

Savage Honor

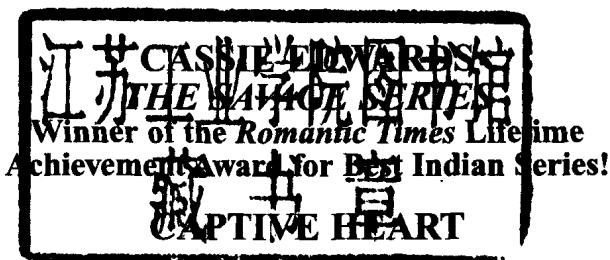


Cassie
Edwards

NY Times Bestselling Author

**"Cassie Edwards writes action-packed, sexy reads!
Romance fans will be more than satisfied!"**

—*Romantic Times*



"We shall be home soon," he said. As he spoke the word "home," he pictured her there with him, not as a prisoner . . . but as the woman who would fill his lodge with sunshine . . . who would warm his bed and reach her arms out for him as she welcomed him.

Shawndee's heart skipped a beat, for she saw a tenderness in his eyes that made her feel she was much more than a captive to him.

If only things were different, she thought to herself.

If only they could have met under different circumstances. She imagined that she was in his canoe willingly and going to his home at Shadow Hawk's invitation, and not as his prisoner. It was hard not to see herself in his arms, to feel his lips pressed to hers, warm and passionate.

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*In friendship and admiration, I dedicate Savage Honor to
my dear friend Steve Sandalis and his sweet wife, Katy!
(And, thank you, Steve, for posing for the cover for Savage
Honor and my next Savage series book, Savage Moon!)*

Savage
& Honor

WHO CARES?

As the clouds move in the skies,
I listen to the Indians' cries.
It hurts my heart and tears my soul,
How can the whites be so cold?
Do they not care what they have done?
Can't they hear the cries of the little ones?
One by one they're fading away,
Their land was taken in a passing day.
But I want you to know someone does care.
I wish I could have only been there.

—Diane Collett

Chapter One

It was 1784. The small room in the Silver Creek General Store was dark and dreary. It had the foul aroma of dried hides and tobacco. It also reeked of pickled cucumbers, which were packed in a tall, open crock that sat on the floor with a dead roach floating belly up on the top.

Eighteen-year-old Shawndee Sibley shuddered as she gazed at the roach. She was remembering the times she had bought one of the pickled cucumbers, enjoying its tangy, vinegary taste as she gathered supplies. She shifted her gaze to the wicker basket that she carried and hurried down one narrow aisle and then another, gathering household supplies for her mother, who sat outside in the buckboard wagon waiting for her.

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Shawndee frowned as she thought of her stout, tight-lipped mother. She would be sitting with a long-barreled firearm hidden beneath a shawl right next to her on the seat, for of late her mother feared for her life. Shawndee's father, Caleb, had been knifed to death in a dark alley of Silver Creek a few nights ago.

Her father rested now in a pine box beneath a mound of earth behind Shawndee's home, for the people of Silver Creek would not allow her father to be buried in the cemetery. Too many thought him unworthy of lying amid the genteel dead of Silver Creek.

They despised Shawndee's mother just as much, and had tried all means possible to run the family out of town.

Now, even more determined than before her husband's death, Shawndee's mother would not budge. Her mother would not let anyone rule her life, especially not the narrow-minded people of Silver Creek. Her mother made her own rules and was determined to keep her Silverleaf Tavern open for business, even though it was against the law to have such an establishment in Silver Creek.

As far back as Shawndee could remember, her parents had moved from town to town, trading in whiskey. She was uncomfortable with this sort of life, not only because her family was looked upon as filth by all of the townsfolk of Silver Creek, but

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also because she was forced to hide her identity. This was a necessary precaution to keep the men who frequented her mother's drinking establishment from taking liberties with her while they were inebriated.

Shawndee walked down another aisle, reaching for a bar of lye soap, then placing it in her basket among the other things she was going to purchase. Today, as always, she was dressed as a boy, in breeches and shirt, with a wide-brimmed hat pulled down low over her thick golden hair.

Yes, when Shawndee began budding into a young lady, her parents forced her to dress and behave like a boy, and she hated every minute of it. She hated not being able to wear beautiful dresses and fancy shoes, and especially hated having to wear her hair in a ponytail when she was at home, and beneath a hat whenever she was anywhere else.

She had spent long hours in bed at night envisioning how it would be to wear a silk dress, with billows of frothy crinoline beneath it, and how she might look on a dance floor with a handsome man dressed in a fancy suit, twirling her frilly skirt around her ankles as she danced. Her hair would be worn loose and long and flowing down her back. Her cheeks would be flushed rosy with excitement. Her lips would be red, and her blue eyes would be sparkling.

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But usually, just as she lost herself in such wonderful thoughts, drunken laughter erupting from downstairs in the tavern would remind her of reality. She must go on posing as the *son* of a woman who ran an illegal liquor establishment in Silver Creek, who had not yet been forced out of town because the sheriff of Silver Creek had refused to order the Sibleys to leave.

As Shawndee's mother had described Sheriff Tom Dawson, he was a man as corrupt as all hell, who enjoyed a drink of booze as well as the next fellow. He defended the Silverleaf Tavern as though it were a holy place of worship.

Shawndee sighed heavily as she moved down another dark aisle to avoid the women in fancy bonnets and beautiful dresses who were doing their shopping. She hurriedly slapped a long, twisted string of tobacco into her basket, hating the fact that her mother enjoyed a chew as much as a man. Her mother's teeth were stained and ugly; her breath smelled like a frightened skunk.

Yes, her mother was hard, through and through, as Shawndee herself would be if she fully accepted this life she was forced to lead.

But she clung to her dreams, where she could become the woman she prayed she'd be one day.

Shawndee had more than one dream. Another was her love of books.

She would love to be surrounded by them. She

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went often and pressed her nose against the glass-paned window of Silver Creek's one-room library and watched the librarian at work, wishing *she* were there, the librarian herself.

Shawndee's time to watch through the window and dream was always short-lived, for as soon as the librarian caught her spying, she'd come outside and chase Shawndee away as though she were no better than a dog.

When that happened, Shawndee *felt* like a wounded puppy.

And then there was her dream of finding the perfect man. Yet she knew that as long as she was forced to behave and dress like a boy, that could never happen.

As she hid herself in a dark corner of her mother's tavern, she sometimes studied the men who sat at the bar, hoping to see one that might be different from the others.

She looked for one who seemed educated, who was dressed in fine clothes, who wore his hair clean and shaped just above his collar line, whose eyes were clear and not bloodshot from drinking himself crazy into the wee hours of the night.

Thus far, she had seen no man like that, not at her mother's tavern, or even walking or riding down the streets of Silver Creek. The townsfolk claimed that except for the Silverleaf Tavern, Silver Creek was a sin-free town, but Shawndee knew that

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many of the men of this town had skeletons in their closets. For it was those men, those *husbands*, who frequented the Silverleaf Tavern despite their wives' and church deacons' objections.

Eager to leave the dirty, smelly general store, Shawndee glanced down at her basket. She mentally checked the items there to be sure that she had gotten everything her mother needed.

She dreaded her next chore—paying for her selections while all the busybody ladies watched from a distance, as though she were poison, their faces pressed close together, gossiping about the son of the whorish woman who owned the only sinful place in their wonderful town.

Wanting to get it over, Shawndee went to the counter and hurriedly emptied her basket.

As the store clerk, a tall, lanky, bald man with thick-lensed glasses perched on his crooked nose, began adding up what Shawndee owed him, she heard the muffled footsteps of someone in moccasins. Surely an Indian had come into the store.

Intrigued by Indians, Shawndee turned and found a warrior only a few footsteps away from her. He stood at the counter with his arms heavily laden with pelts that he must have brought to the store for trade.

As the first store clerk continued to wait on Shawndee, another clerk stepped up to the counter and started taking the pelts from the Indian, stack-