunk onto the ground, but now hauled himself upright on the staff of his rifle. 'Don't worry, Sergeant, Hicks and I both saw it,' Morris said. 'Came to check on the horse. 'Yes, sir,' Hicks said. He was a small young man, very officious, who would never countenance a man of Sharpe's rank. 'Guard!' Morris shouted. 'Here! Now!' Blood was pouring down Hakeswill's face, but the Sergeant managed a grin. 'Got you, Sharpe. 'You bastard,' Sharpe said softly, and wondered if he should run. He wondered if he would be caught.

hammer being cocked stilled Sharpe's tiny impulse to flee. A panting Sergeant Green arrived with four men of the guard and Morris pushed the horse back. 'Gladly, sir,' Hicks agreed. The Ensign was slurring his words, betraying that he had been drinking. Morris looked at Sharpe. 'It's a court martial offence, Sharpe,' the Captain said, the Ensign's words hanging in the air. 'Sir!' Green said, stepping forward. 'Come on, Sharpie.'

'I didn't do nothing, Sergeant,' Sharpe protested.
'Come on, lad. It'll sort itself out,' Green said quietly, then he took Sharpe's elbow.
Morris waited until the prisoner and his escort had gone, then grinned at Hakeswill. 'He's a devil, that one, sir, a devil. Broke my nose, he did.' Hakeswill gingerly tried to touch his nose.
'Tonight?' Morris could not keep the eagerness from his voice.
'Not tonight, sir,' Hakeswill said in a tone that suggested the Captain had made a fool of himself.
Morris flinched as Hakeswill tried to straighten his nose

again. 'You'd better see Mister Micklewhite, Hakeswill.'

'No, sir. Don't believe in doctors, sir, except for the pox. I'll strap it up, sir, and I'll see you're comfortable.'
Morris found Hakeswill's intimate tone unseemly, and stepped stiffly back. 'Then I'll see you're comfortable.'
'Thank you kindly, sir, and the same to you, sir. And sweet dreams too, sir.' Hakeswill turned and went.
For Sharpie was done.

CHAPTER 3

Colonel McCandless woke as the dawn touched the world's rim with a streak of fire. The sun was low in the sky.
'They're all hot,' McCandless answered. 'Haven't had a cold day since I came here.' He

if he could ever live in Scotland again. He certainly would not live in England, not in Hampshire.
The seven men unpicketed the horses and hauled themselves into their worn saddles. The sun was low in the sky.
For this was the kingdom of Mysore, high on the southern Indian plateau, and as far as

McCandless could see six pillars of smoke showing where the Tippoo's cavalry had burned their camps.
He threaded his horse through a grove of cork trees, glad of the shade cast by the deep

beyond them a bare hill crest. McCandless watched that empty crest for a few minutes and then, the sun was low in the sky.
The people working the rice immediately fled towards their homes and McCandless swerved to the left.
It was then that McCandless saw the flash of light in the mango trees.
He instinctively dragged his horse around to face the rising sun and pricked back his heels.
One of the pursuing horsemen fired a shot that echoed through the valley. The bullet whistled

over the crest he reckoned there was a good chance he could outrun his pursuers.
Goats scattered from his path as he spurred the mare over the ridge's skyline. One glance back showed him the sun was low in the sky.
There must have been fifty or sixty horsemen racing towards the Scotsman and, even as he spurred, the sun was low in the sky.
One bullet struck the mare. It was a fortunate shot, fired

at the gallop, and ninety-nine times out of a hundred such a shot would have flown yards wide, and the sun was low in the sky.
'You fools!' McCandless shouted after them. Brave fools, but fools. He was bruised, but the sun was low in the sky.
The Havildar's small group rode full tilt into the enemy's pursuit. That enemy had been

now looked back to see his men fighting desperately among a milling group of enemy horsemen. He was low in the sky.
The Havildar was caught between his duty to his men and his duty to obey McCandless's orders. The sun was low in the sky.
McCandless threw down his pistol and carbine, drew his heavy claymore and walked towards the enemy.

The officer said nothing, just held his hand out, his eyes steady on McCandless. The sun was low in the sky.
'Do you speak English?' McCandless asked in that tongue, determined to hide his knowledge. The sun was low in the sky.
The officer shrugged. He looked at the old claymore then slid it into his sash. His men were low in the sky.
While behind him the vultures circled and at last, sure that nothing lived where the dead were, the sun was low in the sky.

It took two days to convene the court martial. The army could not spare the time in it.

Major John Shee was irritable. The Major was irritable at the best of times, but the m

that he did the job badly and that suspicion had given rise to a haunting fear of mutiny, and Captain Fillmore, commander of the fourth company, spoke for Lawford. 'He was summoned. Shee frowned at Fillmore. 'He knew he was supposed to be here?'

'Indeed, sir. But the General insisted.'

'And we're just supposed to twiddle our thumbs while he takes tea with the General?' S

Captain Fillmore glanced through the tent's open side as if he hoped to see Lawford hu

'Doubt?' Shee snapped. "What doubt is diere? He struck a sergeant, he was seen doing i

Fillmore shrugged. 'Ensign Fitzgerald would also like to say something.'

Shee glared at Fitzgerald. 'Not much to say, Ensign, I trust?'

'Whatever it might take, sir, to prevent a miscarriage of

justice.' Fitzgerald, young and confident, stood and smiled at his commanding officer and fell

'Captain Morris says not,' Shee insisted, 'and so does Ensign Hicks.'

'I cannot contradict the Captain, sir,' Fitzgerald said blandly, 'but I was drinking w

Shee looked dangerously belligerent. 'Are you accusing a fellow officer of being under

Fitzgerald reckoned that most of the 33rd's mess was ever under the influence of arrack

'Doubt?' Shee spat. 'There is no doubt! Open and shut!' He gestured at Sharpe who stood

'I do, sir,' Fitzgerald declared forcibly. 'Indeed I do.'

Sergeant Hakeswill's face twitched. He watched Fitzgerald with loathing. Major Shee st

Captain Fillmore tried one last time. Fillmore doubted the evidence of Morris and Hick

'What can Lawford say, in the name of God?' Shee demanded. There was a flask of arrack

'This afternoon's as good a time as any, sir,' Bywaters answered stolidly. He had expe

Shee nodded. 'Parade the battalion in two hours. These proceedings are over.' He gave

Sharpe was kept under guard. His sentinels were not men from his own battalion, but si

Sharpe was sitting with his back against the boxes. He shrugged. 'I've been whipped be

'Not in the army, lad, not in the army. Here.' Green held out a canteen. 'It's rum.'

Sharpe uncorked the canteen and drank a good slug of the liquor. 'I didn't do nothing

'Maybe, maybe not,' Green said, 'but the more you drink the less you'll feel. Finish i

'Tomkins says you don't feel a damn thing after the first thirty,' Sharpe said.

'I hope he's right, lad, I hope he's right, but you drink that rum anyway.' Green took

Sharpe tipped the canteen again. 'And where was Mister Lawford?' he asked bitterly.

'You heard, son. He was called off to see the General.' Green hesitated. 'But what cou

Sharpe leaned his head against the box-built wall. 'He could have said that Morris is

'No, he couldn't say that, lad, and you know it.' Green filled a clay pipe with tobacc

Sharpe gave a sullen grimace. 'You know what Hakeswill told me? That he was going to s

Green frowned. 'He won't, lad. He won't.'

'And how will you stop him?' Sharpe asked bitterly.

'She's being looked after now,' Green reassured him. 'The lads are making sure of that

'But for how long?' Sharpe asked. He drank more of the rum which seemed to be having n

'I tell you she'll be all right,' Green insisted.

'You don't know Hakeswill,' Sharpe said.

'Oh, but I do, lad, I do,' Green said feelingly, then paused. For a second or two he l

'That's what I thought.'

Green drew on the pipe. 'If the worst does happen, Sharpie . . .' he said, then stopped

'Aye?' Sharpe prompted him.

'Not that it will, of course,' Green said hurriedly. 'Billy Nixon survived a couple of

'But if the worst does happen?' Sharpe reminded the Sergeant.

'Well,' Green said, colouring, but then at last he summoned the courage to say what he

Sharpe almost laughed, but then the thought of two thousand lashes choked off even the
'Did you hear me, Sharpie?' Sergeant Green interrupted Sharpe's gloomy thoughts.
'I heard you, Sergeant,' Sharpe said.
'So would you mind? If I asked her?'
'Have you asked her already?' Sharpe said accusingly.
'No!' Green said hastily. 'Wouldn't be right! Not while you're still, well, you know.'
'Alive,' Sharpe said bitterly.
'It's only if the worst happens.' Green tried to sound optimistic. 'Which it won't.'
'You won't need my permission when I'm dead, Sergeant.'
'No, but if I can tell Mary you wanted her to accept me, then it'd help. Don't you see'
'Hakeswill might stop you marrying her.'
Green nodded. 'Aye, he might, but I can't see how. Not if we tie the knot quick. I'll

fair with me. Ask him tonight, see? But only if the worst happens.'

'But you need a chaplain,' Sharpe warned the Sergeant. The 33rd's own chaplain had come
'The lads in the Old Dozen tell me they've got a God-walloper,' Green said, gesturing
Sharpe shrugged. 'Ask her, Sergeant,' he said, 'ask her.' What else could he say? And
'Of course I will, Sharpie. Hope for the best, eh? Never say die.'
Sharpe drained the canteen. 'There's a couple of things in my pack, Sergeant. A good p
'Of course I will,' Green said, carefully hiding the fact that Hakeswill had already p
'And some dark night, Sergeant, give bloody Hakeswill a kicking for me.'
Green nodded. 'Be a pleasure, Sharpie. Be a pleasure.' He knocked the ashes of his pipe
The preparations for Sharpe's flogging had all been made. Not that they were many, but

whole thing stood two feet higher than a tall man. The three halberd butts were sunk into the
Sergeant Hakeswill personally selected two of the 33rd's drummer boys. The drummer boy
Hakeswill coiled the two whips and hung them on the halberd that was mounted crosswise

'No, sir. Cured, sir. Thanks to your worship's skill, sir. Clean as a whistle I am, sir'
Micklewhite swore as the knot in the damned stock loosened. He did not like Hakeswill,
'Major Shee asked me to say a word, sir.'
'Couldn't speak to me himself?'
'You know the Major, sir. No doubt he's thirsty. A hot day.' Hakeswill's face quivered
'What about him?'
'Troublemaker, sir. Known for it. A thief, a liar and a cheat.'
'So he's a redcoat. So?'
'So Major Shee ain't keen to see him back among the living, sir, if you follow my mean
'Thank you, sir.'

Micklewhite tugged the silk stock tight, then waved Hakes-will off. He pulled on his c

man was restored to health, it was only so he could be strapped to the triangle to be given th
The 33rd paraded under the afternoon's burning sun. Four companies faced the tripod, w
'Sir!' Bywaters acknowledged, then turned and bellowed for the prisoner to be fetched.
Sharpe was brought to the triangle. He was bareheaded and already stripped to the wais

back were as white as his powdered hair and contrasted oddly with his darkly tanned face. He w
'Arms up, lad,' the Sergeant Major said quietly. 'Stand against the triangle. Feet apa
Sharpe obediently stepped up to the triangular face of the tripod. Two corporals knelt
The Sergeant Major went to the back of the triangle and brought from his pouch a folde
Sharpe nodded.

Bywaters stepped smartly back and came to attention. 'Prisoner ready for punishment, s
The Major looked to the surgeon. 'Is the prisoner fit for punishment, Mister Micklewhi
Micklewhite did not even give Sharpe a glance. 'Hale and fit, sir.'

'Then carry on, Sergeant Major.'

'Right, boys,' the Sergeant Major said, 'do your duty! Lay it on hard now, and keep th

A third drummer boy was standing behind the floggers. He lifted his sticks, paused, then the boy to the right brought his whip hard down on Sharpe's back.

'One!' Bywaters shouted.

The whip had left a red mark across Sharpe's shoulder blades. Sharpe had flinched, but 'Two!' Bywaters called and the drummer brought down his stick as the second boy planted. Hakeswill's face twitched uncontrollably, but he was smiling under the rictus. For the

Colonel McCandless stood alone in the centre of the courtyard of the Tippoo's Inner Palace. The courtyard was covered with sand, its lower walls were of dressed stone, but above

enough Arabic to guess that the writing incised above each arch was a surah from the Koran. The McCandless was right. Colonel Gudin and the Tippoo were both staring down through the

'Yes, sir,' Gudin replied through the interpreter.

'You believe him?' It was plain from his tone that the Tippoo was sceptical.

Gudin shrugged. 'Their horses are thin.'

The Tippoo grunted. He had done his best to deny the advancing enemy any food, but the

oxen were especially ill fed, so it was not unlikely that this British officer had been searching

'Scouting, maybe,' Gudin said, 'but not spying. Spies do not ride in uniform, Your Majesty.'

The Tippoo grunted when the answer was translated into Persian. He was a naturally suspicious

Appah Rao knew exactly who Colonel Ross truly was, and what McCandless had been looking for.

'So you don't consider him a spy?'

'Spy or not,' Appah Rao said coldly, 'he is your enemy.'

The Tippoo shrugged at the evasive answer. His good sense suggested that the prisoner

'Kill him,' one of the Tippoo's Muslim generals suggested.

'I shall think about it,' the Tippoo said, and turned back through one of the balconies.

The Tippoo did not spare the gorgeous throne a glance. He had ordered the throne made,

and on a bright day the tiger throne would stay empty. The Tippoo had made his oath, and the oath meant

So the British must go, and if their destruction meant an alliance with the French, then

For it was here, on his island capital, that the Tippoo expected to defeat the British.

came at the southern or eastern walls, he was still ready for them. He had thousands of cannons.

He walked past the throne to stare at his favourite tiger. This one was a lifesize model.

The Tippoo finally let the tiger organ fall silent. 'I suspect the man is a spy,' he said.

'Then kill him,' Appah Rao said.

'A failed spy,' the Tippoo said. 'You say he is a Scot?' he asked Gudin.

'Indeed, Your Majesty.'

'Not English, then?'

'No, sire.'

The Tippoo shrugged at the distinction. 'Whatever his tribe, he is an old man, but is

The question was directed at Colonel Gudin who, once it was translated, stiffened. 'He

Majesty, so he does not deserve death.' Gudin would have liked to add that it would be uncivil

'He is here, is he not?' the Tippoo demanded. 'Does that not deserve death? This is no

'Kill him, Your Majesty,' Gudin warned, 'and the British will show no mercy on any pri

'I am full of mercy,' the Tippoo said, and mostly that was true. There was a time for

Outside, cheated of their prey, the tigers slunk back to the courtyard's shadows. One

While up in the Inner Palace, with his back to the canopied throne of gold, Colonel Je

Sharpe had not meant to cry out. Before the punishment had begun he had been determined

he had involuntarily shuddered. Since then he had closed his eyes and bitten down on the leather.
'One hundred and twenty-three!' Bywaters shouted hoarsely.
The drummer boys' arms were tiring, but they still knew better than to slacken their effort.
'One hundred and twenty-four,' Bywaters called, and it was then, through the silent soot,
'One hundred and thirty-six,' Bywaters shouted and the drummer boy beat his instrument.
Blood had run down Sharpe's back and stained the weave of his white trousers past his waist.
'One hundred and forty. Keep it high, boy, keep it high! Not on the kidneys,' Bywaters

drummer boys, not bothering to keep the disapproval from his voice.
The flogging went on. Hakeswill watched it with delight, but most of the men stared in disbelief.
'One hundred and sixty-nine!' Bywaters shouted, then saw a gleam of white under a lash.
Micklewhite waved a fly away from his face and stared up at a small cloud that was drifting.
'One hundred and seventy-four,' Bywaters shouted, trying to imbue the bare numbers with meaning.
Sharpe was scarcely conscious now. The pain was beyond bearing. It was as if he was being crushed.
'Two hundred and one,' Bywaters called, and wondered if he dared take a sip of water from the canteen.

'Stop!' a voice shouted.
'Two hundred and two.'
'Stop!' the voice shouted again, and this time it was as if the whole battalion had been ordered to halt.
Colonel Arthur Wellesley had ridden up to the tripod. For a moment Shee and his aides stared at him.
'Yes, sir.' Shee was nervous, wondering if he had made some terrible mistake. 'At once, sir.'
'I dislike stopping a well-deserved punishment,' Wellesley said loudly enough for all to hear.
'General Harris, sir?' Major Shee asked in astonishment. General Harris was the commander of the Light Company.
'Then do it!' Wellesley snapped. The Colonel was a thin

young man with a narrow face, hard eyes and a prominently beaked nose. Many older men resented his presence.
Wellesley nudged his horse forward and stared down as the prisoner's bonds were cut loose.
Sharpe looked up, blinked, then made a guttural noise. Bywaters ran forward and worked at the ropes.
'Private Sharpe?' Wellesley's disdainful voice repeated.
Sharpe forced his head up. 'Sir?' The word came out as a croak. 'Sir,' he tried again.
Wellesley's face twitched with distaste for what he was doing. 'You're to be fetched to the hospital.'
Sharpe blinked up at Wellesley. His head was spinning and the pain in his body was vying with the

'You heard the Colonel, boy,' Bywaters prompted Sharpe.
'Yes, sir,' Sharpe managed to answer Wellesley.
Wellesley turned to Micklewhite. 'Bandage him, Mister Micklewhite. Put a salve on his wounds.'
'Within an hour!' the surgeon said in disbelief, then saw the anger on his young Colonel's face.
'And give him clean clothes,' Wellesley ordered the Sergeant Major before giving Sharpe his attention.
The last of the ropes holding Sharpe to the tripod were cut away. Shee and the officers looked on.
Sharpe shook his head. 'I'm all right, Sergeant Major,' he said. He was not, but he would not show it.
A cheer sounded in the Light Company.
'Quiet!' Captain Morris snapped. 'Take names, Sergeant Hakeswill!'
'Take names, sir! Yes, sir!'
Sharpe staggered twice and almost fell, but he forced himself to stand upright and the

but he had recovered most of his wits and the look he gave the surgeon almost made Micklewhite blink.
'Come with me, Private,' Micklewhite said.
'Help him! Help him!' Bywaters snapped at the drummer boys and the two sweating lads who were helping Sharpe.
Sharpe half walked and was half carried away. Major Shee took off his hat, scratched his head and followed.
'No, sir.'
Shee paused. It was all so irregular.
'Dismiss the battalion, sir?' Bywaters suggested.
Shee nodded, glad to have been given some guidance. 'Dismiss them, Sergeant Major.'

'Yes, sir.'
Sharpe had survived.

CHAPTER 4

It seemed airless inside General Harris's tent. It was a large tent, as big as a parish. Four men waited inside the tent. The youngest and most nervous was William Lawford who sat opposite Lawford, and utterly ignoring the younger man, sat his Colonel, Arthur Wellesley. General Harris, the army's commander, sat behind a long table that was spread with maps.

practical ability, and both were qualities he recognized in his younger deputy, Colonel Wellesley. The fourth man in the tent refused to sit, but instead strode up and down between the

not give a tinker's damn whether Colonel Arthur bloody Wellesley approved or not. Baird disliked the man.
'Not true, Baird,' Harris had answered mildly. 'Wellesley has ability.'
'Ability, my arse. He's got family!' Baird spat.
'We all have family.'
'Not prinking English popinjay families with too much bloody money.'
'He was born in Ireland.'
'Poor bloody Ireland, then, but he ain't Irish, Harris, and you know it. The man doesn't care.'
'Some, quite a few, a good number, to tell the truth,' Harris, a fair-minded man, had said.
'Experience is,' Baird had growled. 'Hell, man, you and I have seen some service! We've seen it.'
'He will still make a very good second-in-command, and that's all that matters,' Harris had said.
That hatred went back to the years Baird had spent in the

dungeons of the Tippoo Sultan in Seringapatam. Seventeen years before, in battle against the Tippoo Sultan. It was the memory of that ordeal and the knowledge that his fellow Scotsman, McCandless, had been there. Baird had no doubts about McCandless's worth. McCandless alone knew the identities of

who had persuaded Lawford to enter Seringapatam in an effort to free McCandless, and Baird who had been there. Harris had sighed. He led two armies, fifty thousand men, and all but five thousand of them were British. 'We can't send a blackamoor,' Baird had insisted. 'They'll take money from us, then go home.' 'But why send this young man Lawford?' Harris had asked. 'Because McCandless is a secretive fellow, sir, more cautious than most, and if he sees a chance he'll take it.' Harris had grunted. He had resisted the idea, but it had still tempted him, for the Ha-

searching for the key to the Tippoo's city. Only a mission so important, a mission that could bring the British to the gates of Seringapatam. 'Easy!' Baird had answered scornfully. 'The Tippoo's only too damned eager for European money.' Harris had slowly allowed himself to be persuaded, though Wellesley, once introduced to the mission, had said, 'Good God, man,' Baird intervened, 'spit and swear! It ain't difficult!' 'It will be very difficult,' Harris had insisted, staring at the diffident Lieutenant. Then Lawford had complicated matters still further. 'I think it would be more plausible

'Makes sense, makes sense,' Baird had put in encouragingly.
'You have a man-in mind?' Wellesley had asked coldly.
'His name is Sharpe, sir,' Lawford said. 'They're probably about to flog him.'
'Then he'll be no damned use to you,' Wellesley said in a tone which suggested the matter was closed.
'I'll go with no one else, sir,' Lawford retorted stubbornly, addressing himself to General Harris.
'How many lashes is this fellow getting?' Harris asked.
'Don't know, sir. He's standing trial now, sir, and if I wasn't here I'd be giving evidence.'
The argument over whether to employ Sharpe had continued over a midday meal of rice and mutton. 'I trust I'm not, sir. But my uncle gave me the money to purchase my commission.'
'Did he, by God! That's damned generous.'

'And I hope I'm damned grateful, sir.'
'Grateful enough to die for him?' Wellesley put in sourly.
Lawford had coloured, but stuck to his guns. 'I suspect

Private Sharpe is resourceful enough for both of us, sir.'

The decision whether or not to employ Sharpe belonged, in the end, to General Harris w
'I think you'd better sit, man,' General Baird suggested, with a glance at Harris for
'Fetch that stool,' Harris ordered Sharpe, then saw that the private could not bend do
Baird fetched the stool. 'Is it hurting?' he asked sympathetically.
'Yes, sir.'

'It's supposed to hurt,' Wellesley said curdy. 'Pain is the point of punishment.' He k

'I doubt Private Sharpe even deserved the punishment,' Lawford dared to intervene, blu
'The time for that sentiment, Lieutenant, was during the court martial!' Wellesley sna
Sharpe nodded. 'Killed my share of the enemy, sir.'
'So I'm commuting your sentence. And tonight, damn your eyes, you'll reward me by dese
Sharpe wondered if he had heard right, decided it was best not to ask, and so he look
'Have you ever thought about deserting, Sharpe?' General Baird asked him.
'Me, sir?' Sharpe managed to look surprised. 'Not me, sir, no, sir. Never crossed my m
Baird smiled. "We need a good liar for this particular service. So maybe you're an exc
Sharpe did not smile back. Instead he looked warily from one officer to the other. He

Baird smiled again, trying to put Sharpe at his ease. 'Let me explain why you're runni
'Yes, sir,' Sharpe said obediently.
'Good man. Now, when you reach Seringapatam the Tippoo will want you to join his army.
'Yes, sir,' Sharpe said stoically, and wondered why they did not first ask him to hop
'You won't be going alone,' Baird told Sharpe. 'Lieutenant Lawford volunteered your se
'Yes, sir,' Sharpe said, and hid his dismay that perhaps things were not going to be g
'The thing is, Sharpe,' Lawford said, still smiling, 'I'm not too certain I can pass my
A new recruit! Sharpe almost laughed. You could no more pass the Lieutenant off as a n

Sharpe off as an officer! He had an idea then, and the idea surprised him, not because it was
'Speak up, man!' Wellesley snarled.

'It would be better, sir,' Sharpe said so loudly that he was verging on insolence, 'if
'A clerk?' Baird asked. 'Why?'
'He's got soft hands, sir. Clean hands, sir. Clerks don't muck about in the dirt like
'I like it, Sharpe, indeed I do!' Baird said. 'Well done.'
Wellesley sneered, then pointedly stared through one of the tent openings as though he
'Oh, indeed, sir. I'm sure, sir.' Lawford at last sounded confident.
'Good,' Harris said, laying down his pen. The General wore a wig to hide the scar wher
'Ravi Shekhar, sir.'
'And what if this fellow Shekhar ain't there?' Harris asked. 'Or won't help?' There wa

A dog barked. 'You have to anticipate these things,' Harris said mildly, scratching ag
'If Ravi Shekhar won't help us, sir,' Baird suggested, 'then Lawford and Sharpe must g
A heartbeat's hesitation, then Sharpe nodded. 'Yes, sir.'
'What kind of a thief?' Wellesley asked in a disgusted voice as though he was astonish
Sharpe was surprised that his Colonel even knew such slang. He shook his head indignan
'A house boner means he was a burglar,' Wellesley translated for his two senior offic
Baird was pleased with Sharpe's answers. 'Do you still have a picklock, Private?'
'Me, sir? No, sir. But I suppose I could find one, sir, if I had a guinea.'

Baird laughed, suspecting the true cost was nearer a shilling, but he still went to hi

Sharpe,' he said, 'for who knows, it might be useful.' He turned to Harris. 'But I doubt it wi

'Jettis, sir?' Lawford asked.

'Jettis, Lieutenant. The Tippoo inherited a dozen of the bastards from his father. The

'No, sir,' Lawford said hurriedly, blanching at the thought. Sharpe was disappointed, Baird grimaced. 'Very unpleasant executions, Lieutenant,' he said grimly. 'You still w

Lawford remained pale, but nodded. 'I think it's worth a try, sir.'

Wellesley snorted at the Lieutenant's foolishness, but Baird ignored the Colonel. 'At

'Just one?' Sharpe asked.

Just one, Private,' Baird confirmed.

'I can take care of one sentry, sir,' Sharpe boasted.

'Not this one,' Baird said grimly, 'because when I was there he was eight feet long if

'Or at the very least,' Harris intervened, 'pray that Shekhar can discover what McCand

'So that's what we want of you!' Baird said to Sharpe with a brusque cheerfulness. 'An

Sharpe reckoned it was all idiocy, and he did not much like the sound of the tiger, bu

'Three?' Baird asked, puzzled.

'Three stripes are better than two thousand lashes, sir. If we find out what you want

Wellesley looked enraged at Sharpe's presumption, and for a second it was plain that h

Wellesley thought about opposing the General, then decided that it was most unlikely t

'Thank you, sir,' Sharpe said.

Baird dismissed him. 'Go with Lieutenant Lawford now, Sharpe, he'll tell you what to d

'Wouldn't dream of it, sir,' Sharpe said, flinching as he stood up.

'Go then,' Baird said. He waited till the two men were gone, then sighed. 'A bright yo

'A rogue,' Wellesley interjected. 'I could provide you with a hundred others just as d

Harris rapped the table to stop the squabbling of his two seconds-in-command. 'But wil

'Not a chance,' Wellesley said confidently.

'A woefully small chance,' Baird admitted dourly, then added more vigorously, 'but eve

'At the risk of losing two good men?' Harris asked.

'One man who might become a decent officer,' Wellesley corrected the General, 'and one

'But McCandless might hold the key to the city, General,' Baird reminded Harris.

'True,' Harris said heavily, then unrolled a map that had lain scrolled on the edge of o

defences, but once the army was ready to make camp the choice would have to be made swiftly an
Right where the Tippoo had set his trap.

Allah, in His infinite mercy, had been good to the Tippoo Sultan, for Allah, in His im

the merchant's gold. And so much gold! A strongroom filled with the metal, far more than the T

The Tippoo did not consider himself a cruel man, but nor, indeed, did he think of hims

The jettis were Hindus, and their strength, which was remarkable, was devoted to their

shone dark in the early-afternoon sun. The six tigers, restless because they had been denied t

The Tippoo came from his prayers to the balcony where he threw open the filigree shutt

'Send them to Madame Guillotine, Your Majesty.' The Tippoo chuckled when the answer wa

had the declarations torn down, yet still the Tippoo treasured a love of France. He had never

'That man' - the Tippoo now pointed to the Muslim soldier who had betrayed the secrets

The Muslim soldier was forced to his knees. His tiger-striped uniform had been strippe

The first jetti placed a nail on the crown of the victim's bare head. The nail was of

desperate excuses, then pointed a finger at him. The Tippoo held the finger steady for a few s

The jetti raised his right hand, its palm facing downwards, then took a deep breath. H

The Tippoo and his entourage applauded the first jettfs skill, then the Tippoo pointed

The first jetti, his execution successfully completed, fetched a stool from the gateway

the Tippoo and the kneeling jetti made certain he stayed low so that he would not spoil his ma

'So Your Majesty has been kind enough to inform me before,' Gudin answered drily.

The Tippoo laughed. 'You do not enjoy this, Colonel?'

'The death of traitors is ever necessary, sire,' Gudin said evasively.

'But I should like to think you derive amusement from it. Surely you appreciate my men

'I do admire it, sire.'

'Then admire it now,' the Tippoo said, 'for the next death takes even more strength th

As he shouted the jetti twisted the merchant's head. He was wringing his victim's neck

balcony, heard the distinct crack as the merchant's spine was broken. The jetti let go of the

The balcony shutters were closed. Somewhere deep in the palace, perhaps from the harem

The keepers released the last tiger, then followed the jettis out through the gateway.

And so Ravi Shekhar had died. And now was eaten.

Sharpe was back with his company before sunset. He was greeted ebulliendy by men who s

Sharpe ate with his usual six companions who, as ever, were joined by three wives and

'Sergeant.' Sharpe acknowledged Hakeswill, but did not move.

'A word with you, Private. On your feet now!'

Sharpe still did not move. 'I'm excused company duties, Sergeant. Colonel's orders.'

Hakeswill's face wrenched itself in a grotesque twitch. 'This ain't your duty,' the Se

Sharpe obediently stood, flinching as his coat tugged at his grievously wounded back.

Sharpe ignored the question. Hakeswill's broken nose was still swollen and bruised, an

'Didn't you hear me, boy?' Hakeswill shoved the cane's tip into Sharpe's belly. 'How o

'How come you were cut down from the scaffold, Sergeant?' Sharpe asked.

'No lip from you, boy. No lip, or by God I'll have you strapped to the tripod again. N

Sharpe shook his head. 'If you want to know that, Sergeant,' he said, 'you'd better ask

'Stand still! Stand straight!' Hakeswill snapped, then cut with his cane at a nearby g

Sharpe pretended to relent. 'You know why I was released, Sergeant,' he said. 'The Col

'No, I don't know, lad,' Hakeswill said. 'Upon my soul, I don't. So you tell me now.'

Sharpe shrugged. 'Because we fought well the other day, Sergeant. It's a reward, like.

'No, it bleeding ain't!' Hakeswill shouted, then dodged to one side and slashed his ca

Sharpe turned to face his persecutor. 'You lay that cane on me again, Obadiah,' he sai

'Stand still!' Hakeswill spat.

'Shut your face, Sergeant,' Sharpe said. He had called Hakeswill's bluff, and there wa

'Be careful, Sharpie. Be careful.'

'Oh, I am, Sergeant, I am. I'm real careful. Have you done now?' Sharpe did not wait f

He talked to Mary for half an hour, then it was time to make the excuses that Lieutena

Major General Baird had made all the arrangements. The camp's western perimeter was gu

while next day, Baird promised Lawford, the army would take care not to send any cavalry patro

'Yes, sir,' Lawford answered. The Lieutenant, beneath a heavy cloak that disguised his

Baird hauled a huge watch from his pocket and tilted its face to the half moon. 'Elev

'Hurts like hell, sir.' It did too.

Baird looked worried. 'You'll manage, though?'

'I ain't soft, sir.'

T never supposed you were, Private.' Baird patted Sharpe's

shoulder again, then gestured into the dark. 'Off you go, lads, and God be with you.' Baird wa

'This way, Sharpe,' Lawford said when they were out of earshot of the sentries. 'We're

'Just like the wise men, Bill,' Sharpe said. It had taken Sharpe an extraordinary effo

But the use of the name shocked Lawford, who stopped and stared at Sharpe. 'What did y

'I called you Bill,' Sharpe said, 'because that's your bleeding name. You ain't an officer.'
'Sharpe!' Lawford protested.
'No!' Sharpe turned savagely on Lawford. 'My job is to keep you alive, Bill, so get on your feet.'
Lawford, stunned by Sharpe's confidence, meekly followed. 'But this is south of west!'

'We'll go west later,' Sharpe said. 'Now get your bleeding stock off.' He ripped his coat.
Lawford was still resentful of this sudden reversal of roles, but he was sensible enough.
'Of course you did! Where did they recruit you?'
'My home's near Portsmouth.'
'That's no bloody good. Navy would press you in Portsmouth before a recruiting sergeant.'
'Good Lord, no!' Lawford sounded horrified.
'Good place, Sheffield,' Sharpe said. 'And there's a pub on Pond Street called The Havercakes.'
'His bayonet?' Lawford, fumbling to release the leather binding of his newly clubbed bayonet.
'We're the 33rd, Bill! The Havercakes! He carried an oatcake on his bayonet, remember?'
Lawford shrugged. 'A farmer?'
'No one would ever believe you laboured on a farm,'

Sharpe said scornfully. 'You ain't got a farmer's arms. That General Baird now, he's got a sword.'
Lawford nodded. 'I think we should go now,' he said, trying to reassert his rapidly vanishing authority.
'We're waiting,' Sharpe said stubbornly. 'So why the hell are you running?'
Lawford frowned. 'Unhappiness, I suppose.'
'Bleeding hell, you're a soldier! You ain't supposed to be happy! No, let's think now.'
'I really do think we must go!' Lawford insisted.
'In a minute, sir.' Again Sharpe cursed himself for using the honorific. 'Just let my horse rest.'
'Oh, of course.' Lawford was immediately contrite. 'But we can't wait too long, Sharpe.'
'Dick, sir. You call me Dick. We're friends, remember?'
'Of course.' Lawford, as uncomfortable with this sudden intimacy as with the need to wait.
'The harmen were after me.'
'The harmen? Oh yes, the constables.' Lawford paused. Somewhere in the night a creature had
'Killed a man. Put a knife in him.'
Lawford gazed at Sharpe. 'Murdered him, you mean?'
'Oh, aye, it was murder right enough, even though the bugger deserved it. But the judge

would have been morris-dancing at the end of a rope so I reckoned it was easier to put on the
Lawford hesitated, not sure whether he should enquire too deeply, then decided it was
'Bugger kept an inn. I worked for him, see? It was a coaching inn so he knew what coaching
'We're wasting time,' Lawford said.
'Quiet!' Sharpe snapped, then picked up his musket and pointed it towards some bushes.
'It's me, Richard.' Mary Bickerstaff emerged from the shadows carrying a bundle. 'Even
'Call him Bill,' Sharpe insisted, then stood and shouldered his musket. 'Come on, Bill.'
They walked all night, following Lawford's star towards the western skyline. Lawford turned
'She won't go,' Sharpe retorted.
'We can't take a woman!' Lawford snapped.

'Why not? Deserters always take their valuables, sir. Bill, I mean.'
'Christ, Private, if you mess this up I'll make sure you get all the stripes you escaped.'
Sharpe grinned. 'It won't be me who messes it. It's the damn fool idea itself.'
'Nonsense.' Lawford strode ahead, forcing Sharpe to follow. Mary, guessing that they were
'Whatever part she wants,' Sharpe said stubbornly.
Lawford knew he should argue, or rather that he should impose his authority on Sharpe,

the flogging had taken far more from the Private than he realized. 'I still think Mrs Bickerstaff
'She can't,' Sharpe said curtly. 'Tell him, Mary.'
Mary ran to catch up. 'I'm not safe while Hakeswill's alive,' she told Lawford.
'You could have been looked after,' Lawford suggested vaguely.

'Who by?' Mary asked. 'A man looks after a woman in the army and he wants his price. You call him Bill!' Sharpe snarled. 'Our lives might depend on it! If one of us calls him Hakeswill, and it isn't just Hakeswill,' Mary went on. 'Sergeant Green wants to marry me now, which God knows,' Lawford said bitterly, 'but you've probably jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. I'll take my chances,' Mary said obstinately, though she had taken what care she could. Lawford grunted. Behind them the horizon was now marked with a pale glow that silhouetted

breakfast. After he had eaten, Lawford went into the bushes for privacy and, as he came back, 'Blacking my eye,' Mary answered. 'I asked him to.' 'Dear God!' Lawford said. Mary's left eye was already swelling, and tears were running down her cheek. 'Keep the buggers off her, of course,' Sharpe said. 'Are you all right, love?' 'I'll live,' Mary said. 'You hit hard, Richard.' 'No point in hitting softly. Didn't mean to hurt you, though.' Mary splashed water on her eye, then they all started walking again. They were now in the open. The Lieutenant's spirits were low. He had volunteered for this mission readily enough,

Sharpe was equally worried. He liked Lawford, but suspected he would have to work hard to keep Mary too had doubts. She had persuaded herself she was in love with Sharpe, but she

best she could. Mary, just like Sharpe, wanted to find some way up and out of that fate, but Lawford led them to a slight hill from where, screened by flowering bushes, he scanned the horizon. 'The villagers will see us anyway,' Mary said. 'They don't miss much.' 'We're not here to trouble them,' Lawford said, 'so perhaps they'll leave us alone?' 'Turn our coats, Bill,' Sharpe suggested. 'Turn our coats?' 'We're running, aren't we? So put your coat on back to front as a sign that you're on the run. The villagers will hardly realize the significance of that,' Lawford observed tartly. 'Bugger the villagers,' Sharpe said. 'It's the Tippoo's bloody men I'm worried about. Lawford was reluctant to turn his coat. A turned coat was a sign of disgrace. Battalion

'No deserter would throw away his gun,' Sharpe answered. He buckled his belt over the coat. 'In a moment,' Lawford said, then, to Sharpe's surprise, the Lieutenant went on one knee. They walked south towards the gleam of water. All three were tired, and Sharpe was plain as day. 'I could do with a rest now,' Sharpe admitted. The pain was terrible and every step was a torment. 'Wet them?' Lawford asked. 'That's what that bastard Micklewhite said. Said to keep the bandages damp or else they'll rot. We'll wet them at the river,' Lawford promised. But they never reached the river bank. They were walking beside some beech trees when

They were fine-looking men in tiger-striped tunics and with spiring brass helmets who Sharpe shook his head and waved, then realized the man intended to skewer the spear in his back. 'No!' Lawford shouted at the galloping lancers. 'No!' The lancer thrust his blade at Sharpe who knocked the spear point aside with the muzzle of his rifle. The spear point paused an inch from Sharpe's left eyeball.

The lancer looked at Mary, grimaced at her filthy state, then said something. Mary answered. The lancer, who was evidently an officer, looked back to Sharpe and seemed to be debating. Sharpe swore foully, then collapsed at the foot of the tree. There were a score of horsemen and they all now gathered around the fugitives. Two of the lance tips were tickling Lawford's neck, and as a recruiting device they worked well. The officer did not need the enthusiastic reply translated. He smiled and ordered his men to advance. And thus Sharpe joined the enemy's army.

CHAPTER 5

Sharpe was near to exhausted despair by the time he reached the city. The lancers had

'Keep going, Sharpe,' Lawford said encouragingly.

'Gall me Dick, for Christ's sake,' Sharpe snapped.

'Keep going, Dick,' Lawford managed to say, albeit angrily for having been reprovved by

'Not far now,' Mary said in Sharpe's ear. She was helping Sharpe walk, though at times

heat, were carrying baskets of deep-red earth on their backs and piling the soil to heighten t

The lancers ducked their spired helmets as they clattered through the tunnel of the ci

'Non, monsieur,' Lawford answered in his best schoolboy French. 'Nous sommes deserteur

'C'est bon!' The man tossed Lawford a mango. 'Lafemme aussi?'

'Lafemme est notre prisonniere.' Lawford tried a little wit and

was rewarded with a laugh and a farewell shout of bonne chance.

'You speak French?' Sharpe asked.

'A little,' Lawford claimed modestly. 'Really only a little.'

'Bloody amazing,' Sharpe said and Lawford was obscurely pleased that he had at last su

'I didn't think of that,' Lawford said ruefully. He looked at the mango as though he h

The lancers turned into a delicately sculpted archway where two sentries stood guard.

'Had it all along,' Sharpe said. 'Mary's got it. And she's got the guinea.' He grinned

'You mean you lied to General Baird?' Lawford asked sternly.

"Course I bloody lied!" Sharpe snarled. 'What kind of a fool admits to having a picklo

For a moment Lawford looked as though he would reprove Sharpe for dishonesty, but the

Sharpe woke after dark. He groaned as the pains in his back registered and Mary hushed

'Late.'

'Jesus,' Sharpe said as a stab of agony tore down his spine. He sat up, whimpering wit

'No,' Mary said. 'They brought us some water while you were asleep. Here.' She lifted

'I can smell what the bucket's for,' Sharpe said. He took

the jug and drank. Lawford was slumped against the far wall and there was a small open book fa

'You mean this?' Lawford said, indicating the book. He had not been asleep after all.

Sharpe wished he had not used the insult, but did not know how to retrieve it. 'What is

'A Bible.'

'Bloody hell,' Sharpe said.

'You don't approve?' Lawford asked icily.

'I had a bellyful of the good book when I was in the foundlings' home,' Sharpe said. '

'Did they teach you to read it?' Lawford asked.

'We weren't reckoned good enough to read. Good enough to pick hemp, we were, but not r

'So you can't read?' Lawford asked.

'Of course I can't read!' Sharpe laughed scornfully. 'What the bloody hell's the use o

'Don't be a fool, Dick,' Lawford said patiently. 'Only a fool takes pride in pretendin

'A man doesn't have to read to be a sergeant,' Sharpe said stubbornly.

'No, but it helps, and you'll be a better sergeant if you can read. Otherwise the comp

There was a long silence. Somewhere in the palace a sentry's footsteps echoed off ston

'Learning to read?' Lawford said. 'Not really.'

'Then you and Mary had better teach me, Bill, hadn't you?'

'Yes,' Lawford said. 'Yes. We had.'

They were taken out of the guardroom in the morning. Four tiger-striped soldiers fetch

'Just big pussy cats,' Lawford said with an insouciance he did not entirely feel.

'Then you go and scratch their chins,' Sharpe said, 'and

see if they purr. Bugger off, you.' This was to another curious beast that was straining toward them. 'The tigers can't reach you.' A voice spoke in English from behind them. 'Unless their claws reach you.' For a moment none of them spoke, then Lawford straightened to attention. 'William Lawford, sir. His name's Bill,' Sharpe said. 'I'm called Dick, and this is my woman.' He put an arm around Mary. Gudin grimaced as he looked at Mary's swollen black eye and her filthy skirts. 'You have a fine woman, sir.' 'Mary, sir.' She made a small curtsey and Gudin returned the courtesy with an inclination of his head. 'Sharpe, sir. Dick Sharpe.' 'And you are deserters?' the Colonel asked with a measure of distaste. 'Yes, sir,' Lawford said. 'I am never certain that deserters are to be trusted,' Gudin said mildly. He was accustomed to deserters. 'A man might have good reason to betray his flag, sir,' Sharpe said defiantly. 'And your reason, Sharpe?' Sharpe turned round so that the blood on his back was visible. He let Gudin stare at it. Gudin shuddered. 'I never understand why the British flog

their soldiers. It is barbarism.' He waved irritably at the flies which buzzed about his face. 'You don't flog in the French army, sir?' 'Of course not,' Gudin said scornfully. He put a hand on Sharpe's shoulder and turned to the Frenchman. 'Couple of days ago, sir.' 'Have you changed the bandages?' 'No, sir. Wetted them, though.' 'You'll still be dead in a week unless we do something,' Gudin said, then turned and spoke to the Frenchman. 'Nothing, sir.' 'Beyond nothing,' Gudin said tiredly, as though he had heard every excuse imaginable. 'I hit a sergeant, sir.' 'And you?' Gudin challenged Lawford. 'Why did you run?' 'They were going to flog me, sir.' Lawford was nervous telling the lie, and the nervousness showed in his voice. 'For doing nothing?' Gudin asked with amusement. 'For stealing a watch, sir.' Lawford reddened as he spoke. 'Which I did steal,' he added. The Frenchman was certainly intrigued by Lawford. 'What did you say your name was?' the Frenchman asked. 'Lawford, sir.'

Gudin gave Lawford a long scrutiny. The Frenchman was tall and thin, with a lugubrious expression. 'You do not seem to me, Private Lawford, to be a deserter.' 'Men like me,' Sharpe said. 'Quiet,' Gudin reproved Sharpe with a sudden authority. 'I did not speak to you.' The Frenchman looked at Sharpe. 'Father went bankrupt, sir,' Lawford said, conjuring the worst disaster that he could think of. 'But the son of a bankrupt father can take employment, can he not?' Gudin looked again at Lawford. 'I got drunk, sir,' Lawford said miserably, 'and I met a recruiting sergeant.' 'The Lieutnant in Sheffield?' Gudin asked. 'Is that not where they make iron? And - what is the word?' 'I was a lawyer's apprentice, sir.' Lawford was blushing violently. He knew he had mixed up his words. 'And your job in the army?' Gudin asked.

'Company clerk, sir.'

Gudin smiled. 'No ink on your breeches, Lawford! In our army the clerks spatter ink everywhere.' For a moment it seemed as though Lawford was about to abandon his lie and, in his misery, confess. Gudin laughed. In truth he had never doubted Lawford's story, mistaking the Lieutnant for a deserter. 'A lot, sir.' 'So do you know how many guns the British are bringing here?' Gudin asked. 'How much ammunition?' Lawford shook his head in consternation. For a few seconds he was speechless, then managed to say, 'Bloody thousands,' Sharpe interjected. 'Beg pardon for speaking, sir.' 'Thousands of what?' Gudin asked. 'Bullocks, sir. Six eighteen-pounder shot strapped on apiece, sir, and some of the bugger are two thousand? Three?' Gudin asked.

'More than that, sir. I ain't seen a herd the size of it, not even when the Scots drive them.'
Gudin shrugged. He very much doubted whether these two could tell him anything useful,

questions had to be asked. Now, waving flies from his face, he told the two deserters what the T Tippoo wanted.
'Yes, sir,' Sharpe said eagerly. 'It's why we came, sir.'
'Good,' Gudin said. 'The Tippoo might want you in one of his own cushoons. That's the best of the way.'
Lawford went pale, while Sharpe just shrugged. 'Is that bad, sir?'
'You know what circumcision is, Private?'
'Something the army does to you, sir? Like swear you in?'
Gudin smiled. 'Not quite, Sharpe. The Tippoo is a Muslim and he likes his foreign volunteers to be circumcised.'
'My prick?' Sharpe was as aghast as Lawford now.
'It's over in seconds,' Gudin reassured them, 'though the bleeding can last for a while.'
'Bloody hell, sir!' Sharpe said. 'For religion? They do that?'
'We Christians sprinkle babies with water,' Gudin said, 'and the Muslims chop off foreheads.'
'Quite right too, sir,' Sharpe said enthusiastically. 'And it'll be an honour to serve in a French battalion.'

'In a French battalion?' Gudin teased him.
'If you don't flog, sir, and you don't carve up pricks, then it'll be more than an honour to serve in a French battalion.'
'If the Tippoo allows it,' Gudin warned them, 'which he may not. But I think he might.'
Mary touched Sharpe's elbow. 'I came with Richard, sir.'
Gudin inspected her black eye. 'How did that happen, Mademoiselle?'
'I fell, sir,' Mary said.
Gudin's face flickered with a smile. 'Or did Private Sharpe hit you? So that you would be a deserter?'
'I fell over, sir.'
Gudin nodded. 'You hit hard, Private Sharpe.'
'No point else, sir.'
'That is true,' Gudin said, then shrugged. 'My men have their women. If His Majesty allows it, they'll be a good deal better off than you are.'
'Not as much as circumcising, sir.'
Gudin laughed. 'All the same, I think you had better sit down.'
Removing the bandages hurt like buggery. Mister Micklewhite, the surgeon, had put a sack of flour over the wound to keep it clean.

the bandages away. Doctor Venkatesh was indeed skilful and gentle and his voice was ever soothing. The Indian doctor plainly disapproved of both the injury and the treatment. He tutted and shook his head. Sharpe twisted round to see that a group of Indians had come into the courtyard. At the head of the group was the Tippoo. The Tippoo stopped a half-dozen paces short of Sharpe and Lawford. He stared at them for a moment. Sharpe obediently turned, showing his back to the Tippoo, who, fascinated by the open wound, looked at Sharpe's back.

could inspect the damage. Sharpe could feel the Tippoo's breath on the back of his neck, he could hear the Tippoo's heart beating. Then a sudden pain like the blow of a red-hot poker slammed through Sharpe. He almost fell. The Tippoo nodded approval and stepped back. 'So tell me about them,' he ordered Gudin. 'Ordinary deserters,' Gudin said in French to the interpreter. 'That one' - he indicated Lawford - 'is a deserter. The other is a deserter. The Tippoo glanced at him, then at Sharpe. 'She's with the tall one,' Gudin said, again indicating Sharpe, then waited as the interpreter translated. The Tippoo gave Mary a brief inspection. She was slouching, trying to accentuate her dress. 'Nothing.'
'They say they know nothing,' the Tippoo corrected Gudin. 'And they're not spies?'
Gudin shrugged. 'How can one tell? But I think not.'
'I think we can tell,' the Tippoo said. 'And I think we can

discover what kind of soldiers they are too.' He turned and rapped some orders to an aide, who returned with a pair of hunting muskets. The long-barrelled weapons were like no guns Sharpe had ever seen. A British soldier, like any other, learned to load with a paper cartridge, but there was

attention with the gun's jewelled butt grounded beside him. 'Sir!' he said, signifying he was

Lawford was still trying to trickle powder into the muzzle. The Lieutenant was just as The interpreter translated the words for the Tippoo who waited patiently as Lawford fi 'You can evidently load,' the Tippoo said to Sharpe, 'but can you shoot?' 'Aye, sir,' Sharpe answered the interpreter. The Tippoo pointed over Sharpe's shoulder. 'Then shoot him.' Sharpe and Lawford both turned to see an elderly British officer being escorted through 'You can't shoot. . .' Lawford began.

'Shut up, Bill,' Sharpe said and brought the musket up to his shoulder and swung its m 'Wait!' Gudin shouted, then spoke urgently to the Tippoo. The Tippoo laughed away Gudin's protest. Instead he had his interpreter ask Sharpe wha 'Scum, sir,' Sharpe said loudly enough for Colonel McCandless to hear. 'Goddamn bloody 'You are willing to shoot that one?' the interpreter asked. 'Td pay for the chance,' Sharpe said vengefully. Lawford hissed at him, but Sharpe igno 'His Majesty would like you to do it very close,' the interpreter said. 'He wants you 'It'll be a bloody pleasure,' Sharpe said enthusiastically. He cocked the gun as he wa Sharpe raised the musket so that its muzzle was no more than six inches from McCandless's face McCandless again hid his reaction, other than sparing one glance at Lawford. Then he l

at him. 'Attack anywhere but from the west,' the Scotsman said quietly, and then, much louder, 'Bugger God,' Sharpe said, then pulled the trigger. The flint fell, it snapped its spa 'Stop!' Gudin shouted. Sharpe paused and turned. 'I thought you wanted the bugger dead.' The Tippoo laughed. 'We need him alive for a while. But you passed your test.' He turn 'Did Harris send you?' McCandless asked softly. 'Yes,' Sharpe hissed, not looking at the Colonel. Mary was shaking her head. She glanc 'Beware the west,' McCandless whispered. 'Nothing else.' The Scotsman groaned, pretend Sharpe spat on McCandless. 'Come here, Sharpe!' Gudin, disapproval plain in his voice, Sharpe marched back to Lawford's side where one of the

Tippoo's attendants took back the two muskets. The Tippoo gestured at McCandless's guards, evi 'I'm to go with him, love,' she explained to Sharpe. 'I thought you were staying with me!' Sharpe protested. 'I'm to earn my keep,' she said. 'I'm to teach his little sons English. And sweep and Colonel Gudin intervened. 'She will join you later,' he told Sharpe. 'But for now you 'Probation, sir?' Lawford offered. 'Exactly,' Gudin said. 'And soldiers on probation are not permitted wives. Don't worry Mary stood on tiptoe and kissed Sharpe's cheek. 'I'll be all right, love,' she whisper 'Look after yourself, lass,' Sharpe said, and watched her follow the tall Indian offic Gudin gestured towards the archway. 'We must let Doctor Venkatesh finish your back, SH 'Good money!' Sharpe said, impressed. A haideri was worth half a crown, far above the 'But doubtless in arrears,' Lawford said sarcastically. He was still angry at Sharpe f 'The pay is always in arrears,' Gudin admitted cheerfully, 'but in what army is the pa

Doctor Venkatesh who retrieved his basket and followed Gudin out of the palace. Thus Sharpe went to meet his new comrades and readied himself to face a new enemy. His

General David Baird did not feel guilty about Sharpe and Lawford, for they were soldie Major Shee seemed alarmed at the General's sudden appearance, but Baird soothed the Ma 'I'll take you to Captain Morris, sir,' Shee said, then clapped on his hat and led the

officers' tents. 'It's the end one, sir,' he said nervously. 'Do you need me at all?' 'I wouldn't waste your time, Shee, on trifles, but I'm obliged for your help, though.' Baird found a shirt-sleeved Captain Morris frowning at his paperwork in the company of 'Sir!' Morris upset his chair as he stood up, then he plucked his red coat off the flo

Baird waved to show that Morris need not worry about donning a coat. 'There's no need
'Unbearable, sir,' Morris said nervously.
'I'm Baird,' Baird introduced himself. 'I don't think we've had the pleasure.'
'No, sir.' Morris was too nervous to introduce himself properly.
'Sit you down, man,' Baird said, trying to put the Captain at his ease. 'Sit you down.'
'Thank you, sir.' Sergeant Hakeswill's stiff posture unbent a fraction.
Baird smiled at Morris. 'You lost two men this week, Captain, did you not?'
'Two men?' Morris frowned. That bastard Sharpe had run, taking his bibbi with him, but

'The very fellow. A lucky fellow too, eh? Carrying the despatch to Madras. It's quite
'Very glad for him,' Morris managed to say.
'Found a replacement, have you?' Baird asked.
'Ensign Fitzgerald, sir,' Morris said. 'Lieutenant Fitzgerald now, sir, by brevet, of
'And the other fellow you lost?' Baird asked, trying hard to sound casual. 'The private
'He's in the book all right, sir.' The Sergeant answered for Morris. 'Hakeswill, sir,'

'What was the rogue's name?' Baird asked Morris.
'Sharpe, sir.' Hakeswill again answered. 'Richard Sharpe, sir, and as filthy horrible
'The book?' Baird asked Morris, ignoring Hakeswill's judgement.
Morris frantically searched the mess on his desk for the Punishment Book, at the back
Baird leafed through the front pages, finally discovering the entry for Sharpe's court
'Struck a sergeant, sir!' Hakeswill announced.
'You, perhaps?' Baird asked drily, noting the Sergeant's swollen and bruised nose.
'Without any provocation, sir,' Hakeswill said earnestly. 'As God is my judge, sir, I
Baird did not respond, but just turned to the last page of the book where he found the

Shoulders, Arms, Hands, Thighs, Legs, and Feet. Morris had filled them all in, thus offering a
'Thank you, sir.'
'It's been distributed?'
'Tomorrow, sir.' Morris blushed. The form should have been copied out four times. One
Baird put the open book onto Morris's table. 'I want you

to add a note under "General Remarks",' Baird told the Captain.
'Of course, sir.'
'Just say that it is vital that Private Sharpe be taken alive. And that if he is captu
Morris gaped at Baird. 'You, sir?'
'Baird, B-A-I-R-D. Major General.'
'Yes, sir, but.. .' Morris had been about to ask what possible business a major genera
'I do hope so, Captain.' Baird stood. 'I even pray as much. Now may I thank you for yo
'Yes, sir, of course, sir.' Morris half stood as the General left, then dropped back o
Hakeswill sniffed. 'No good, sir, I'll warrant that.'
Morris uncovered the arrack and took a sip. 'First the bastard is summoned to Harris's
'He's up to no good, sir,' Hakeswill said. 'He took his woman and vanished, sir. Ain't
'I can't disobey Baird,' Morris muttered.
'But you don't wants Sharpie back here either, sir,' Hakes-will said fervently. 'A sol

himself. 'Who knows, sir,' he suggested slyly, 'but the little bastard might be reporting on y
'General's pet?' Morris repeated softly. The Captain was a venal man and, though no wo
'Don't need to, sir. With respect, sir. Ain't no form being distributed here, sir, not
'I'm sure it does, Sergeant, I'm sure it does,' Morris said, then closed the Punishmen

'You do me honour, sir,' Hakeswill said with feigned emotion. 'You do me honour. And I
In Seringapatam.

'What in God's name did you think you were doing, Sharpe?' Lawford demanded furiously. Sharpe stared south across the landscape, saying nothing. To his right the shallow river. Colonel Gudin had then taken the two Englishmen to a barracks room close by the city's

over the head. 'Where you boys from?' an English voice asked Sharpe as he pulled down the dyed
'33rd,' Sharpe had said.

'The Havercakes?' the man said. 'Thought they were up north, in Calcutta?'
'Brought down to Madras last year,' Sharpe said. He gingerly sat on his cot, an Indian
'Royal bleeding Artillery, mate, both of us. Ran three months back. Name's Johnny Black
Tom Dick Sharpe and that's Bill Lawford,' Sharpe said, introducing the Lieutenant who had
'Used to be a lot more of us,' Blake told Sharpe, 'but men die here like flies. Fever
'But it ain't bad here,' Henry Hickson offered. 'Food's all right. Plenty of bibbis and
'Right bastards we had,' Blake agreed.
'Aren't they all?' Sharpe had said.

'And the pay's good, when you get it. Five months overdue now, but maybe we'll get it
Blake and Hickson were not required to stand guard, but instead manned one of the big

nothing to say for yourself, Private?' he challenged Sharpe who still stared serenely over the
Sharpe looked at him. 'You loaded the musket, didn't you, Bill?'

'Of course!'
'You ever felt gunpowder that smooth and fine?' Sharpe gazed into the Lieutenant's face
'It could have been gunpowder dust!' Lawford insisted angrily.
'That shiny?' Sharpe said derisively. 'Gunpowder dust is full of rat shit and sawdust!
Lawford gaped at Sharpe. 'So you knew all along the gun wouldn't fire?'
'Of course I bloody knew! I wouldn't have pulled the trigger else. You mean you didn't
Lawford turned away. Once again he had been made to look like a fool and he blushed at
Sharpe stared at a patrol of the Tippoo's lancers who were riding back towards the city

'I know. I'm sorry too. I should have known it wasn't powder.'
'It was confusing, weren't it?' Sharpe said, trying to console his companion. 'What was
'I was thinking of Private Brookfield,' Lawford said, not without some pride at the memory
'The clerk of Mister Stanbridge's company, sir? Fellow who wears spectacles? Does he wear
'He says it keeps the ink off him.'
'He always was an old woman,' Sharpe said scornfully, 'but you did well. And I'll tell
Lawford gaped at him. "You know?"
'The Colonel spoke to me, sir, while we was going through that pantomime back there in
Lawford stared at Sharpe, then glanced across the angle of the city walls towards the
'He said it twice. Avoid the west wall.'
A bellow from the next cavalier made them turn. Rothiere

was pointing south, suggesting that the two Englishmen watch that direction as they were supposed
'Maybe at night?' Lawford suggested vaguely.

'If they ever let us stand guard at night,' Sharpe said dubiously, then thought of Marston
'So what do we do?' Lawford asked.
'What we always do in the army,' Sharpe said stoically. 'Hurry up and do nothing. Wait
Lawford shuddered. 'I'm glad I brought you, Sharpe.'
'You are?' Sharpe grinned at that compliment. 'I'll tell you when I'll be glad. When you

army had bored Richard Sharpe, then done its best to break his spirits. It had even flogged him
For at heart, as Richard Sharpe had just discovered for himself, he was a soldier.

CHAPTER 6

The armies of Britain and Hyderabad reached Seringapatam four days later. The first evening

guns supplied from France, some still with the ancient Bourbon cipher incised close to their t
And not just cannon fire, for as the two enemy armies marched closer to the city the r
'How do you aim the bloody things?' Sharpe asked. Some of the rockets had been placed
'You don't really aim them,' Lawford said, 'at least I don't think you do. They're jus
'We'll see soon enough,' Sharpe said as another handcart of the strange missiles was h
Sharpe looked forward to seeing the rockets fired, but then

it became apparent that the British and Hyderabad armies were not approaching the city directl
Sharpe watched fascinated as an officer turned one of the long weapons on the flat top

The fuse paper, Sharpe guessed, had been soaked in water diluted with gunpowder, then

walls and the heavy round shot screamed across the river to disembowel a horse a half-mile awa
'He's got thousands of those bloody things,' Sharpe told Lawford, indicating a pile of
'They really aren't very accurate,' Lawford said with pedantic disapproval.
'But fire enough at once and you wouldn't know if you were in this world or the next.
Behind them, from one of the tall white minarets of the city's new mosque, the muezzin
'Poor bloody fools,' Sharpe said, though neither he nor Lawford yet knew what was dang

that until he and Lawford proved their reliability there would always be an undercurrent of su
'How long have you been in the artillery?' Lawford had asked the grey-haired Hickson.
'Bleeding lifetime, Bill. Joined in '76.' Hickson laughed. 'King and country! Go and s
'So why did you run?' Lawford asked.
'Money, of course. The Tippoo might be a black heathen bastard, but he pays well for g
'Don't you ever worry that you'll be recaptured?' Lawford asked him.
'Of course I bloody worry! All the bleeding time!' Hickson held the thumbstall close t

of his stitching. 'Christ, Bill, I don't want to be stood up against a bleeding post with a do
Sharpe and Lawford watched the invading armies make their camp well out of cannon rang
Sergeant Rothiere shouted at Sharpe and Lawford from the inner wall of the Mysore Gate

'Vitel' Rothiere bellowed.

'Now,' Lawford said nervously.

The two men threaded their way through the spectators who crowded the parapets until t
'Mending wonderfully, sir.'

Gudin smiled, pleased at the news. 'It's Indian medicine, Sharpe. If I ever go back to
Sharpe stared, but could see nothing. 'You want us to go and get them, sir?' he offere

'I want you to shoot them,' Gudin said.

The bushes under the twin palms were nearly quarter of a mile away. 'Long bloody range

'Try this, then,' Gudin said and held out a gun. It must have been one of the Tippoo's
Sharpe took and hefted the gun. 'Might be pretty, sir,' he said, 'but no amount of fan
'You're wrong,' Gudin said. 'That's a rifle.'

'A rifle!' Sharpe had heard of such weapons, but he had never handled one, and now he

'That rifle can kill at four hundred paces, Sharpe,' Gudin said confidently. 'It's loa

'No, you don't, sir,' Sharpe said, 'you want to see if I'm willing to kill my own coun

'That too, of course,' Gudin agreed placidly, and laughed at having had his small ploy

'I'll do my best, sir,' Lawford said and took the second rifle from Gudin. Lawford mig

'Some men find it hard to shoot at their old comrades,' Gudin told Lawford mildly, 'an

'Let's hope the bastards are officers,' Sharpe said, 'begging your presence, sir.'
'There they are!' Gudin said, and, sure enough, just beside the cistern beneath the tower
Sharpe knelt in a gun embrasure. He instinctively felt that the range was much too long.
He settled himself firmly, keeping the sights lined on the distant man, then gently raised

thus the freedom that might let him escape from the city. He took a breath, half let it out, then
'The clerk wins!' Gudin exclaimed in astonishment. He lowered his spyglass. 'Yours were
Lawford reddened, but said nothing. He looked very troubled and Gudin put his evident
'Yes, sir,' Lawford said, truthfully enough.
'You deserve to be better than a clerk. Well done. Well done both of you.' He took the
'Yes, sir.'
'You will. Six inches off at that distance is very good shooting. Very good indeed.' Gudin
Sharpe glanced behind him, hoping to see what devilment the western walls held, but he
I did,' Sharpe muttered.
'God, what have I done? I was aiming left!'
Don't be a bloody fool,' Sharpe said, 'what you've done

is earned our freedom. You did bloody well.' He dragged Lawford into a tavern. The Tippoos might
Lawford drank it in one go. 'That was the first man I've killed,' he said, blinking from
'Worry you?'
'Of course it does! He was British!'
'Can't skin a cat without making a bloody mess,' Sharpe said comfortingly.
'Jesus!' Lawford said angrily.
Sharpe poured half his liquor into Lawford's glass, then beckoned to one of the serving
'If I'd have missed like you,' Lawford said ruefully, 'Gudin would have been just as if
'I was aiming to kill the bugger.'
'You were?' Lawford was shocked.
'Jesus Christ, Bill! We have to convince these buggers!' Sharpe smiled as the girl poured

drinkers nibbled between sips, but Sharpe found the stuff too pungent. Once the girl was gone
Lawford was silent for a few seconds, then gave a shrug. 'In truth I thought it would
'So why did you come?'
Lawford cradled the glass in both hands and stared at Sharpe as if weighing up whether
'Morris is a bastard,' Sharpe said feelingly.
Lawford frowned at the criticism. 'He's bored,' he said chidingly, then he steered the
'And because it would get you noticed?'
Lawford looked up with some surprise on his face, then he nodded. 'That too.'
'Same as me then,' Sharpe said. 'Exact same as me. Except till the General said you was
Lawford was shocked by the admission. 'You really wanted to desert?'
'For Christ's sake! What do you think it's like in the ranks if you've got an officer
Lawford said nothing.

"You've got some good men in the company," Sharpe insisted. "Tom Garrard is a better soldier
in the battalion, but you don't even notice him. If a man can't read and doesn't speak like a
'The army's changing,' Lawford said defensively.
'Like hell it is. Why do you make us powder our hair like bleeding women? Or wear that
'Change takes time,' Lawford said weakly.
'Too much bloody time/ Sharpe said fervently, then leaned against the wall and eyed the
'What about Mrs Bickerstaff?' Lawford asked.
'I was just thinking of her. And maybe you were right. Maybe I shouldn't have brought
'A kin?'
'A pimp.'
'He really planned that?' Lawford asked.
'Him and Morris. In it together, they were. Bloody Hakeswill told me as much, the night

'Can you prove it?'

'Prove it!' Sharpe asked derisively. 'Of course I can't prove it, but it's true.' He b

'Take her with you, of course,' Lawford said sternly.

'Might not have a chance,' Sharpe said.

Lawford stared at him for a few seconds. 'God, you're ruthless,' he finally said.

'I'm a soldier. It fits.' Sharpe said it proudly, but he was not proud, merely defiant

'A whore?' Lawford asked in horror.

'I don't suppose a respectable woman will help us out much. Not unless you want a spot

Lawford stared aghast at Sharpe. 'What we should do,' the Lieutenant said softly, 'is

'And how the hell are we supposed to find him?' Sharpe asked defiantly. 'We can't wand

'Maybe I'll read.'

'Your choice,' Sharpe said carelessly.

Lawford hesitated, his face reddening. 'It's just that I've seen men with the pox,' he

'Christ! You've seen men vomit, but it don't stop you drinking. Besides, don't worry a

stuff worked for bloody Hakeswill, didn't it? Though God knows why. Besides, Harry Hickson say
course they always say that. Still, if you want to ruin your eyes reading the Bible, go ahead,

Lawford said nothing for a few seconds. 'Maybe I will come with you,' he finally said

'Learning how the other half lives?' Sharpe asked with a grin.

'Something like that,' Lawford mumbled.

"Well enough, I tell you. Give us some cash and a willing couple of frows and we can l

Lawford was now deep red. 'You won't, of course, tell anyone about this when we're bac

'Me?' Sharpe pretended to be astonished at the very idea. 'My lips are gummed together

Lawford worried that he was letting his dignity slide, but he did not want to lose Sha

Every house in the city was prepared for the siege. Storehouses were filled with food

Mary helped General Appah Rao's household prepare for that ordeal. She felt guilty, no

When General Appah Rao had first taken her away from

Sharpe she had been frightened, but the General had taken her to his own house and there reass

But now, after a week in the General's household, Mary did not want to leave. For a st

It had been Lakshmi who had scolded Mary for being so dirty, had stripped her from her

'I didn't want to draw attention to myself.'

'When you're my age, my dear, no one pays you any attention at all, so you should take

'He was an Englishman,' Mary said nervously, explaining

the lack of the marriage mark on her forehead and worried lest the older woman thought she sho

'Well, you're a free woman now, so let's make you expensive.' Lakshmi laughed and then

'There was a man back in the army. A bad man. He wanted to . . . ' Mary stopped and shr

'Soldiers!' Lakshmi said disapprovingly. 'But the two men you ran away with, did they

'Yes, oh yes.' Mary suddenly wanted Lakshmi's good opinion, and that opinion would not

'Ah!' Lakshmi said as though everything was clear now. Her husband had told her that M

'He's just a friend of my brother's.' Mary blushed at the lie, but Lakshmi did not see

'That's good. That's good. Now, this.' She held out a white petticoat that Mary steppe

'Green,' she said, 'that'll suit you,' and she unfolded a vast bolt of green silk that

'My mother taught me.'

'In Calcutta?' Lakshmi hooted. 'What do they know of saris in Calcutta? Skimpy little

In the mornings Mary taught the General's three small boys English. They were bright o

'We don't talk about it,' Lakshmi said to Mary one afternoon when they were both hulli

'I'm sorry I asked.'

'His father was disgraced, you see,' Lakshmi went on enthusiastically. 'And so the who

'Is it a worse disgrace than having been married to an Englishman?' Mary asked miserab

'A disgrace? Married to an Englishman? What nonsense you do talk, girl!' Lakshmi said,

Mary was happy, but she felt guilty. She knew she ought to try and find Shaipe for she

perhaps everything would turn out well on that day, but Mary did nothing to hasten it. She just she did not start lighting the lamps until she heard the first shutter bar fall.

And Lakshmi, who had been wondering just where she might find poor disgraced Kunwar Si

Once the British and Hyderabad armies had made their permanent encampment to the west General Harris endured the rocket bombardment for two days, then decided it was time to Hakeswill was sitting in his own tent, a luxury he alone enjoyed among the 33rd's serge

to Captain Hughes and should have been auctioned with the rest of the Captain's belongings aft

'Sixty rounds of ammunition,' Morris said.

'Always carry it, sir! Regulations, sir!'

Morris had drunk the best part of three bottles of wine at luncheon and was in no mood

'Us, sir?' Hakeswill was alarmed at the prospect. 'Just us, sir?'

'The whole battalion. Night attack. Inspection at sundown. Any man who looks drunk get Officers excepted, Hakeswill thought, then quivered as he offered Morris a cracking sa

able pay. Are you drunk, Garrard? If you're drunk, boy, I'll have your bones given a stroking.

The battalion paraded at dusk and, to its surprise, found itself being inspected by it

'So what are we doing, Lieutenant?' Tom Garrard asked the newly promoted Lieutenant Fi

'Silence in the ranks!' Hakeswill bawled.

'He was talking to me, Sergeant,' Fitzgerald said, 'and you will do me the honour of n

Hakeswill growled. Fitzgerald claimed his brother was the Knight of Kerry, whatever th

to countermand Hakeswill's authority, and Hakeswill was determined to change that. The Sergeant

'You see those trees ahead?' Fitzgerald explained to Garrard. 'We're going to clear th

'How many of the bastards, sir?'

'Hundreds!' Fitzgerald answered cheerfully. 'And all of them quaking at the knees to t

The Tippoo's boys might be quaking, but they could clearly see the three battalions ap

'It's nothing, boys, nothing,' Fitzgerald called. A scrap of the rocket's cylinder had

'It is, sir,' the Irish Private answered.

'Got skulls like bloody buckets, we have,' Fitzgerald said, and crammed his tattered s

Hakeswill's resentment of Fitzgerald seethed. How dare a mere lieutenant overrule him?

The sun had long gone by the time Wellesley halted the three battalions, though a lamb

later, but the range was too great and the balls spent themselves harmlessly.

Wellesley galloped his horse to Major Shee's side, spoke briefly, then spurred on. 'Fl

'That's us, boys,' Fitzgerald said and drew his sabre. His left arm was throbbing now,

The Grenadier and Light companies advanced from the two flanks of the battalion. Welle

'Sir!' Francis West, the commander of the Grenadier Company, was senior to Morris and

'You may advance.'

'At once, sir,' West said. 'Detachment! Forward!'

'Im in your hands, Mother,' Hakeswill said under his breath as the two companies began

'Steady in the line!' Sergeant Green's voice called. 'Don't hurry! Keep your ranks!'

Morris had discarded his horse and drawn his sabre. He

felt distinctly unwell. 'Give them steel when we get there,' he called to his company.

'We should give the buggers some bleeding artillery,' someone muttered.

'Who said that?' Hakeswill shouted. 'Keep your bleeding tongues still!'

The first balls were whistling past their ears now and the crackle of the enemy's musk

The musketry fire blazed along the embankment's lip, each shot a spark of brightness t

They ran hard towards the embankment. Musket balls whipped overhead. All the redcoats

they reached the embankment and clambered up its short steep slope. 'Kill them, boys!' Fitzgerald
A blast of musketry erupted from the farther bank. The Light Company, poised on the lip of the
Redcoats fell as the bullets thumped home. The aqueduct was only about ten paces wide
'Follow him, lads!' Sergeant Green shouted and about half the Light Company jumped into the

was still confused and Sergeant Hakeswill was crouching at the foot of the embankment out of sight
'Go on!' Wellesley shouted, angered at their hesitation. 'Go on! Don't let them stand
'Oh Jesus, Mother!' Hakeswill called as he scrambled up the embankment. 'Mother, Mother!
Wellesley saw his two flank companies at last advance across the aqueduct and he sent

If necessary he could summon the two sepoy battalions as reinforcements, but he was sure
Hakeswill slithered down the farther embankment into the black shadows among the trees
'Where?'

'Here, sir!' A volley of musketry crashed in the trees and the balls slashed through the
'Form line!' Morris shouted. 'Form line!' He had a dozen men with him and they formed

among the trees. The reflected flames of the burning rockets flickered red on their bayonets.
'I'm here, sir!' Fitzgerald called confidently from the darkness ahead. 'Up ahead of you
'Ensign Hicks!' Morris called.

'I'm here, sir, right beside you, sir,' a small voice said from almost beneath Morris.
'Jesus Christ!' Morris swore. He had been hoping that Hicks could have brought reinforcements
'Still here, sir! Got the buggers worried, we have.'

'I want you here, Lieutenant!' Morris insisted. 'Hakeswill! Where are you?'
'Here, sir,' Hakeswill said, but not moving from his hiding place among the bushes. He
'Fitzgerald!' Morris shouted irritably. 'Come here!'
'The bloody man,' Fitzgerald said under his breath. His left arm was useless now, and

to tie a handkerchief round the wound and hoped the pressure would staunch the blood. The thought
'Sir?' Green responded stoically.

'Stay with the men here, Sergeant,' Fitzgerald ordered. The Irishman had led a score of
'Here!' Morris called irritably. 'Hurry, damn you!'

'Back in a minute, Sergeant,' Fitzgerald reassured Green, and headed off through the trees
He strayed too far north, and suddenly a rocket flared up from the top of the eastern edge
'Sergeant Hakeswill?' Fitzgerald asked.

'It's me, sir. Right here, sir. This way, sir.'
'Thank God.' Fitzgerald crossed the clearing at a run, his left arm hanging useless at his
'I know what I'm doing, sir,' Hakeswill said, and as the fierce crackling fire in the

belly. His face twitched as the newly sharpened blade ripped through the Lieutenant's clothes
'Fitzgerald!' Morris shouted frantically. 'For Christ's sake, Lieutenant! Where the hell
'He's gone to hell.' Hakeswill chuckled softly. He was searching the Lieutenant's body
'Who's that?' Morris called as he heard Hakeswill pushing through the undergrowth.
'Me, sir!' Hakeswill called. 'I'm looking for Lieutenant Fitzgerald, sir.'
'Come here instead!' Morris snapped.

Hakeswill ran the last few yards and dropped down between Morris and a frightened Ensign
'You think the bastards found Fitzgerald?' Morris asked.

'I reckon so,' Hakeswill said. 'Poor little bastard. I tried to find him, sir, but the
'Jesus.' Morris ducked as a volley of bullets flicked through the leaves overhead. 'Where
'Probably skulking, sir. Hiding his precious hide, I don't wonder.'

'We're all bloody skulking,' Morris answered truthfully enough.

'Not me, sir. Not Obadiah Hakeswill, sir. Got me halberd proper wet, sir. Want to feel
Morris shuddered at the thought of touching the spear, but took some comfort in having
'Maybe we should go back?' Ensign Hicks suggested. 'Back across the aqueduct?'
'Can't, sir,' Hakeswill said. 'Buggers are behind us.'
'You're sure?' Morris asked.
'Fought the black buggers there myself, sir. Couldn't hold them. A whole tribe of the
'You're a brave man, Hakeswill,' Morris said gruffly.

'Just following your lead, sir,' Hakeswill said, then ducked as another enemy volley w
Behind him there was another cheer as the rest of the 33rd at last crossed the aqueduct
'Forward!' a voice shouted from somewhere behind the Light Company's scattered fugitiv
'Bloody hell!' Morris snapped. 'Who the hell is that?' '33rd!' the voice shouted. 'To

CHAPTER 7

'Sharpe! Sharpe!' It was Colonel Gudin who, at nightfall, burst into the barracks room
'What about me, sir?' Lawford asked. The Lieutenant had been idly reading his Bible as
'Come on, Sharpe!' Gudin did not wait to answer Lawford, but just ran across the barra
'Can you ride a horse?' Gudin shouted at Sharpe when the two men reached the gate.
'I did a couple of times,' Sharpe said, not bothering to explain that the beasts had b
'Get on that one!' Gudin said, pointing to a small excited mare that was being held by

for God's sake take care,' Gudin shouted as he swung himself up into the saddle. Captain Romet
Sharpe could hear the distant fight. Muskets snapped and shells exploded dully to flic
Sharpe followed, more intent on staying on the mare than watching the excitement that
'Your old friends are trying to clear the tope,' Gudin explained, pointing at the thic

not want to break a horse's leg by being too reckless. 'I want you to confuse them.'
'Me, sir?' Sharpe slipped half out of the saddle, gripped the pommel desperately and s
'Shout orders at them, Sharpe,' Gudin said, when the report of the gun had rolled past
'Lawford would have done better, sir,' Sharpe said. 'He's got a voice like an officer.
'Then you'll have to sound like a sergeant,' Gudin said, 'and if you do it right, Shar
'Thank you, sir.'
Gudin had slowed his horse to a walk as they neared the wood. It was too dark to trot
'You don't need one. We're not here to fight, just to mix them up. That's why I came b

shouted the commands to fire, to advance and to kill. Whatever British or Indian troops were t
'Man Colonel!' The big Sergeant, who had first used Captain Romet's horse to reach the
'Let's enjoy ourselves,' Gudin said in English.
'Aye, sir,' Sharpe said and wondered what the hell he should do now. In the dark, he r
Gudin paused at the edge of the tope. Rocketmen were enthusiastically blasting their w
Sharpe followed the two Frenchmen. Off to his right there was a sudden blast of gunfir

was over before they even reached it. The Tippoo's men had encountered a small group of redcoa
'Bloody hell,' Sharpe said. 'Excuse me, sir,' he added, then he gently moved Gudin's h
'Good.' Gudin snapped the tinderbox shut, extinguishing the small flame. 'And you don'
'That's why I'm here, sir,' Sharpe said with a suitable bloodthirstiness.
'I think the British army lost a good man in you, Sharpe,' Gudin said, standing and gu
'To France, sir?'
Gudin smiled at Sharpe's surprised tone. 'It isn't the devil's country, Sharpe; indeed
'Me, sir? An officer?' Sharpe laughed. 'Like making a mule into a racehorse.'

'You underestimate yourself.' Gudin paused. There were feet trampling to the right, an
'Forward!' Sharpe obediently bellowed into the dark trees. 'Forward!' He paused, liste

No one responded. 'Try a name,' Gudin suggested.

Sharpe invented an officer's name. 'Captain Fellows! This way!' He called it a dozen times. Then, from maybe thirty paces away, the hated voice called back, 'Who's that?' The Sergeant said, 'Come here, man!' Sharpe snapped.

Hakeswill ignored the order, but the fact that a man had replied at all cheered Gudin. One thing was plain to Sharpe. The 33rd was in trouble. Poor Jed Mallinson should never

need to get closer, sir,' he told the Colonel and, without waiting for Gudin's consent, he ran. 'Sharpe!' Gudin hissed, but Sharpe was well away from the Colonel now and he reckoned 'Sergeant Hakeswill!' Sharpe bellowed, then ran on again. There was a danger that by so. A rocket crashed into a branch high above Sharpe and slashed straight down into the clearing. 'Sharpie!' Hakeswill shouted. 'You bastard!' He slashed wildly at Sharpe with his bloody sword. 'For Christ's sake, drop it!' Sharpe shouted, retreating before the quick lunges of the grenadiers. 'Running off to the enemy, Sharpie?' Hakeswill said. 'I

should take you in, shouldn't I? It'll be another court martial and a firing party this time. Sharpe felt the rocket's iron tube under his right hand, gripped it and threw it up at the grenadiers. Just then a squad of redcoats burst into the clearing. The burning carcass of the rocket showed. Then a volley of musketry flamed from the trees and half of the grenadiers spun round

the fallen Hakeswill. 'Well done, Sharpe,' Gudin called. 'Well done! Stop that! Stop that!' The Colonel said. Sharpe was cursing. He had so nearly got clean away! If Hakeswill had not attacked him. 'You took a terrible risk, Corporal!' Gudin said, coming back to Sharpe and sheathing his sword. 'Aye, sir. It worked,' Sharpe said, though he took no pleasure in it. It had all gone. 'I'll make sure the Tippoo hears of your bravery, Sharpe,' Gudin said as he retrieved the sword. 'Thank you, sir,' Sharpe said, though without enthusiasm.

'You're not wounded, are you?' Gudin asked anxiously, struck by the forlorn tone of Sharpe's voice.

'Burned my hand, sir,' Sharpe said. He had not realized it when he snatched up the rocket. 'Of course you'll live,' Gudin said, then laughed delightedly. 'Gave them a beating, did you? Troused 'em proper, sir.'

'And we'll trounce them again, Sharpe, when they attack the city. They don't know what's waiting for them, sir?' Sharpe asked.

'You'll see. You'll see,' Gudin said, then hauled himself up into his saddle. Sergeant Hakeswill looked up at Sharpe and spat. 'Bloody traitor!'

'Ignore him,' Gudin said.

'Snake!' Hakeswill hissed. 'Piece of no-good shit, that's what you are, Sharpie. Jesus Christ!'

'I'd like to kick his bloody teeth in, sir,' Sharpe said to Gudin. 'In fact, if you've got a mind to, I'd like to kick his teeth in, sir.'

Gudin sighed. 'I do object,' the Colonel said mildly, 'because it's rather important that you should not do that.'

'I'd still like to kick the bastard's teeth in, sir.'

'I assure you the Tippoo might do that without any help from you,' Gudin said grimly.

Sharpe and the Colonel spurred ahead of the prisoners to cross the bridge back to the city. 'Thank you, sir.'

'And believe me, I'll tell the Tippoo. He admires bravery!'

Lieutenant Lawford was among the curious crowd who waited just inside the gate. 'What's happened?' he asked.

'I bugged up,' Sharpe said bitterly. 'I bloody well bugged it up. Come on, let's see the bastards.'

'No, wait.' Lawford had seen the redcoats coming through the flame light of the gate to the city. 'Come away!' Sharpe insisted and he tugged at Lawford's elbow.

Lawford shook off the tug and stared at the prisoners, unable to hide his chagrin at the sight of them.

'Come on!' Lawford hurried down an alley. The Lieutenant

had gone pale. He stopped beside the arched doorway of a small temple that was surmounted by a statue. 'That bastard?' Sharpe said. 'Anything's possible.'

'Surely not. He wouldn't betray us,' Lawford said, then shuddered. 'What happened, for Sharpe told him of the night's events and how close he had come to making a clean break?' 'He could have misunderstood you,' Lawford said. 'Not him.' 'But what happens if he does betray us?' Lawford asked. 'Then we join your uncle in the bloody cells,' Sharpe said gloomily. 'You should have seen him.' 'Don't be a fool!' Lawford snapped. 'You're still in the army, Sharpe. So am I.' He said. 'Why?' 'Because if we can't get the news out, then maybe he can!' Lawford said angrily. His a. 'How? We can't ask in the streets for him!' 'Then find Mrs Bickerstaff,' Lawford said urgently. 'Find her, Sharpe!' He lowered his head. 'I outrank you,' Sharpe said. Lawford turned on him furiously. 'What did you say?' 'I'm a corporal now, Private.' Sharpe grinned. 'This is not a joke, Sharpe!' Lawford snapped. There was a sudden authority in his voice. 'We've done it bloody well so far,' Sharpe said defensively.

'No, we haven't,' Lawford said firmly. 'Because we haven't got the news out, have we?' Sharpe felt the comforting weight of the haideri in his tunic pocket. He thought about it. So he went to spend his gold.

The 33rd marched unhappily back to the encampment. The wounded were carried or limped. The Grenadier and Light Companies had taken the casualties. Men were missing and Wellesley

firing a shot. The two sepoy battalions could easily have turned the night's disaster into a victory. It was that lack of professionalism that galled Wellesley. He had failed. The northern battalions. 'We'll clear the tope in the morning,' Harris tried to console Wellesley. 'My men will do it,' Wellesley promised quickly. 'No, no. They won't be rested,' Harris said. 'Better if we use fresh troops.' 'My fellows will be quite ready.' Baird spoke for the first time. He smiled at Wellesley. 'I request permission to command the attack, sir,' Wellesley said very stiffly, ignoring

'I'm sure, I'm sure,' Harris said vaguely, neither granting nor denying Wellesley's request. 'A whippersnapper,' Baird said loudly enough for the retreating Colonel to hear him, 'but he's very efficient,' Harris said mildly. 'My mother was efficient, God rest her soul,' Baird retorted vigorously, 'but you would do better.' 'So you have,' Harris agreed, 'so you have.' 'And let me take the damned tope in the morning. God, man, I could do it with a corporal.' 'Wellesley will still be officer of the day tomorrow morning, Baird,' Harris said, then turned to Baird. 'You know how to spell Wellesley's name for the despatch, Harris?' Baird asked. 'Three letters.' 'Good night,' Harris said firmly.

At dawn the Scotch Brigade and two Indian battalions paraded east of the encampment, with

tests at the violence that had once again disturbed their nests. Major General Baird waited in front of the Scotch Brigade. He itched to take his count. 'He ain't up,' Baird said. 'He's sleeping it off. If you wait for him to wake up it'll be a long time.' 'Give him five minutes,' Harris insisted. 'I sent an aide to wake him.' Baird had intercepted the aide to make certain Wellesley did not wake in time, but just in case. 'You're ready, Wellesley?' 'Indeed, sir.' 'Then you know what to do,' Harris said curdy. 'Look after my Scots boys!' Baird called to Wellesley, and received, as he expected, no answer. The Scots colours were unfurled, the drummer boys sounded the advance, the pipers began

Harris waited, then a galloper came from the northern stretch of the aqueduct, which had

'I'll hear the butcher's bill first, sir, if you don't mind,' Baird answered, but then
And now, with the approach ground west of the city in Harris's hands, the siege proper

It did not prove difficult to find Mary. Sharpe merely asked Gudin and, after the night
'Your woman, Sharpe?' Gudin teased. 'You become a corporal and all you want is your woman'
'I just want to see her, sir.'
'She's in Appah Rao's household. I'll have a word with the General, but first you're to
'Me, sir?' Sharpe felt an instant pang of alarm, fearing that Hakeswill had betrayed him

'To get an award, Sharpe,' Gudin reassured him. 'But don't worry, I'll be there to see
'Yes, sir.' Sharpe grinned. He liked Gudin, and he could not help contrasting the kind
'He's a good soldier, Sharpe. Very good. What he really wants is a French army, not a
'What does he want a French army for, sir?'
'To beat you British out of India.'
'But then he'd just be stuck with you French instead,' Sharpe pointed out.
'But he likes the French, Sharpe. You find that strange?'
'I find everything in India strange, sir. Haven't had a proper meal since I got here.'
Gudin laughed. 'And a proper meal is what?'
'Bit of beef, sir, with some potatoes and a gravy thick enough to choke a rat.'
Gudin shuddered. 'La cuisine anglaise!'
'Sir?'
'Never mind, Sharpe, never mind.'
A half-dozen men waited to be presented to the Tippoo,

all of them soldiers who had somehow distinguished themselves in the defence of the tope the p
'I'll let you stroke it, sir. Wild horses wouldn't get me near a beast like that.'
The tiger liked being scratched. It closed its eyes and for a few seconds Sharpe
Sharpe gaped at them. They were both huge; tall and muscled like prizefighters. Their

'God almighty!' Sharpe said in wonderment as he watched the man's head being wrung lik
Then, one by one, the night's heroes were led up to the tiger-striped canopy and to the
At last it was Sharpe's turn. 'You know what to do,' Gudin said encouragingly.
Sharpe did. He disliked going on his knees to any man, let alone this plump little mon
Gudin had come forward with Sharpe and now spoke to the Tippoo's interpreter in French

tale of high heroics for the Tippoo kept giving Sharpe appreciative glances. Sharpe stared bac
'Does that mean I'll have to be circumvented, sir?' Sharpe asked.
'It means you are extraordinarily grateful to His Majesty, as I shall now tell him,' G

almost swore as he did so, for the thing was not made of brass at all, but of heavy gold.

'Back away,' Gudin muttered.
Sharpe bowed to the Tippoo and backed clumsily to his place in the line. The Tippoo sp
'You are now officially a hero of Mysore,' Gudin said drily, 'one of the Tippoo's belo
'Don't deserve to be, sir,' Sharpe said, peering at the medallion. One side was patter
'It says, Sharpe, "Assad Allah al-ghalib", which is Arabic and it means "The Lion of G
'Lion, not tiger?'
'It's a verse from the Koran, Sharpe, the Muslim Bible, and I suspect the holy book do
'Funny, isn't it?' Sharpe said, peering at the heavy gold medallion.
'What is?'
'The British beast is the lion, sir.' Sharpe chuckled, then hefted the gold in his han
'As rich as can be,' Gudin said drily.
'And those are real stones? That ruby in his hat and the diamond in his dagger?'
'Both worth a king's ransom, Sharpe, but be careful. The diamond is called the Moonsto
'I wasn't thinking of thieving it, sir,' Sharpe said, though he had been thinking exact

'Of course you do. Though I might say you only received it because I somewhat exaggerate. Sharpe unlooped the medallion. 'You can have it, sir.' He pushed the heavy gold toward Gudin backed away and held up his hands in horror. 'If the Tippoo discovered you had given it to me, he would have your head on a pike. No, sir.'

'Go to the north side of the big Hindu temple,' the Colonel said, 'and keep walking. Why do they put cows over the gates, sir?'

'For the same reason we put images of a tortured man in our churches. Religion. You ask me, I would have put a cow over the gates. It was not hard to find the small temple that lay opposite an old gateway that led through

itself, flanked by two smaller green flags that showed a silver device. The wind lifted one of the flags. He went into the temple, but Mary had not yet arrived. Sharpe found a patch of shade in a doorway. 'Brother!' Mary called aloud, and then, almost in a panic, she repeated the word. 'Brother!' Sharpe grinned, disguising his confusion. Then he saw there were tears in Mary's eyes.

'I'm very well,' she said deliberately, and then, in an even more stilted voice, 'Brother!' Sharpe glanced at the Indian soldier and saw that the man had a fiercely protective look. 'No. It's Kunwar Singh,' Mary said, and she turned and gestured towards the soldier and the doctor. 'Does he speak English?' Sharpe asked, and then, with a grin, 'sister?'

Mary threw him a look of pure relief. 'Some,' she said. 'How are you? How's your back? Mending all right, it is. That Indian doctor does magic, he does. I still feel it now. Mary fingered the gold, then looked up at Sharpe. 'I'm sorry, Richard,' she whispered. 'There's nothing to be sorry for, lass,' Sharpe said, and he spoke truthfully, for even now Mary gave a tiny nod.

'Good for you!' Sharpe called to the Indian and gave him a smile. 'Good girl, my sister. Half-sister,' Mary hissed.

'Make up your bloody mind, lass.'

'And I've taken an Indian name,' she said. 'Aruna.'

'Sounds good. Aruna.' Sharpe smiled. 'I like it.'

'It was my mother's name,' Mary explained, then fell into

an awkward silence. She glanced at the man with the white stripe on his head, then tentatively at Sharpe. For a second neither Sharpe nor Mary had anything to say. 'I've been watching that naked man. It's one way to worship,' Mary said softly.

'Bloody odd though. The whole thing's odd.' Sharpe gestured around the decorated shrine. Mary nodded. 'I'm sorry, Richard. Truly.'

'It happens, lass,' Sharpe said. 'But you don't want him to know about you and me, is that right? She nodded and again looked fearful. 'Please?' she begged him. Sharpe paused, not to kiss her. He looked back to her. 'I want you to do something for me,' he said.

She looked wary, but nodded. 'Of course. If I can.'

'There's a fellow in this city called Ravi Shekhar. Got the name? He's a merchant, God bless him. 'Yes.'

'Then you get out, lass, and find this Ravi Shekhar and

tell him to get a message to the British. And the message is this. They mustn't attack the west wall. Mary licked her lips, then nodded. 'And you won't tell Kunwar about us?'

'I wouldn't have told him anyway,' Sharpe said. 'Of course I wouldn't. I wish you joy. 'I'll do it for you. I promise.'

'You're a good lass.' He stood. 'Do brothers kiss sisters in India?'

Mary half smiled. 'I think they do, yes.'

Sharpe gave her a very respectable kiss on the cheek, smelling her perfume. 'You look like a good girl. 'You're a good man, Richard.'

'That won't get me very far in this world, will it?' He backed away from Mary then gripped her hand. He had turned back towards the barracks where Gudin's battalion was quartered. He was

about how graceful, even unapproachable, she had looked, and he was hardly looking where he was. And Sharpe instinctively knew something was amiss. He stood watching and suspected he was being watched. Then he was through the gate and he saw that it was not a passage out of the city at all. It had been walled shut to leave this gloomy tunnel that was now stacked with barrels. They had to go on. An officer saw him and shouted angrily. Sharpe played the innocent. 'Colonel Gudin?' he asked. The Indian officer ran towards him and, as he came, he drew a pistol, but then, in the confusion, Sharpe smiled eagerly. 'He's my officer, sahib. I've got a message for him.' The Indian did not understand, but he did know the significance of the medal and it was a medal. 'Gudin?' Sharpe insisted. The man shook his head and Sharpe, with a grin, left the tunnel. He had forgotten Mary now for he knew he was on the verge of understanding what was being planned.

where the big guns waited and, when he reached the firestep, he understood everything. or there were stones onto any troops who might survive the terrible blast. 'Bloody hell,' Sharpe said, and then he was gone.

CHAPTER 8

The siege works advanced steadily, hampered only by the Tippoo's guns and by a shortage of powder. Baird broke the brief silence that followed Gent's words. 'They can't surely garrison this wall.' 'The Tippoo has no shortage of men,' Wellesley pointed out. 'Thirty or forty thousand, I should think.' Baird ignored the young Colonel, while Harris, uncomfortably aware of the bad feeling between them, hooked them over his ears as he peered down at the map. Harris sighed. 'I still think it has to be the west,' he said, 'despite this new wall.' 'The north?' Wellesley asked. 'According to our farmer fellow,' Gent answered, 'the new inner wall goes all the way round the city.' Harris wished to God that McCandless was still with the army. That subtle Scotsman would have said, 'We could cross the Arrakerry Ford,' Baird suggested, 'then blast our way in from the north.' Harris lifted the hem of his wig and scratched at his old scalp wound. 'We discussed a plan to cross the river with a bridge of boats, but that would require a great deal of powder and a great deal of men. A pound of powder will have to be carried across the river.' 'And one good rainfall will make the ford impassable,' Gent put in gloomily, 'not to mention the fact that the river is very wide.' 'So wherever we attack,' Wellesley asked, 'we have to pierce two walls?' 'That's what the man said,' Baird growled. 'This new inner wall,' Wellesley asked Gent, ignoring Baird, 'what do we know of it?' 'Mud,' Gent said, 'red mud bricks. Just like Devon mud.' 'Mud will crumble,' Wellesley pointed out. 'If it's dry, it will,' Gent agreed, 'but the core of the wall won't be dry. Thoroughly dry.' 'But it will yield?' Harris asked anxiously. 'Oh, it'll yield, sir, it'll yield, I can warrant you that, but how much time do we have before it rains?' Harris asked.

God only knows what'll be waiting on the other side. Nothing good, I dare say.' 'But we can breach this outer wall quickly enough?' Harris asked, tapping the place on the map. 'Aye, sir. It's mostly mud again, but it's older so the centre will be drier. Once we get to the centre, we can take it.' Harris stared down at the map, unconsciously scratching beneath his wig. 'Ladders,' he said. Baird looked alarmed. 'You're not thinking of an escalade, God save us?' 'We've no timber!' Gent protested. 'Bamboo scaling ladders,' Harris said, 'just a few.' He smiled as he leaned back in his chair. There was silence in the tent as the three officers considered Harris's suggestion. 'Two Forlorn Hopes,' Harris said, thinking aloud and ignoring Gent's gloomy comments,

south. That way they don't need to go between the walls.'

'It'll be a desperate business,' Gent said flatly.

'Assaults always are,' Baird said stoutly. 'That's why we employ Forlorn Hopes.' The F
Harris smiled. 'Granted, David.' He spoke gently, using Baird's Christian name for the
'God be with the damned Tippoo,' Baird said, hiding his delight. 'He's the one who'll
Or I send you to your death, Harris thought, but kept the sentiment silent. He rolled
The troops went on digging, zigzagging their way across the fertile fields between the

sepoys, and behind all the troops, in the sprawling encampments, more than a hundred thousand
Harris had men enough for the siege and assault, but not enough to ring the city entire
The trenches made ground daily, but one last formidable obstacle prevented their approach

Lion of God would be felled, but whenever skirmishers went close to the fort to discover if an
The fort had to be taken. Harris ordered a dusk attack that was led by Indian and Scot
The bombardment suddenly ceased and the Tippoo's men

came scrambling out of the mill's damp cellars to take their places at their fire-scorched ramparts
The smoke of the carcasses at last died and drifted away, its remnants touched red by

turned into a massacre and the officers now tried to calm the attackers down as they pierced e
Next morning the first eighteen-pounders were already emplaced in the mill. The range

accompanied the Bengalis and the Highlanders in their assault on the old mill now seemed to se
While inside the city, watching his precious cannon being destroyed, the Tippoo fumed.
It was time, the Tippoo decided, to show his soldiers that these red-coated enemies we
A half-hour's walk east of the city, just outside the embrasured wall that protected t

The Daria Dowlat had not been built to impress, but rather for comfort. Only two store
The Daria Dowlat's garden was a wide lawn dotted with pools, trees, shrubs and flowers
The Tippoo had ordered entertainment for his troops. There were dancers from the city,

growl did not carry very far, any more than did the pathetic cry of the tiger's victim, but th
The Tippoo arrived in a palanquin just after midday. None of his European advisers acc
The Tippoo let his soldiers enjoy the tiger for a few moments longer, then he clapped
Then a goatskin drum sounded and the jettis, obedient to its strokes, went back to the shadows

the forecourt. There were thirteen prisoners, all in red coats, all of them men of the 33rd wh
The thirteen men stood uncertainly amidst the ring of their enemies. The sun beat down
Guards surrounded the prisoners and pushed them back to the palace, leaving just one m
Two jettis walked towards him. They were big men, formidably bearded, tall and with th

like a rabbit cuffing at a wolf. The watching soldiers laughed again, though there was a nervo
The jetti drew the soldier in to his body, then hugged him in a terrible last embrace.
The prisoner's dying scream was choked off in an instant. For a second his head stared
A second redcoat was driven to the jettis, and this man was forced to kneel. He did no
The jettis saved the Sergeant till last. The watching soldiers

were in a fine mood now. They had been nervous at first, apprehensive of cold-blooded death on
A jetti caught the Sergeant from behind and forced him to his knees.

'Get these black bastards off me!' the Sergeant screamed. 'Listen, Your Honour, I know

Hakeswill spat the morsel out. 'Listen, Your Grace! I know what the bastards are up to
'Wait,' the Tippoo called.

The jetti paused, still holding Hakeswill's head at an unnatural angle.

'What did he say?' the Tippoo asked one of his officers who spoke some English and who

The Tippoo waved one of his small delicate hands and the aggrieved jetti let go of Hakeswill's

The officer who spoke English called down from the verandah. 'Who did you see?' he asked

'I told you, Your Honour, didn't I?'

'No, you didn't. Give us a name.'

Hakeswill's face twitched. 'I'll tell you,' he wheedled, 'if you promise to let me live'

The officer translated for the Tippoo who, at last, nodded and so prompted the officer

'Word of honour?' Hakeswill asked.

'Upon my honour.'

'Cross your heart and hope to die? Like it says in the scriptures?'

'You will live!' the officer snapped. 'So long as you tell us the truth.'

'I always do that, sir. Honest Hakeswill, that's my name, sir. I saw-him, didn't I? Li

The officer had not understood everything that Hakeswill had said, but he had understood

'Course he is! In my bleeding company, what's more. And they said he'd gone back to M

The officer seemed sceptical. 'The only Englishmen we have here, Sergeant, are prisoners'

Hakeswill spat on the gravel that was soaked with the blood from the decapitated pris

off home to Mummy. I tell you, sir, he's an officer! And the other one's a right bastard! Flog

The mention of the flogging woke a memory in the Tippoo. 'When was he flogged?' The officer

Just before he ran, sir. Raw, he must have been, but not raw enough.'

'And you say the General sent for him?' The officer sounded disbelieving.

'Harris, sir, the bugger what lost a lump out of his skull in America. He sent our Col

The Tippoo listened to the translation, then stepped back from the railing. He turned

'None that I've ever heard of, Your Majesty,' Appah Rao said, glad that the shadows of

The Tippoo nodded down to the kneeling Hakeswill. 'Put that wretch back in the cells,'

Guards dragged Hakeswill back to the city. 'And he had a bib hi with him!' Hakeswill s

The twelve dead men were hidden in a makeshift grave.

The troops marched back to their encampment while the Tippoo, being carried to the Inn

'You think Mrs Bickerstaff has gone over to the enemy?' Lawford asked Sharpe for the t

'She's gone to his bed,' Sharpe said bleakly, 'but I reckon she'll still help us.' Sha

'Suppose she betrays us?' Lawford asked.

'Then we're in trouble,' Sharpe said brutally. 'But she won't. Mary's a good lass.'

Lawford shrugged. 'She jilted you.'

'Easy come, easy go,' Sharpe said, then belted the tunic. Like most of the Tippoo's so

we run like buggery. You reckon that musket's ready for inspection?'

'It's clean,' Lawford said defensively, hefting his big French firelock.

'Christ, you'd be on a charge for that musket back in the proper army. Give it here.'

Sergeant Rothiere's daily inspection was not for another half-hour, and after that the

'I already had Wazzy clean that,' Lawford said, nodding at the musket in Sharpe's hand

'If you want a job done properly,' Sharpe said, 'you do it yourself. Hell!' He swore b

'Do you clean your own musket like that?' Lawford asked, impressed that Sharpe had un

'Course I do! Not that Hakeswill ever cares. He only looks at the outside.' Sharpe gr

'He changed it?' Lawford seemed shocked.

'Bloody snake, that Obadiah. How much did you pay Wazzy?'

'An anna.'

'He robbed you. You want to pass me that oil bottle?'

Lawford obliged, then settled back against the stone water trough in which Sharpe had
'Lieutenant?' a voice called respectfully across the yard. 'Lieutenant Lawford?'

'Sir?' Lawford responded without thinking, turning towards the voice and rising to his feet.
Sharpe swore.

Colonel Gudin walked slowly across the yard, rubbing his long face as he approached the trough.
Lawford said nothing.

Gudin shrugged. 'Officers are supposedly men of honour, Lieutenant. Are you going to c
'No, sir,' Lawford said.

Gudin sighed. 'So are you a commissioned officer or not?'

'I am, sir.' Lawford sounded ashamed, though whether it was because he had been accuse

'And you, Corporal Sharpe?' Gudin asked sadly.

'I ain't an officer, Colonel.'

'No,' Gudin said, 'I did not think you were. But are you a true deserter?'

'Of course I am, sir!' Sharpe lied.

Gudin smiled at Sharpe's confident tone. 'And you, Lieutenant,' he asked Lawford, 'are

'No, sir,' Lawford admitted. 'Nor is Private Sharpe, sir.'

Gudin nodded. 'That is what the Sergeant said.'

'The Sergeant, sir?' Lawford asked.

Gudin grimaced. 'I fear the Tippoo executed the prisoners taken the other night. He sp

'The bastard!' Sharpe said, throwing the musket down in disgust. 'Bloody Hakeswill! He

'Sir?' Lawford said to Gudin, ignoring Sharpe's anger.

'Lieutenant?' Gudin responded courteously.

We were captured by the Tippoo's men while wearing our red coats, sir. That means we s

Gudin shook his head. 'It means nothing of the sort, Lieutenant, for you lied about yo

'I suppose not, but I warn you that the Tippoo will want to know.' Gudin smiled at Sha

'Sorry, sir,' Sharpe said, noticing the Colonel's distaste and dropping his tunic's he

'I'm sorry to be losing you, Sharpe,' Gudin went on. 'I'm afraid there is an escort wait

'She had nothing to do with this, sir,' Sharpe said hurriedly as he pulled on the trou

'Twice unlucky, Sharpe. Bad in a soldier, that.' Gudin smiled and reached out a hand.

Sharpe handed over both guns. 'Sir?'

'Private Sharpe?'

Sharpe reddened and became awkward. 'It was an honour to serve you, sir. I mean that.

'Thank you, Sharpe,' Gudin gravely acknowledged the compliment. 'Of course,' he added,

Lawford stiffened as this offer was made to Sharpe. Sharpe hesitated, then shook his h

Gudin had expected the reply. 'Good for you, Sharpe. And by the way, Private, you migh

'Yes, sir.' Sharpe retrieved the gold from his trouser pocket where he had optimistica

Gudin stood and gestured towards the barracks room. 'This way, gentlemen.'

That was the end of the pleasantries.

And Sharpe suspected it would be the last pleasantry for a very long time.

For now they were the Tippoo's prisoners.

Appah Rao had Mary fetched to a room off the courtyard of his house. Kunwar Singh was

no particular reason to expect bad news, but she was ever wary, and something about Appah Rao'

'My half-brother, sir,' Mary whispered.

'If you say so,' Appah Rao conceded. Kunwar Singh spoke a little English, though not e

'I don't know, sir.'

Appah Rao took a pistol from his belt and began loading it. Both Mary and Kunwar Singh

'will want to know two things. First, why they came here, and, second, whether they were told

'Yes, sir.'

The General placed the bullet in the barrel, then pulled out the pistol's short ramrod.

'No, sir,' Mary whispered.

Appah Rao slotted the short ramrod back in its hoops. He primed the gun, but did not

Mary stared at the pistol in the General's hand. It was a beautiful weapon with a butt

It was the answer Rao had feared. 'And did they?'

'No, sir.'

'So what did they find out?' Rao asked, laying the pistol down on the table. 'What did

'Private Sharpe told me that the British shouldn't attack in the west, sir,' Mary said.

'All?' Rao asked. 'Surely not. Why would he tell you that? Did he think you could get

Mary stared down at the pistol. 'It was to find a man, sir,' she said at last.

'Who?'

She looked up at the General, fear in her eyes. 'A merchant, sir, called Ravi Shekhar.

'Anyone else?'

'No, sir! Truly.'

Rao believed her, and felt a wash of relief. His greatest fear was that Sharpe and Law

Mary looked astonished. 'The pistol, sir?'

'Take it! Now listen, girl. Ravi Shekhar is dead and his body was fed to the tigers. I

that placing it in your mouth and pointing it slightly upwards is the most effective.' Mary sh

Kunwar Singh bowed his head.

Mary went back to the women's quarters while Appah Rao made an offering at his househo

The Tippoo himself came to the courtyard where the tigers had been restored to their long chain

The officer was a suave young Muslim who spoke good English. 'His Majesty,' he said wh

Lawford stiffened. 'I am an officer in His Britannic

Majesty's ...' he began, but the Indian cut him off with a gesture.

'Quiet!' the officer said wearily. 'You are nothing except what we make you. So why ar

'Why do you think?' Sharpe said.

The officer looked at him. 'I think,' he said judiciously, 'that you came here to spy.

'So now you know,' Sharpe said defiantly.

The officer smiled. 'But maybe you were given the name of a man who might help you ins

Sharpe shook his head. 'Didn't give us any names. Not one.'

'Maybe,' the officer said, then nodded at the two jettis who seized hold of Sharpe, th

The sudden pain was every bit as bad as the flogging. It stabbed up and down Sharpe's

the officer told Lawford mildly, 'and when he is dead we shall beat you until you are dead.'

The jetti struck down again, and this time Sharpe rolled onto his side, but the second

'You can't do this!' Lawford protested.

'Of course we can!' the officer answered. 'We shall start splintering his bones now, b

'A merchant!' Lawford blurted out.

The officer held up his hand to stop the beating. 'A merchant, Lieutenant? The city is

'He deals in metals,' Lawford said. 'I don't know more than that.'

'Of course you do,' the officer said, then nodded at the jetti who raised the ramrod h

'Ravi Shekhar!' Lawford shouted. The Lieutenant was bitterly ashamed for giving the na

'Ravi Shekhar,' the officer said, checking the jetti's stroke. 'And how did you find him

'We didn't,' Lawford said. 'We didn't know how! We were waiting till we spoke some of your lan

Sharpe groaned. Blood trickled down his sides and dripped onto the stones. One of the tigers s

The officer, who was wearing one of the prized gold tiger medallions about his neck, t

'And what, Lieutenant,' the officer translated, 'would you have told Ravi Shekhar?'

'Everything we'd discovered about the defences,' Lawford said miserably. 'That's why w

'And what did you discover?'

'How many men you have, how many guns, how many rockets.'

'That's all?'

'It's enough, isn't it?' Lawford retorted.

The officer translated the answers. The Tippoo shrugged, glanced at Lawford, then took

'Who else would you have told in the city?' the officer asked.

'There was no one else!' Lawford pleaded. 'In the name of God, there was no one else.'

The Tippoo believed him. Lawford's chagrin was so clear and his shame so palpable that
'Never.'

'You're looking at him now,' the officer said, gesturing at the tigers. 'His body was

'Oh, God,' Lawford said, and he closed his eyes as he realized just what an utter fail

For a second the Tippoo hesitated, wondering whether to

release the tigers onto the two men. Then he turned away. 'Take them to the cells,' he ordered

The sacrifice of prisoners had yielded up the traitors and turned the Tippoo's luck. T

CHAPTER 9

The dungeons lay in one of the palace's northern courtyards, hard under the city's inn

The dungeon guards did not carry muskets, but instead had coiled whips in their belts

bars that were as thick as a man's wrist. The turnkey indicated that they should wait while he

More straw stirred in the first cell on the left, close by where Sharpe and Lawford were stand

'Be quiet, Sergeant,' Lawford snapped.

'Yes, sir, Mister Lieutenant Lawford, sir, quiet it is, sir.' Hakeswill clung to the b

'Bastard,' Sharpe muttered.

'Quiet! Both of you,' Lawford insisted and then, with his innate politeness, the Lieut

'Willie,' a tired voice said from the shadows of the cell, 'how very good of you to vi

'You too, sir. You've met Private Sharpe, I think.'

McCandless gave Sharpe a grim look. 'I have a question for you, young man.'

'It wasn't gunpowder, sir,' Sharpe said, remembering his first confrontation with the

'Aye, it didn't look like powder,' the Scotsman said. 'It was blowing in the wind like

'I'd have shot you, sir,' Sharpe said, 'begging your pardon, sir.'

'Sharpe!' Lawford remonstrated.

'Quite right, man,' McCandless said. 'The wretched fellow was testing you, wasn't he?'

'Bastards cracked a rib, sir, and I'm bleeding a bit. Do you mind if I sit?' Sharpe gi

wounds, though there was nothing he could do to help them mend.

'You won't get fresh air here,' McCandless said. 'You smell the sewage?'

'You can't miss that smell, Uncle,' Lawford said.

'It's the new inner wall,' McCandless explained. 'When they built it they cut the city

McCandless wanted news, not only of what had brought Lawford and Sharpe into Seringapa

'Yes, sir.'

'Straight into the Tippoo's loving arms.' The Scotsman sat quietly for a moment, somet

'It's near finished, sir.' Sharpe delivered yet more bad news. 'I saw it.'

'Aye, it would be. He's an efficient man, the Tippoo,' McCandless said, 'efficient and

'What will he do with us?' Lawford asked.

'That I cannot say,' Colonel McCandless replied. Tt depends, probably, on his dreams.

as he'd like us to think, for he still believes in some older magic and he sets great store by

'We heard,' Lawford said.

'Murdered to amuse the Tippoo's troops!' McCandless said disapprovingly. 'And there we

'He survived, sir,' Sharpe said vengefully, 'because he betrayed us.'

'It's a lie, sir!' Hakeswill, who had been avidly listening to Sharpe and Lawford's ta

McCandless turned to gaze at the Sergeant. 'Then why were you spared?' he asked coldly.
'Touched by God, sir. Always have been, sir. Can't be killed, sir.'
'Mad,' McCandless said quietly.
'You can be killed, Obadiah,' Sharpe said. 'Christ, if it wasn't for you, you bastard.'
'Lies, sir! More lies,' Hakeswill insisted.
'Quiet, both of you,' McCandless said. 'And Private Sharpe?'
'Sir?'
'I'd be grateful if you did not blaspheme. Remember that "Thou shalt not take the name"
'Amen, sir,' Hakeswill called, 'and praise the Lord, sir.'
'Sorry, sir,' Sharpe muttered.

'You do know your Ten Commandments, don't you, Sharpe?' McCandless asked.
'No, sir.'
'Not one of them?' McCandless asked, shocked.
'Thou shalt not be found out, sir? Is that one of them?' Sharpe asked guilelessly.
McCandless stared at him in horror. 'Do you have any religion, Sharpe?'
'No, sir. Never found a need for it.'
'You were born with a hunger for it, man.' The Colonel spoke with some of his old energy.
'And for a few things else, sir.'
McCandless shivered under his mantle of straw. 'If God spares me, Sharpe, I may attempt
'They took it from me, sir,' Lawford said. 'But I did manage to save one page.' He took
'Give it here, man,' McCandless said fiercely, 'and let us see what the good Lord has
'Not very cheerful, sir,' Sharpe ventured.
'It is the most cheerful thing I can contemplate in this place, Private. A promise from
'Me, sir? No, sir. Never taught, sir.'

'He's stupid, sir, he is, sir,' Hakeswill offered from across the corridor. 'Always was
'We must teach you your letters,' McCandless said, ignoring the Sergeant's comments.
'Mister Lawford was going to do that, sir,' Sharpe said.
'Then I suggest he begins now,' McCandless said firmly.
Lawford smiled diffidently. 'It's difficult to know where to begin, Uncle.'
'Why not with T for tiger?' McCandless suggested.
The beast growled, then settled in its straw. And Sharpe, some years late, began his lesson.

The siege works advanced fast. Redcoats and sepoy worked day and night, sapping forward

know the exact stretch of wall that the enemy engineers had chosen, and it suited General Harker
But the Tippoo was gambling that he already knew where the British would choose to make
He did not put all his faith in the single massive mine. That mine could well kill or

with men when the time came, and those men would each have at least three loaded muskets, and
The skies might be clear, but every other omen was good. The ill luck that had led to

south, and from the Coromandel Coast to the seas off Malabar. All that glory was foretold by
But then, one dawn, it seemed the auguries might be deceiving, for the British suddenly
The balls were not aimed where the Tippoo had hoped, at the vulnerable part of the wall
Next day more of the siege guns opened fire, but these new weapons were aimed at the

guns had fallen silent. The Tippoo's troops rushed to the walls, their muskets and rockets ready
A brave man of the Tippoo's army ventured up the mound of rubble that had been the non
The Tippoo inspected the damage to his western defences. The guns were gone from the s
Colonel Gudin agreed. For a time, like the Tippoo, he had been worried that the British

Tippoo could mount high guns to plunge their fire onto the flanks of the storming troops. The man who had planted the flag on the crest of the fallen bastion was brought to the
'No, Your Majesty.'
The Tippoo suddenly turned and gazed up into the tall Appah Rao's face. He was frowning.
'Yes, Your Majesty.'
'And didn't she go to your house?' the Tippoo charged Appah Rao.
'She did, Highness, but she died.' Appah Rao told the lie smoothly.
The Tippoo was intrigued. 'Died?'
'She was a drab sick creature,' Appah Rao said carelessly, 'and just died. As should t
'Those two will die,' the Tippoo promised grimly, his query about Mary apparently forg

silver steps of his tiger throne, the throne he had sworn never to use until his enemies were
The muezzin's call echoed across the city, summoning the faithful to prayer. The sound

'T-I-K,' Sharpe said, scratching the letters in the dust of the cell's floor where he
'Picklock,' Lawford said. 'Very good, but you've left out two CV
'But I've got the picklock, sir,' Sharpe said, and produced it from his coat pocket. I
'Why didn't they find it?' Lawford asked. Both men had been searched when they had bee

their arrest, and though the guards had left the page of the Bible in Lawford's pocket, they h
'I had it somewhere it couldn't be found, sir,' Sharpe said. 'Colonel Gudin thought I
'I'd rather not know,' Lawford said primly.
'A good picklock like that can take care of those old padlocks in seconds, sir,' Sharp
'And get a bellyful of lead?' Lawford suggested.
'When the assault comes,' Sharpe said, 'the guards will like as not be at the top of t
'When the assault comes, Sharpe,' Colonel McCandless intervened, 'our guards are more
'Hadn't thought of that, sir.' Sharpe sounded disappointed.
'I don't think even you can rush a tiger,' McCandless said.
'No, sir. I don't suppose I can,' Sharpe admitted. Each night, at dusk, the guards lef

the heat of the day until its time for guard duty came again. It was a huge and mangy beast, n
By day, when the tiger twitched in its sleep, the guards would watch the cells. Someti
At first the learning was hard and it was made no easier by Hakeswill's constant scoff

It ain't natural, ain't right. A private soldier should know his place, says so in the scriptu
'It says nothing of the sort, Sergeant!' McCandless would always snap after such an as
And always, every daylight hour of every day, there was the sound of the besiegers' gu
'Working hard, them gunners!' Hakeswill would say. 'Doing a proper job, like real sold
'Quiet, Sergeant,' McCandless would growl.
'Yes, sir. I shall be quiet, sir. Like a church mouse, sir.' But a few moments later t
Hakeswill even talked at night. Sharpe would wake to hear the Sergeant talking in a lo

just like me.' The Sergeant reached a tentative hand through the bars and gave the beast's bac
The Colonel's fever was growing worse, though he tried hard not to complain. Sharpe, a
'That's kind of you, Sharpe, kind.'
The Colonel drank, then propped his back against the

stone wall at the back of the cell. 'We had a rainstorm last month,' he said, 'not a severe on
'No chance of us still being here then, is there, sir?'
'It depends, Sharpe, whether we take the city or not.'
'We will, sir,' Sharpe said.
'Maybe.' The Colonel smiled at Sharpe's serene confidence. 'But the Tippoo might decid
'Nothing to understand, sir. He's just an evil bastard, sir.'
'No, he's not that,' the Colonel said severely. 'He's actually rather a good ruler. Be

'So why the hell are we fighting him, sir?'

McCandless smiled. 'Because we want to be here, and he doesn't want us to be here. Two

Sharpe grimaced. 'It seems a funny thing to be fighting about, sir.'

'Does it?' McCandless seemed surprised. 'Not to me, Sharpe. Without trade there's no w

Sharpe laughed softly. 'Trade never did 'owt for me, sir.'

'Did it not?' McCandless asked gently. The Colonel smiled. 'So what do you think is wo

'Friends, sir. And pride. We have to show that we're better bastards than the other si

'You don't fight for King or country?'

T've never met the King, sir. Never even seen him.'

'He's not much to look at, but he's a decent enough man when he's not mad.' McCandless

'I think so, sir.'

'Poor soul.'

'He's evil, too,' Sharpe said, speaking too softly for Hakeswill to hear him. 'Takes a

'And you've done none of those things?'

'Never raped, sir, and as for the others, only when I had to.'

'Then I pray God you'll never have to again,' McCandless said fervently, and with that

Sharpe watched the dawn light seep into the dungeon pit. The last bats of the night wh

The opening shot of the day was aimed at the low mud wall that plugged the gap in the

One by one the other siege guns woke and had their throats blasted clear. The first fe

This morning the British guns seemed erratic. Every battery was at work, but their fir

were hot now, they would fire true, and soon they would concentrate a dreadful intensity of ir

He trained his glass on the nearest battery which was scarce four hundred yards from t

Gudin knew that the serious business of making the breach was about to begin and he al

unmasked a gun and the great brute belched a jet of smoke fifty yards in front of its embrasur

The British had swallowed the bait. They were coming straight for the trap.

The rest of the breaching guns now opened fire. For a moment a rumbling thunder filled

The guns scarcely paused, only now they raised their aim very slightly so mat the ball

All day long they fired, and all day long the old wall crumbled. The shots were kept l

By nightfall the wall still stood, but at its base there was a crumbling, dusty cavern

scattering canister or grapeshot in an attempt to stop the Tippoo's men from repairing the cav

It crumpled slowly, jetting a cloud of dust into the air, a cloud so thick that at fir

Yet still the guns fired. Now the gunners were trying to flatten the slope of the brea

A half-mile away from Gudin, in the British lines, General Harris and General Baird st

'Let's pray it's unfinished,' Baird growled.

'But still I think it's better to ignore it,' Harris decreed. 'Capture the outer wall

Baird turned to stare at some clouds that lay heavy and low on the western horizon. He

Harris collapsed his glass. 'Tomorrow,' he said firmly, and scratched beneath the edge

That night a handful of British officers crept out from the leading trenches with smal

And all through that night the assault troops filed down the long trenches. Harris was

against the defenders on the inner wall. Two Forlorn Hopes would go ahead of the columns, each

'God knows,' Harris said that night at supper, 'but I can think of nothing left undone

'No, sir, I can't,' Baird said. 'Upon my soul, I can't.' He was trying to sound cheerf

Colonel Gent, who as well as being Harris's chief engineer, had taken on himself the o

'There are always such rumours,' Baird said curtly.

'A bit late to tell us, surely?' Harris remonstrated mildly.

'Only heard of it today, sir,' Gent said defensively. 'One of their cavalry fellows de

*** MISSING PAGE ??? ***

would regard the appointment as a slight, yet in truth Baird's hatred of all things Indian dis
'This time tomorrow,' Meer Allum said in his odd English accent, 'we shall all dine in
'I pray that we do,' Harris said, 'and I pray we manage it without grievous loss.' He
The officers were still sombre when the meal ended. Harris bade them a good night, then stood
Bugles greeted the dawn. The storm clouds had thickened in the west, but there was no

The Tippoo had spent the night in a small sentry shelter on the north walls. He woke e
Nothing had changed. Beyond the gently flowing South Cauvery the sun baked the ground
'They want another day to widen the breach,' an officer opined.
Colonel Gudin shook his head. 'They'll come today,' he insisted.
The Tippoo grunted. He was standing just north of the

breach from where he watched the enemy trenches through a spyglass. Some of the British round
'They want us to think that,' Gudin protested, 'to lull us. But they will come today.
The Tippoo stepped back from the remains of the parapet. Was his luck changed? He had
The walls, already thick with troops, now became crowded with defenders. One company o
Others of the Tippoo's finest troops were posted on the outer wall above the edges of

to defend the shoulders of the breach, for the Tippoo was determined to funnel the attackers i
The Tippoo had decided to lead the fight on the wall north of the breach. Colonel Gudin's batt
The Tippoo assured himself that all had been done that could be done. The city was rea
The British guns fired on. In the mosque some men prayed, but all of them were old men
Midday came. The city baked in the heat. It seemed strangely silent, for the fire of t

On the walls a horde of men crouched behind their firesteps, while in the trenches acro
The Tippoo had a prayer mat brought to the walls and there, facing towards the enemy,
'All of them, Your Majesty?' the aide asked.
'Not the Sergeant,' the Tippoo said. 'Not the one who twitches. The others. Tell the j

CHAPTER 10

Appah Rao was an able man, otherwise he would not have been promoted to the command of
Now, ordered to take his men to the walls of Seringapatam and there fight to preserve

be wrapped in reed mats and buried in an unmarked grave.

But if the Tippoo lost then the British would rule in Mysore. True, if they kept their
He stood above the southern gate, waiting for an unseen enemy to erupt from their tren
'At the house, Lord.' Kunwar Singh was a soldier, but not in any of the Tippoo's cusho
'Take six men,' the General said, 'and make sure they are not dressed in my livery. Th

do get into the city then McCandless will protect our women.' Appah Rao added this last assura
'Lord,' Kunwar Singh said, then stepped back, turned and was gone. Appah Rao watched h
It took only a minute for Kunwar Singh to reach the General's house. He ordered six of
Mary came to the courtyard and demanded to know what

was happening. There was a strange stillness in the city, and the tempo of the British guns, w
'We think the British are coming,' Kunwar Singh told her, then blurted out that she wo
'What about my brother?' Mary asked.

Kunwar Singh shrugged. 'I have no orders for him.'

'Then I shall come with you,' Mary declared.

'You can't!' Kunwar Singh insisted. He was often shocked by Mary's defiance, though he

'You can stop me,' she said, 'by shooting me. Or you can let me come. Make up your mind.'

'I can't let your brother come back here,' he warned Mary when she came back to the cell.

'We can free him,' Mary insisted, 'and after that he can look after himself. He's good.'

The streets of the city were oddly deserted. Most of the Tippoo's soldiers were on the

party five minutes to reach the complex of small courtyards that lay to the north of the Inner

The difficulty, Kunwar Singh had anticipated, would lie in persuading the guards to un-

But when he reached the cells he found there were no guards. The space within the outer

Kunwar Singh acknowledged the man, then rattled the gate, vainly hoping that the padlock

Kunwar Singh instinctively stepped back. The soldier above him lost interest and went

'We can't get inside?' Mary asked.

'No. Not without attracting the guards.' He gestured

towards the palace. The thought of the tiger had made him nervous and he was wondering whether

Then Mary stepped to the bars. 'Richard?' she called. 'Richard!'

There was a momentary pause. 'Lass?' The answer came at last.

Kunwar Singh's nervousness increased. There were a dozen soldiers on the inner wall im-

'We can't get inside!' Mary called to Sharpe.

'Have you got a gun, lass?' Sharpe called back. Mary could not see him, for the outer

'Yes.'

'Chuck it down here, lass. Chuck it as close to the bottom of the steps as you can. Ma-

Kunwar Singh rattled the gate again. The sound of the clangorous iron prompted a growl

'Throw us a gun, love!' Sharpe shouted.

Mary groped inside the folds of her sari to find the ivory-inlaid pistol that Appah Ra-

gauge how much effort would be needed to toss the gun into the pit, but not too far from the b-

'Here, Richard!' she called, and she tossed the gun underarm. It was a clumsy throw, a

Sharpe cursed, for the pistol had lodged three steps up. 'Have you got another one?' he

'Give me your pistol,' Mary said to Kunwar Singh.

'No! We can't get in.' Kunwar Singh was close to panic now and his six men had been in

'Mary!' Sharpe called.

'I'm sorry, Richard.'

'Not to worry, lass,' Sharpe said, staring at the pistol. He did not doubt he could pi-

'Sharpe!' McCandless chided him.

'I was praying, sir. Because this is a right bugger-up, sir, a right bugger-up.' Sharp-

'Go on, boy, good boy,' Hakeswill said. 'Get us out of here, boy.'

'Shut your ugly face, Obadiah,' Sharpe muttered. He had moved one lever, now only the

face. He was working half blind, unable to pull the padlock to an angle where he could see the

And just as he swore the tiger twisted and sprang. It attacked with appalling speed, a

'Sergeant Hakeswill,' Sharpe hissed. 'Get the beast over on your side.'

'Nothing I can do!' Hakeswill protested, his face twitching. The tiger was watching SH-

'You say that one more time,' McCandless roared in sudden and unexpected fury, 'and I'

Hakeswill was taken aback by the Colonel's anger. 'Sir,' he said weakly.

'So do as Private Sharpe says,' Colonel McCandless ordered. 'And do it now.'

Hakeswill beat his hands against the bars. The tiger turned its head and Sharpe immedi-

shaking the bars of his cell with its violence, and Hakeswill backed hurriedly away.

'Keep provoking it, man!' McCandless ordered Hakeswill, and the Sergeant spat at the t-

Sharpe worked on the lock. He had the hook against the lever again. The tiger, roused to a pet-

'That was the easy part,' he said grimly. He folded the picklock and put it back in hi-

'What do you need her for?' Colonel McCandless asked.

'I don't even know if the bloody gun's loaded, sir. I never asked her.'
'Assume it is,' McCandless said.
'Easy for you, sir,' Sharpe said respectfully, 'being as you ain't the one who's got t
'I'll do it,' Lawford offered.
Sharpe grinned. 'It's either you or me, sir,' he said, 'and being honest, sir, who do
'You,' Lawford admitted.
'Which is what I reckoned, sir. But one thing, sir. How do you shoot a tiger? In the h
'Between the eyes,' McCandless said, 'but not too high up. Just below the eyes.'

'Bloody hell,' Sharpe said. He had eased the padlock out of its hasp and he could now
The tiger saw the motion, twisted away from Hakeswill's cage and sprang towards the co
Sharpe had slipped through the door, turned to the steps and snatched up the pistol. H
'Don't shoot now!' McCandless called softly. 'Get close!'
'Yes, sir,' Sharpe said. He kept his eyes on the tiger's eyes as he slowly, slowly cli

the muzzle aimed at a patch of black fur just beneath the animal's eyes. Fifteen feet away, tw
'Kill the bugger, Sharpie!' Hakeswill urged.
'Careful, man!' McCandless hissed. 'Make sure of your shot. Careful now!'
Sharpe edged forward. His eyes were still fixed on the tiger's eyes. He was willing th
And the tiger sprang. It came from the ground so fast that it was almost on top of Sha
Lawford gasped. The echo of the pistol shot was hugely loud in the confines of the dun

with the sulphurous smell of powder smoke. Hakeswill was crouching in a corner of his cell, so
But the tiger was dying. The bullet had struck the back of the tiger's mouth. It was o
There was silence.
The first flies came down to explore the blood spilling from the tiger's mouth. 'Oh, s
McCandless did not reprove him. The Colonel knew a prayer when he heard one.
Sharpe fetched his torn jacket, pulled the cell door wide open, then gingerly sidled p
'Leave him,' McCandless ordered.
'I was planning on it, sir,' Sharpe said. He found his picklock again and reached for
'To ground, man,' McCandless said. The sudden freedom seemed to have lifted the Colone

Sharpe pushed the gate outwards, then saw Mary gazing at him from a doorway across the
Three jettis were crossing the courtyard towards the dungeon cage. Three monsters. Thr
'Can you lock us in again?' McCandless asked.
'Those buggers are strong enough to tear the padlocks clean away, sir. We have to kill
Mary snatched a musket from one of Kunwar Singh's men and, before the astonished man o

desperately for breath, but the long spears were turning towards Sharpe who, with the whip sti
Two of the bastards were down. The soldiers on the inner ramparts' battery were watchi
Lawford had moved to help Sharpe, but his uncle held him back. 'Let him be, Willie,' M
The third jetti lumbered at Sharpe with his spear. He advanced warily, confused by the
Sharpe smiled at the third jetti, shouldered the musket, pulled back the cock, and fir
The bullet drummed into ihejettfs chest, making all his huge muscles shudder with the
Sharpe uncoiled the whip from his neck, picked up one of the clumsy spears, and finish

breathe, and both now had their throats cut. From the windows of the low buildings around the
'Don't just stand there!' Sharpe snarled at Lawford. 'Sir,' he added hastily.
Lawford and McCandless came through the gate, while Kunwar Singh, as if released from
'Never better, lass,' he said. In truth he was shaking as he picked up his red coat an
Lawford crossed to Sharpe. 'We think the assault is about to come, Sharpe,' the Lieute
Sharpe glanced up into the Lieutenant's eyes. T'm not going with him, sir, I'm going t
'Sharpe!' Lawford reprovved him.
'There's a bloody great mine, sir!' Sharpe raised his voice angrily. 'Just waiting to

cartridges that he shoved into a pocket. Kunwar Singh made no move to stop him. Indeed, everyo
McCandless had overheard Sharpe talking to Lawford. 'If I can help, Private . . .' the
'You're weak, sir, begging your pardon, sir. But Mister Lawford will help me.'
Lawford said nothing for a moment, then nodded. 'Yes, of course I will.'
'What will you do?' McCandless asked. He spoke to Sharpe, not Lawford.
'Blow the bloody mine, sir, blow it to kingdom come.'
'God bless you, Sharpe. And keep you.'
'Save your prayers for the bloody enemy, sir,' Sharpe said curtly. He rammed a bullet

Major General Baird hauled a huge watch from his fob pocket, sprang open the lid, and
It would be good, he thought, to go home and see the new

century. Maybe the eighteen hundreds would bring a different world, even a better one, but he
He peered between two sandbags that formed the forward lip of the trench. The South Ca
Baird pushed through the waiting men to find Sergeant Graham. Graham would lead one of
'Whenever you say, sir.' Graham poured the water over his bare head, then pulled on hi

the breach with a musket in one hand and a British flag in the other.
'Whenever the guns give their farewell volley, Sergeant.' Baird clicked open the watch
'We're ready, sir,' Graham said.
Tm sure you're ready,' Baird said, 'but wait for my order.'
'Of course, sir.'
Baird looked at the volunteers, a mix of British and sepoy. They grinned back at him.
'Is there food in the city, sir?' one of the volunteers asked.
'Plenty, boys, plenty.' Baird, like the rest of the army, was on half-rations.
'And some bibbi, sir?' another man asked.
Baird rolled his eyes. 'Running over with it, lads, and all of them just panting for y
They laughed. General Harris had given strict orders that

the inhabitants were not to be molested, but Baird knew that the terrible savagery of an assau
He edged his way through the crush of men to a point midway between the two Forlorn Ho
He drew his claymore, a brutal Scottish blade that had none of the finesse of more mod
In the batteries behind Baird the gunners blew on their linstocks to keep the fire bur

Tippop might die, but the important thing was to gain Mysore's friendship and Wellesley was de
The Forlorn Hopes, their muskets loaded and tipped with steel, crouched in the trench

'Coat off,' Sharpe said to Lawford, instinctively lapsing back into the relationship t
'Soon remedy that,' Sharpe said confidently. 'Come on now.'
Sharpe led, plunging into the intricate maze of small streets that surrounded the pala
He hurried past a shuttered goldsmith's shop and half glimpsed, deep in its shadowed entrance,

Lawford, then slung the musket on his shoulder and doubled back. He pushed a wandering
Lawford opened the musket's pan to check that it was loaded. 'Just what do you plan to
'Don't know, sir. Won't know till we get there.'
'You're going to the mine?'
'Aye, sir.'
'There'll be guards.'
'Like as not.'
'And only two of us.'
'I can count, sir.' Sharpe grinned. 'It's reading I find hard. But my letters are comi
'You're reading well,' Lawford said. Probably, the Lieutenant thought, as well as most
'I'd like that, sir,' Sharpe said, then ran across a street junction. The fear of an i

presence. 'There, sir, there's our bloody answer,' Sharpe said. He had run from a street into
'There are guards.'
'Of course there are.'
'I mean on the rocket carts, Sharpe.'
'They're nothing,' Sharpe said scornfully. 'If those fellows were any good they'd be u
Lawford looked into his companion's face. 'You're enjoying this, aren't you, Sharpe?'
'Aye, sir. Aren't you?'
Tm scared as hell,' Lawford admitted.
Sharpe smiled. 'You won't be when we're through, sir. We're going to be all right. You
Sharpe brazenly walked into the sunlight, his musket slung on his shoulder, and Lawfor
'Of course not, sir. You think I'm not scared myself? Jesus, I almost fouled my breech

Hey, you! Are you in charge?' Sharpe shouted imperiously at a man who squatted beside
The man sprang aside as Sharpe jerked up the handles. There must have been fifty rocke
'Shout at the buggers, sir. You're an officer!'
'Back!' Lawford shouted. 'To your duties! Go on! Now! Do as I say, damn your eyes! Go!
'Works with us, sir, should work with them,' Sharpe said. He turned a corner and saw t
'We can't do anything if there isn't an attack,' Lawford said.
'I know that, sir.'
'So what do we do if there isn't an assault?'
'Hide, sir.'
'Where, for God's sake?'
'Lali will take us in, sir. You remember Lali, don't you, sir?'
Lawford blushed at the memory of his introduction to Seringapatam's brothels. 'You rea
'She thinks you're sweet, sir.' Sharpe grinned. T've seen her a couple of times since
'Good God, Sharpe, you won't tell anyone?'

'Me, sir?' Sharpe pretended to be shocked. 'Not a word, sir.'
Then, very suddenly, and far off, muffled by distance so that it was thin and wavering
And every gun in creation seemed to fire at once.

Baird clambered up the trench wall, climbed over the sandbags and turned to face his m
The Forlorn Hopes were already on their way. The moment Baird had climbed out of the t
'Fire!' the Tippoo shouted, and the walls of the city were rimmed with flame and smoke

'Come on!' Sergeant Graham roared as he stumbled over the remains of the mud wall that
Graham reached the breach's summit. His real goal was the wall to his left, but the su
It was just then that the Tippoo's own volunteers struck. Sixty men swarmed up from be

and carved a way to the foot of the wall where it climbed up from the breach to the northern r
Baird was still west of the river. His job was not to die with the Forlorn Hopes, but
'Forward!' Baird shouted, and led the twin columns towards the river. The ground ahead
Hell had come to Seringapatam and Baird hurried towards it.

Jesus Christ!' Sharpe swore, for he could hear the sudden sound of battle swelling jus
He stopped at a corner of the alley which led to the ancient gateway that had been fil

round the corner and saw Sergeant Rothiere and two Frenchmen from Gudin's battalion. All three
The rockets were stacked nose first on the cart so that their long bamboo tails stuck
Lawford said nothing, but just watched as Sharpe tore the fuse paper from one of the r
Sharpe dropped the musket and began lighting the fuses of the topmost row of rockets.

missiles were pointing straight down the alley. He crouched beside it, sheltered from the men. The first rocket shuddered, then streaked away. The second went an instant later, then Lawford charged with him. At least four men were still on their feet, while another ha

standing men and sent them reeling. Sharpe stamped on the head of one and kicked the other in. 'That's far enough, Sharpe.' It was Colonel Gudin who spoke. He was behind Sharpe. The Sharpe had turned with the musket at his hip. The Colonel was only three or four paces

A slight look of regret crossed the Colonel's face as he straightened his arm to take. 'Best to leave the mine alone, I think, Sharpe. Our men might be too close.' Sharpe still held the burning tube. 'Just you and me, sir, eh?' 'You and me, Sharpe?' Lawford asked, puzzled. 'In five minutes, sir, when the Tippoo wonders why his fireworks aren't going off? And Lawford hesitated. 'I don't know,' he said uncertainly. 'I do, sir,' Sharpe said, and he pushed the burning rocket onto the fuse and immediately. 'Broken shoulder, Sharpe.' Gudin looked close to tears, not

because of his wound, but because he had failed in his duty. 'I've no doubt Doctor Venkatesh w. 'Killed a tiger, sir, and some more of those jetti buggers.' Gudin smiled sadly. 'The Tippoo should have killed you when he had the chance.' 'We all make mistakes, sir,' Sharpe said as he watched the fire burn through the stone. 'I reckon you've just made Sergeant, Sharpe,' Lawford said. Sharpe smiled. 'I reckon I have, sir.' 'Well done, Sergeant Sharpe.' Lawford held out a hand. 'A good day's work.' Sharpe shook his officer's hand. 'But the day's work ain't done yet, sir.' 'It isn't?' Lawford asked. 'For God's sake, man, what else are you planning?' But Lawford never heard what Sergeant Sharpe answered, for at that moment the mine ble

CHAPTER 11

The Tippoo's engineers had done their work well. Not all the mine's force was directed. To Sharpe, peering round the doorway, it at first looked as though the whole squat gat. The noise seemed to go on for ever. First there was the swelling bang of the powder ex

devils in streets a quarter of a mile away from the explosion.

The men on the walls nearest the gatehouse saw nothing, unless it was the flash that e. The noise slowly faded. The ringing in Sharpe's ears diminished until he could hear a. North of the breach, where the lick of flame and blast had been lessened by distance, In the breach itself there was a vast veil of swirling dust. A huge boiling pyre of sm

of the breach were either dead or so shocked as to be unable to respond, while the men on the. 'Now, boys, now!' a man shouted on the breach, and the survivors of the Forlorn Hopes. Baird had still been west of the river when the explosion occurred and he had felt a m

him. The dust obscuring the breach shifted as a snatch of wind caught and whirled it northward. Behind Baird the twin columns of redcoats splashed through the river. Each column had

And there the fight changed. Now, on the narrow firestep of the outer wall, the column. The breach had been taken, but the city had not fallen yet. The sepoy and the redcoat

deliberately, exultantly defending his city and his dream against the barbarians who had come

The fight on the walls intensified as more men came to the threatened ramparts. The men
Where the vultures flew, scenting death.

Sharpe scooped up three fallen muskets from the end of the alley where they had been
Lawford coloured. 'Lali?'

'Look after her, sir. I promised the lass she'd come to no harm.'

'You did?' Lawford asked with a trace of indignation. He was wondering just how well S

'Got a job to do, sir,' Sharpe answered vaguely. 'And, sir? Can I thank you, sir? I co

Lawford felt absurdly pleased. He knew he should have stopped Sharpe from leaving, for

his arms through the sleeves. Gudin, beside him, waved away a fly and wondered why the dust an

'They'll treat you well, sir, I'm sure. They'll probably send you back to France.'

'I'd like that,' Gudin said and suddenly realized that was all he really did want. 'Yo

'Sergeant Sharpe now, sir.'

'Your Sergeant Sharpe, then. He's a good man, Lieutenant.'

'Yes, sir,' Lawford said, 'he is.'

'If he lives, he'll go far.'

'If he lives, sir, yes.' And if the army lets him live, Lawford thought.

'Look after him, Lieutenant,' Gudin said. 'An army isn't made of its officers, you kno

'Yes, sir,' Lawford said dutifully. The first fugitives from the walls were visible at

Sharpe lived so far. He had thought about putting on his red coat, then decided there

he could also hear the roar of maddened men going into a brutal fight. In a few minutes that f

He pushed through a crowd of fearful women, passed the cheetah cages and so went back

'Sharpie!' Hakeswill came to the bars. 'You came back, lad! I knew you would. So what'

Sharpe turned the muzzle away from Hakeswill and aimed it at the padlock. He did not w

'Knew you would, Sharpie, knew you would.' Hakeswill's face twitched. 'Knew you wouldn

'So come on out,' Sharpe said.

Hakeswill hung back. 'No hard feelings, lad?'

T'm not a lad, Obadiah. I'm a sergeant like you are. I've

got Colonel Wellesley's promise, I have. I'm a sergeant now, just like you.'

'So you are, so you are, and so you should be.' Hakeswill's face twitched again. 'I sa

Sharpe smiled. 'So come on out here, Obadiah.'

Hakeswill backed all the way to the cell's rear wall. 'Better to stay here, Sharpie,'

Sharpe crossed the cell in two strides and gripped Hakeswill's collar. 'You come with

'No, Sharpie, no!' Hakeswill screamed as Sharpe dragged him out of the cell, across th

'Nothing!' Sharpe turned furiously on Hakeswill. 'You had me flogged, you bastard, and

'I never did! Cross my heart and hope to die, Sharpie!'

Sharpe spun Hakeswill up against the bars of the dungeon's outer cage, slamming him ag

'I didn't do nothing,' Hakeswill said through his laboured breathing. 'On my mother's

'You'll still be telling lies when you go dirough the gates of hell, Obadiah,' Sharpe

collar again. 'Now come on, you bastard.' He pulled Hakeswill through the dungeon's outer gate

'Where are you taking me, Sharpie?' Hakeswill panted.

'You'll find out.'

Two more guards were stationed at the inner courtyard gate and they too pointed their

Sharpe lifted the gate's latch and dragged it open. The six tigers, already disturbed

Sharpe dragged the struggling Hakeswill into the courtyard. 'You reckon you can't die,

'No, Sharpie! No!' This last word was a yelp of despair as Sharpe pulled Hakeswill int

was unbalanced and out of control. He staggered and flailed his arms, but nothing could stop h

'Goodbye, Obadiah,' Sharpe said, 'you bastard.'

'I cannot die!' Hakeswill screamed, then his cry was cut off as a great yellow-eyed be

'They've got an early supper,' Sharpe told the bemused guards on the gate. 'Hope they'

The guards, not understanding a word, grinned back. Sharpe took one look behind, spat,

For a time it seemed as if the Tippoo could hold his city. He fought like a tiger himself. He did not know what was happening on the southern stretch of the walls, except that

at his side. Those gaudy stones made him a target for every redcoat and sepoy, yet he insisted. The attackers suffered even worse damage from the men on the inner wall. That wall had Baird, heading south from the breach, encountered similar resistance, but Baird was in

trenches, the redcoats and sepoys had become gods of war. They gave death with impunity as the Appah Rao's cushoons defended the south-western corner of the city and Appah Rao watched. But to die for what? he wondered. The city was gone and the Tippoo's dynasty was doomed. The officer frowned, puzzled by the question, but at last managed an answer. 'Three months.' 'Tell them there will be a pay parade this afternoon.' 'Sahib?' The second-in-command gaped up at Appah Rao. The General raised his voice so that as many of his men as possible could hear him. 'The

wall's guards, suddenly saw that the city was his. He howled again, this time in victory. His. The Tippoo still fought and still thought he could win, but on the northern wall, just. The Tippoo's men on the outer wall cheered and edged forward to drive the enemy away from. The Light Company of the Ring's eighth regiment followed the sepoys. Captain Goodall, their commander

with defenders, but it was also a bridge to victory. 'Death or glory!' Goodall shouted the climb. The Tippoo saw the enemy revive. They were like a beast that had been wounded, but not. The Tippoo retreated fast and his bodyguard went with him. They left other men to defend

the bullets hissing through the sky, bowed low to the Tippoo and invited His Majesty to take his. Above the Tippoo the city's last defenders retreated slowly. The city was falling to the. The palanquin was carried by eight men, two to each of its four long gilded handles. With. He could sense a panic inside the city now. It had been quiet until a few moments ago, when

in the streets, their bare feet pattering on the dried mud as they ran towards the Bangalore Gate. The chamberlains led the palanquin towards the Water Gate of the inner wall. The gate. Sharpe paused inside the tunnel while the palanquin went on ahead. The tunnel's floor

against the curved wall and pulled the jacket right side out and then shoved his arms into the. And saw the Tippoo. He saw the small gaudy man come running down the ramp from the outer walls. The Tippoo. 'Bloody hell,' Sharpe cursed. The whole damned lot were coming for him, and he backed. The aide ran into the tunnel, shouting for the gate to be opened. Then he saw Sharpe in. The Tippoo's bodyguard ran towards the tunnel. Sharpe fired his second musket. He knew

to the space between the walls, and those troops were now attacking towards the Water Gate. The. A cheer sounded to Sharpe's left. More muskets fired, then suddenly there were two red. The man, wild-eyed and with his right cheek pitted by powder burns from the lock of his. 'Havercakes. You?' 'The Old Dozen.' The man fired, and immediately sidled back to begin reloading the musket.

The dying redcoat shuddered. His companion fired, then swore. 'Bastards!' He hesitated. Musket balls thumped into the teak doors behind him. He fired his last musket, then reloaded. The bodyguard had still not come into the tunnel. Sharpe, in his fear, had not heard the

fire had forced the Tippoo's bodyguard to crouch close about their monarch, and Sharpe had been
But the Tippoo was once again fighting off the encroaching infidels. Allah had given him this
And as those new enemies appeared, the Tippoo's charmed luck turned. One bullet struck
A shot crashed out of the Water Gate's smoky gloom and the man leading the Tippoo's es

end of the tunnel the fine droplets of blood looked like powdered rubies. The man fell, scream
'Go, Your Majesty!' A wounded aide thrust a rifle into the Tippoo's hands, then dared
'Open the gate!' the aide shouted, then he saw the shadow within the shadow at the end
Sharpe stood and grinned at the Tippoo. 'Bastard,' he said, seeing the glint of light

helmet. 'Bastard,' he said again. He had one loaded musket left. The Tippoo was holding a rifl
The Tippoo recognized the hard, bloody face in the gloom. He smiled. Fate was most str
'Bastard,' Sharpe said again. He wanted to be close when he killed the Tippoo, close e
Behind the Tippoo the bright daylight was dulled by the swirling gunsmoke where dying men gasp
Sharpe did not understand the Tippoo any more than the Tippoo understood Sharpe. 'You'
The Tippoo just smiled. His helmet had been dipped in the fountain of life, but it had

But no bodyguard appeared and the Tippoo turned back to face Sharpe. 'I dreamed of dea
Sharpe fired. The bullet went higher than he intended. He had thought to put it throug
The booming echo of the musket shot still battered Sharpe's ears so he was not aware t

proper. 'Take a proper soldier.' He stood up and then, awkwardly, because of his burden of jewe
The Tippoo's eyes closed and he thought of the prayer that he had copied into his note
Sharpe felt a pang of sorrow for the dying man. He might have been a murderous enemy,
'Just a fat little fellow dying,' Sharpe said as he climbed over the barrier of the de
'Did he have any loot?'

'Nothing,' Sharpe said, 'nothing worth the trouble. Place is full of shit, too.'
The Sergeant frowned at Sharpe's unkempt dress and unpowdered hair. 'What regiment are
'Not yours,' Sharpe said curtly, and walked away through the crowds of celebrating red
Sergeant Richard Sharpe slung the musket and walked around the base of the inner wall,

Next day it rained. It was not the monsoon, though it could have been, for the rain fe
But there was no Tippoo in Seringapatam, only the Rajah, who had been restored to his

from the ravages of the assaulting troops, was now being stripped bare by the victorious offic
The Tippoo's father, the great Hyder Ali, lay in a mausoleum east of the city and, whe
Sharpe, with three bright white stripes newly sewn onto his faded red sleeve, waited o
'Some lucky bastard, sir.'

'A rich one by now, no doubt,' the Colonel said.
'Good for him, sir,' Sharpe said, 'whoever he is.'
'He'd only waste the plunder,' McCandless said severely. 'He'll fritter it on women an
'Don't sound like a waste to me, sir.'
McCandless grimaced at the Sergeant's levity. 'That ruby alone was worth ten years of
'A shame it's vanished, sir,' Sharpe said guilelessly.
'Isn't it, Sharpe?' McCandless agreed. 'But I hear you were at the Water Gate?'

'Me, sir? No, sir. Not me, sir. I stayed with Mister Lawford, sir.'
The Colonel gave Sharpe a fierce glance. 'A sergeant of the Old Dozen reports he saw a
'He was probably confused by the battle, sir. Lost his wits, I wouldn't doubt.'
'So who put Sergeant Hakeswill in with the tigers?' McCandless demanded.
'Only the good Lord knows, sir, and He ain't saying.'

The Colonel, scenting blasphemy, frowned. 'Hakeswill says it was you,' he accused Sharpe. 'Hakeswill's mad, sir, and you can't trust a thing he says,' Sharpe said. And Hakeswill

'Hakeswill's a lucky man,' McCandless said drily, abandoning any further attempt to do
'But not devil-caters, sir. One whiff of Hakeswill and they must have gone right off the
'He still swears it was you who threw him to the tigers,' McCandless said. 'I've no doubt
'I've no doubt either, sir, but I'll be ready for him.' And next time, Sharpe thought,
McCandless turned as the slow funeral procession appeared at the end of the long road.
The muffled drumbeat came nearer and the red-coated honour guard stiffened to attention.
'I'm sure we have, sir.'

The Colonel glanced at Sharpe. He saw a young man, hard as flint, and the restless anger

Sharpe seemed surprised. 'I thought you were going home, sir. To Scotland.'
McCandless shrugged. 'There's work undone here, Sharpe, work undone. And what will I expect
'And I'd be privileged to help you, sir, so I would,' Sharpe said, then he snatched up
The coffin was carried slowly past Sharpe. The men bearing the Tippoos were dressed in
It was Sharpe's tiger.

Historical Note

The siege and fall of Seringapatam (now Srirangapatna) in May 1799 ended decades of warfare.
The novel's description of the city's fall is mostly accurate. Two Forlorn Hopes, one

opposition, most probably caused by the Tippoos' own leadership. Many eyewitnesses, from both sides,
I did take one great liberty with the historical facts of the assault. There was no doubt
There were a few French troops in Seringapatam, but Nelson's victory at the Nile had ended

appointed the younger man to be the Governor of Seringapatam after the siege, although, given
The Tippoos Sultan, of course, existed. His defeat was celebrated in Britain where the
But much of the Tippoos grandeur can still be seen. The Inner Palace of Seringapatam,

exquisite little palace while he governed Mysore. It is now a museum. The Tippoos mosque still
The Tippoos revered the tiger, and used tiger motifs wherever he could. His fabulous tiger
Srirangapatna's outer wall still stands. The town, which has fewer inhabitants now than
The so-called dungeons are beneath the Sultan Battery, and while it is quite possible

forty-four months) they were not so employed in 1799. By then the inner wall had been built (it
A plaque marks the Water Gate through the outer wall as the site of the Tippoos death

seems a pity to abandon the present Water Gate as the place where the Tippoos was shot, for its
The Tippoos body was treated with honour, and next day, as the novel describes, he was
Today the Tippoos is a hero to many Indians who regard him as a proto-independence fighter

I would like to thank Elizabeth Cartmale-Freedman who ransacked the files of London's
Srirangapatna is still dominated by the Tippoos memory. He was an efficient ruler who

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Bernard Cornwell

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India, 1803. It is four years since Richard Sharpe earned his sergeant's stripes at the

Sharpe is ordered to join the hunt for the renegade Englishman, a hunt that will take
The paths of treachery all lead to the small village of Assaye where Sir Arthur Welles

ISBN 0 00 225630 4

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