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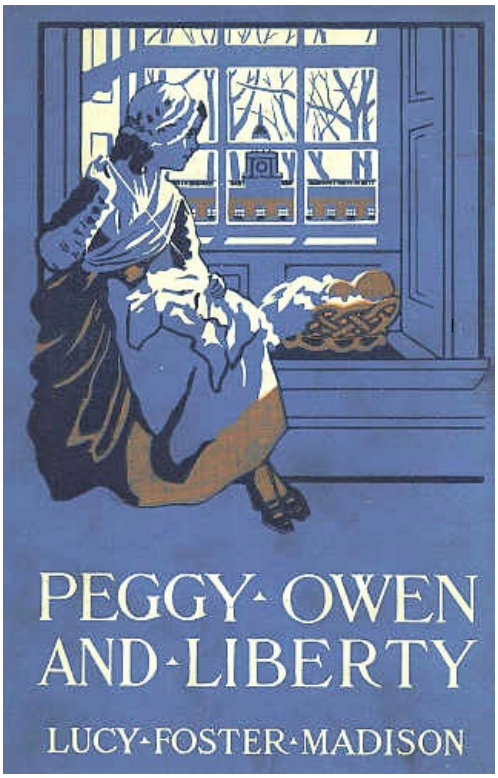

PEGGY OWEN AND LIBERTY

BY LUCY FOSTER MADISON

AUTHOR OF

"PEGGY OWEN"
"PEGGY OWEN,

PATRIOT”
“PEGGY OWEN
AT YORKTOWN”
ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

H. J. PECK

The Penn Publishing Company

PHILADELPHIA MCMXIII

“WHY, IT’S FATHER!”

“The motto of our father-band
Circled the world in its embrace:
’Twas Liberty throughout the land,
And good to all their brother race.
Long here—within the pilgrim’s bell
Had lingered—though it often pealed
—
Those treasured tones, that eke

should tell
Where freedom’s proudest scroll was sealed!
Here the dawn of reason broke
On the trampled rights of man;
And a moral era woke
Brightest since the world began.”

Introduction

In “Peggy Owen,” the first book of this series, is related the story of a little Quaker maid who lived across from the State House in Philadelphia, and who, neutral at first on account of her religion, became at length an active patriot. The vicissitudes and annoyances to which she and her mother are subjected by one William Owen, an officer in the English army and a kinsman of her father’s, are also given.

“Peggy Owen, Patriot” tells of Peggy’s winter at Middlebrook, in northern New Jersey, where Washington’s army is camped, her capture by the British and enforced journey to the Carolinas, and final return home.

“Peggy Owen at Yorktown” details how Peggy goes to Virginia to nurse a cousin, who is wounded and a prisoner. The town is captured by the British under Benedict Arnold, the traitor, and Peggy is led to believe that he has induced the desertion of her friend, John Drayton. Drayton’s rescue from execution as a spy and the siege of Yorktown follow.

In the present volume Peggy’s friends rally about her when her Cousin Clifford is in danger of capture. The exciting events of the story show the unsettled state of the country after the surrender of Cornwallis.

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Peggy Owen and Liberty

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CHAPTER I

A SMALL DINNER BECOMES A PARTY

"At Delaware's broad stream, the view begin
Where jutting wharfs, food-freighted boats take in;
Then, with the advancing sun direct your eye
Wide opes the street with firm brick buildings high;
Step, gently rising, over the pebbly way,
And see the shops their tempting wares display."

—"Description of Philadelphia," Breitnal, 1729.

It was the first of March, 1782, and over the city of Philadelphia a severe storm was raging. A stiff wind, that lashed the black waters of the Delaware into sullen fury and sent the snow whirling and eddying before it, blew savagely from the northeast. The snow, which had begun falling the day before, had continued all night with such rigorous, relentless persistence that by the noon hour the whole city was sheeted with a soft white blanket that spread abroad a solemn stillness. The rolling wheels of the few vehicles in the streets were noiseless, and the sharp ring and clatter of horses' hoofs became a dull muffled tramp. High [Pg 12] up overhead the snow settled on the church spires, clothing them in a garb of pure cold white, and drifted among the niches of the State House Tower, until the face of the great clock was hidden, and could scarce be told for what it was.

Just across from the State House, in the midst of extensive grounds, stood a large double brick house which was taking its share of the storm. There were piles of snow on the steps and broad piazzas, huge drifts against the fences, and great banks on the terraces of the gardens. The wind lashed the lithe limbs of the leafless trees of the orchard, shrieked through the sooty caverns of the wide chimneys, whistled merrily as it drove the snow against the windows, and rattled the casements with howls of glee as it went whirling by.

Storm-bound the mansion seemed, but its cold and wintry appearance was wholly on the outside, for within its walls there was no lack of cheerfulness and warmth. Great fires blazed on every hearth and puffed clouds of smoke through the broad chimneys, in defiance of the wind which strove there for the mastery. Between the heavy gusts of wind came [Pg 13] gleeful bursts of laughter from the sitting-room as though the inmates were too happy to heed the driving storm without, and from the kitchen arose savory odors that spoke of tempting preparations for a bounteous meal, which further enhanced the air of geniality that pervaded the dwelling.

In this latter apartment were two persons: one, a serene faced woman of middle age who was busily engaged at the kneading board; the other, a slender maiden well covered by a huge apron and with sleeves rolled back, stood before a deal table reducing loaf sugar to usable shape. They were Mistress David Owen and her daughter Peggy.

“How it blows!” exclaimed the girl, looking up from her task as a sudden gust of wind flung the outside door wide, and sent the snow scurrying across the sanded floor of the kitchen. “What shall be done anent that door, mother?”

“Tell Sukey to bring a large stick of wood and put against it,” returned the lady. “Then look to the oven, Peggy. ’Tis hard to get a clear fire with so much wind.”

“I do believe that everything is going to be done to a turn in spite of it,” remarked Peggy, a little frown of anxiety which had puckered her brow disappearing as she glanced into the great oven. [Pg 14]

“Then as soon as thou hast set the table the dinner will be ready to take up. I make no doubt but that thy friends are hungry. And what a time they seem to be having,” Mrs. Owen added as a merry peal of laughter came from the sitting-room.

“Are they not?” Peggy smiled in sympathy. “I am so glad they came yesterday. I fear me that they could not have reached here to-day in this dreadful storm. ’Tis too bad to have such weather now when ’tis Robert’s first home leave in three years.”

“Methinks that ’twould better come when one is on a furlough than in camp,” remarked her mother gravely. “It must be terrible for the soldiers who lack so much to keep them comfortable.”

“True,” assented the girl soberly. “Would that the war were at an end, and the peace we long for had come in very truth.”

“And so do we all, my daughter. ’Tis weary waiting, but we must of necessity possess ourselves with patience. But there! let not the thought of it sadden thee to-day. ’Tis long since thou hast had thy friends together. Enjoy the present, for we know not what the morrow may bring. And now——” [Pg 15]

“Set the table,” added Peggy with a laugh, as she rolled down her sleeves. “And don’t thee dally too long talking with thy friends, Peggy. Thee didn’t add that, mother.”

“As thee knows thy weakness it might be well to bear it in mind,” commented her mother with a smile.

The kitchen was the principal apartment of a long low building attached to the main dwelling by a covered entry way. Through this Peggy went to the hall and on to the dining-room, where she began laying the table. This room adjoined the sitting-room, and, as the bursts of merriment became more and more frequent, the maiden softly opened the connecting door and peeped in.

A tall youth of soldierly bearing, in the uniform of the Light Infantry, his epaulettes denoting the rank of major, leaned carelessly against one end of the mantelpiece. On a settle drawn up before the fire sat two girls. One held a book from which she was reading aloud, and both the other girl and the youth were so intent upon her utterances that they did not notice Peggy’s entrance. They turned toward her eagerly as she spoke: [Pg 16]

“Aren’t you getting hungry, or are you too interested to stop for dinner?”

“’Tis quite time thee was coming, Peggy,” cried the girl who had been reading, tossing back her curly locks that, innocent of powder, hung in picturesque confusion about her face. “I really don’t know what we are to do with Betty here. Since she hath taken to young lady ways there’s no living with her.”

“What has thee been doing, Betty Williams?” queried Peggy with mock gravity, turning toward the other girl. Her hair was done high over a cushion, profusely powdered, and she waved a large fan languidly.

“Sally is just talking, Peggy,” she said. “She and Robert seem to find much amusement in some of my remarks. ’Tis just nothing at all. Sally Evans is the one that needs to be dealt with.”

“Sally hath been reading to us from your diary, which you kept for the Social Select Circle while you were in Virginia,” explained Robert Dale. “We were much entertained anent the account of your bashful friend, Fairfax Johnson. Betty amused us by telling just what she would have done with him had she been in your place.” [Pg 17]

“I often wished for her,” declared Peggy, smiling. “Poor Fairfax would mantle did a girl but speak to him. And yet he was so brave!”

“He was indeed,” assented the youth with warm admiration. “Sally hath just read where he went to warn the Legislature of Virginia of Tarleton’s coming despite the fact that he was ill. But, Peggy, we could not help but laugh over what he said to you. Read his words, Sally.”

“‘I said,’” read Sally picking up the book again, “‘Friend Fairfax, thee always seems so afraid of us females, yet thee can do this, or aught else that is for thy country. Why is it?’ And he replied:

“‘To defend the country from the invader, to do anything that can be done to thwart the enemy’s designs, is man’s duty. But to face a battery of bright eyes requires courage, [Pg 18] Mistress Peggy. And that I have not.’”

“Wasn’t that fine?” cried Betty with animation. “I adore bravery and shyness combined. Methinks ’twould be delightsome to be the woman who could teach him how to face such a battery. Thee didn’t live up to thy opportunity, Peggy. It was thy duty to cure such a fine fellow of bashfulness. It was thy duty, I say. Would I could take him in hand.”

“Would that thee might, Betty,” answered Peggy. “But I fear thee would have thy hands full.”

“I wonder if thee has heard the latest concerning Betty’s doings,” broke in Sally. “Mr. Deering told me of it. Betty was dancing a measure with Colonel Middleton at the last Assembly when Mr. Deering came up to her and said:

“‘I see that you are dancing with a man of war, Miss Betty.’

“‘Yes, sir,’ says Betty, ‘but I think a tender would be preferable.’”

“Oh, Betty! Betty!” gasped Peggy when the merriment that greeted this had subsided. [Pg 19] “How did thee dare?”

“La!” spoke Betty, arranging the folds of her paduasoy gown complacently, “when a man is so remiss as to forget the refreshments one must dare.”

“I verily believe that she could manage your friend, Fairfax,” commented Robert Dale laughing. “Would that I might be there to see it.”

“I kept an account of everything he said for Betty’s especial delectation,” said Peggy. “She named him the ‘Silent Knight,’ and it was very appropriate.”

“Now why for my delectation instead of thine, or Sally’s?” queried Betty.

“Why, Sally and I are such workaday damsels that we are not accustomed to handling such problems,” explained Peggy demurely. “Thou art the only belle in the Social Select Circle, and having been instructed in French, I hear very thoroughly, thou hast waxed proficient in matters regarding the sterner sex.”

“Nonsense! Nonsense!” ejaculated Betty. She sat up quickly, and sniffed the air daintily. [Pg 20] “Peggy Owen,” she cried, “do I in very truth smell pepper-pot?”

“Thee does. I thought that would please thee. And Sally, too, but Robert——” She glanced at the lad inquiringly.

“Robert is enough of a Quaker to enjoy pepper-pot,” answered he emphatically. “This weather is the very time for it too.”

“We’ll forgive thy desertion of us so long as thee was making pepper-pot,” declared Sally.

“Well, Robert hath not had leave for three years, so mother and I thought we must do what we could to give him a good dinner.”

“Does she mean by that that thee has not eaten in all that time, Robert?” demanded Betty slyly. “In truth ’twould seem so. I do believe that she hath done naught but move betwixt spit and oven this whole morning.”

“I think I shall do justice to all such preparations,” said the youth smiling. “I fancy that the most of us in the army would find little difficulty in keeping Peggy busy all the time.”

“Hark!” exclaimed Sally. “I thought I heard some one call.”

As the youth and the maidens assumed a listening attitude there came a faint “Hallo!” [Pg 21] above the tumult of the wind. Sally ran to one of the windows that faced Chestnut Street,

and flattened her nose against the glass in the endeavor to see out.

“’Tis a man on horseback,” she cried. “He is stopping in front of the house. Now he is dismounting. Who can it be?”

“Some traveler, I make no doubt,” remarked Peggy, coming to her side. “The storm hath forced him to stop for shelter. Ah! there is Tom ready to take his horse. He should have cleaned the steps, but he waited, I dare say, hoping that it would stop snow—— Why! it’s father——” she broke off abruptly, making a dash for the door. “Tell mother, Sally.”

“David, this is a surprise,” exclaimed Mrs. Owen, coming quickly in answer to Sally’s call, and reaching the sitting-room just as a tall man, booted and spurred, entered it from the hall. “Thee must be almost frozen after being exposed to the fury of such a storm.”

“’Tis good to be out of it, wife,” answered Mr. Owen, greeting her with affection. He stretched his hands luxuriantly toward the fire as Peggy relieved him of his hat and riding [Pg 22] coat, and glanced about appreciatively. “How cozy and comfortable it is here! And what a merry party! It puts new heart into a man just to see so much brightness.”

“We are to have pepper-pot, Mr. Owen,” Betty informed him, drawing forward a large easy chair for his use while Sally ran to lay an extra plate on the table. “Doesn’t it smell good?”

“It does indeed, Betty. The odor is delectable enough to whet the appetite to as keen an edge as the wind hath. Robert, ’tis some time since I have seen thee.”

“I am on my first leave in three years, Mr. Owen. Are you on a furlough too, sir?”

“Nay, lad; I took one just after Yorktown, when I brought Peggy home from Virginia. General Washington, who, as thee doubtless knows, is still here in Philadelphia perfecting plans with Congress for next summer’s campaign, hath sent for me to confer with him regarding the best means of putting down this illicit trade which hath sprung up of late. I do not know how long the conference will last, but it comes very pleasantly just now, as it [Pg 23] enables me to have the comforts of home during this severe weather.”

“When did you leave the Highlands, sir?”

“Four days since. The army had begun to hope that winter was over, as the ice was beginning to come down the Hudson. This storm hath dashed our hopes of an early spring.”

“And must thee return there, David?” asked Mistress Owen.

“No; I am to go to Lancaster. This trade seems to be flourishing among the British prisoners stationed there. Congress had granted permission to England to keep them in supplies, and it seems that advantage is taken of this fact to include a great many contraband goods. These the prisoners, or their wives, are selling to the citizens of Lancaster and surrounding country. To such an extent hath the trade grown that it threatens to ruin the merchants of the place, who cannot compete with the prices asked. I am to look into the matter, and to stop the importation of such goods, if possible.”

“’Tis openly talked that England will defer coming to terms of peace because she hopes to [Pg 24] conquer us by this same trade,” observed Robert Dale gravely.

“And is like to succeed if it cannot be put down,” commented David Owen shaking his head. “All along the coast the British cruisers patrol to capture our merchantmen, and to obstruct our commerce. The Delaware is watched, our coasts are watched that we may not get goods elsewhere, or have any market for our produce. Unable to get what they want, our own people buy where they can without realizing the harm. ’Tis estimated from forty to fifty thousand pounds have been drawn by this means into New York in the past few months. If this continues the enemy will soon be possessed of all the hard money that hath come into the country through the French, and without money we can do naught. Our resources and industries have been ruined by the long war, and this latest scheme of England bids fair to undo what hath been accomplished by force of arms.”

“And after Yorktown every one thought that of course peace was just a matter of a few months. That it would be declared at once,” sighed Sally. “Oh, dear! It makes me sad to [Pg 25] think the war is not over yet!”

“And I have been the marplot to spoil this merry company,” said Mr. Owen contritely. “Let’s declare a truce to the matter for the time being, and discuss that pepper-pot. Is’t ready, lass?”

“Yes, father,” answered Peggy rising. “And there is a good dinner beside. We will enjoy it the more for having thee with us.”

“Thee must be hungry, David,” observed Mistress Owen rising also. “The dinner is ready to put on the table, so thee is just in time. I——”

She stopped abruptly as high above the noise of the wind the brass knocker sounded.

“More company,” exclaimed Betty gleefully as Peggy started for the hall. “Peggy, thy small dinner bids fair to become a party.”

CHAPTER II

[Pg 26]

PEGGY IS SURPRISED

“The state that strives for liberty, though foiled
And forced to abandon what she bravely sought,
Deserves at least applause for her attempt,
And pity for her loss. But that’s a cause
Not often unsuccessful.”

—“*The Task*,” *Cowper*.

Peggy was nearly blinded by the sudden rush of snow and wind that followed the opening of the great front door, and so for the moment did not recognize the two, a man and a woman, who stood there on the steps.

“Will ye enter, friends?” she asked courteously. “’Tis a fearful storm!”

“That it is, Peggy. We are mighty glad to reach shelter. Come, Fairfax! I told you that we should be welcome.”

“Nurse Johnson,” shrilled the girl in delight. “Why, come right in. Welcome? Of course thee is welcome. And thou also, Friend Fairfax. Why, we were speaking of thee but now. Mother, ’tis Friend Nurse, from Virginia.”

[Pg 27]

“Come in, Friend Johnson,” spoke Mrs. Owen warmly, coming in haste from the sitting-room. “Thee must be cold. ’Tis dreadful weather. Let me help thee with thy wraps.”

“I was getting pretty cold,” acknowledged Nurse Johnson. “We were on our way to the Jerseys, where my sister hath taken a farm. We thought to get to Burlington to-night, but the storm made traveling so difficult that I told Fairfax that I made no doubt you would put us up until ’twas over.”

“’Twill give us great pleasure, Friend Nurse—I should say, Friend Johnson,” answered Mistress Owen graciously. “We have heard Peggy talk of thee so much that we have fallen into her way of speaking of thee.”

“Continue so to call me, Mrs. Owen. I like it,” declared Nurse Johnson heartily.

“Peggy, see thou to the dishing up of the dinner, while I attend our friends,” spoke her mother. “We were just on the point of taking it up when ye came,” she explained. “Hot pepper-pot will warm ye better than anything.”

[Pg 28]

“Isn’t that our Silent Knight?” queried Betty, in a shrill whisper as Peggy was passing through the room.

“Yes, Betty. Shall I place him by thee at table?”

“See how she is priming for conquest,” remarked Sally as Betty, nodding acquiescence, began unconsciously to smooth her hair. “She must tell us every word he says; must she not, Robert?”

“Of a verity,” smiled the young man, his amusement plainly visible.

“I think thee has met with every one, Friend Nurse,” observed Mrs. Owen entering at this moment with the new arrivals. “David ye know, of course. Sally and Betty ye met last year. Robert? No; ye do not know him. Robert Dale, of the army, Nurse Johnson. And this is Fairfax, her son, Robert. Ye should be good friends, as ye have both fought for the country.”

“Thou hast forgot to give Robert his rank, Lowry,” spoke Mr. Owen as the young men shook hands. “Friend Johnson, have this chair. Thou wilt find it easy and quite comfortable.”

“Thy pardon, Robert,” exclaimed Mrs. Owen. “I do not always remember that thou art Major Dale.” [Pg 29]

“I do not always remember it myself, madam,” returned the youth modestly. “And I wish to be Robert to you always.”

“How these children grow!” exclaimed Nurse Johnson sinking into the easy chair with a sigh of content. “It hardly seems possible that Fairfax is more than a boy; yet here he is a captain in the army.”

“A captain?” ejaculated Peggy in surprise.

“Yes; it does seem strange, doesn’t it? You see he served with the militia in Virginia during the last few years, and I presume would have stayed with it; but his uncle, my sister’s husband, persuaded him to enlist with the regular army. He said that if he would enroll himself among the New Jersey troops he would get him a commission as captain, which he did. That is one of the reasons we are going to New Jersey.”

“Thou wilt find it very comfortable here on the settle, Captain Johnson,” spoke Betty sweetly, drawing her skirts aside with such an unmistakable gesture that Fairfax, flushing hotly, was obliged to seat himself beside her. [Pg 30]

Peggy’s glance met Sally’s with quick understanding.

“I will help thee, Peggy,” said Sally, rising. “Nay; we do not need thee, Mrs. Owen. Didst ever see Betty’s equal?” she questioned as they reached the kitchen.

Peggy laughed.

“Sally, she will never make him talk in the world,” she declared. “Thou and I will have a good laugh at her when ’tis over. ’Twill give a fine chance to tease.”

“’Tis just like a party,” cried Betty as, a little later, they were gathered about the table. “’Tis charming to meet old friends! And everybody is here save thy cousins, Clifford and Harriet, Peggy. Oh, yes! and Captain Drayton.”

“Captain Drayton is to go to Lancaster too, I understand,” remarked Mr. Owen. “Did thee know, lass?”

“No, father. I thought he was still with General Greene. He returned to him after Yorktown.”

“Yes, I know. This is but a recent arrangement. I shall be glad to have him at Lancaster. He is good help in a matter of the nature we shall find there.” [Pg 31]

“And the cousins?” inquired Nurse Johnson. “Did they go to New York from Yorktown? I have wondered anent it.”

“Harriet went with Cousin William to New York; but Clifford was sent somewhere into the interior with the men. Thee remembers that all the majors and captains accompanied the men, to look after their welfare and to maintain discipline,” explained Peggy.

“I rather liked Clifford,” remarked the nurse. “He certainly earned our gratitude, Peggy, by protecting us when the British came to Williamsburgh. Did Peggy tell you about it, Mrs. Owen?”

“Yes; and so much else concerning the lad that I find myself quite anxious to see him,” answered Mrs. Owen. “Peggy declares that he should have been her brother instead of Harriet’s. He looks so much like David.”

“I think I agree with her. The resemblance is remarkable. But why did he go under the name of Captain Williams? I never did understand it.”

“’Twas because he went into the army without his father’s permission,” Peggy told her. “He feared that if he came to America under his own name Cousin William might use his influence to have him returned to England. ’Tis generally known, however, that he is Colonel William Owen’s son, though he is called Captain Williams.” [Pg 32]

“Well, I hope the lad is well treated wherever he may be,” said the nurse musingly. “I should not like harm to befall him; he was so considerate of us. What is the outlook for another summer, Mr. Owen?”

“The general is preparing for another campaign, Friend Johnson. The preparations are

proceeding slowly, however, owing to the exhaustion of the country. Then, too, every state seems afraid of bearing more than its share of the war. There is much disinclination to vigorous exertion. His Excellency is pleading and entreating that the people may not let the late success of our arms render them insensible to the danger we still face. There is talk of a new commander for the British, I hear. Meantime, our coasts are harassed by the enemy, and our commerce is all but stopped. Could the general have followed out his wish, and laid [Pg 33] siege to Charlestown after the success at Yorktown, we need not have prepared for another campaign."

And so the talk went on. It was never in the character and traditions of England to treat with an enemy in the hour of disaster. In its history treaties had, from time immemorial, followed upon victory, never upon defeat. It was therefore necessary as well as politic to grasp the full fruits of the brilliant success at Yorktown, and Washington, with the vigor which was one of the most striking traits of his well balanced nature, wished to carry its consequences to their utmost limit. But the French fleet under De Grasse refused to co-operate longer, and the general was forced to send his army back to the Hudson while he began preparations for another campaign. Meantime, the illicit trade assumed proportions that threatened to undo everything that had been gained by force of arms.

All these things were discussed, and Nurse Johnson gave them the latest news of the army in the South: General Greene had completely invested Charlestown, she said. General Wayne had been sent to Georgia and now lay before Savannah. The capitulation of the two [Pg 34] places seemed but a question of time. The French still lay about Williamsburgh, having chosen that place for their winter quarters. It was reported that they would go north with the opening of spring. In turn, Mr. Owen told of the numerous raids that had been made, principally by refugees along the coast, the capture of the merchantmen, and the war at sea. Under cover of the conversation of their elders, Peggy was amused to see that Betty was talking animatedly to Fairfax Johnson. Presently, the dinner was finished, and she found herself alone in the dining-room with her girl friends.

"Peggy, thee maligned Captain Johnson," declared Betty closing the door of the sitting-room. "Get me a towel, Sally. We will both wipe the dishes." She polished a plate vigorously as she continued: "I found him most entertaining. He and his mother are going to northern New Jersey, where his aunt and uncle have a large farm. Plantation, he calls it. They grew very tired of being with the military so much at Williamsburgh, though no one could desire [Pg 35] better troops than the allies. They intend to make their home in New Jersey if they like it. His aunt hath but one son, who is with the military on Tom's River."

Peggy gazed at her with an expression of the most intense astonishment.

"He told thee all that, Betty?" she exclaimed. "Why, thee is wonderful! In all the six or seven months that I knew him I never heard him say so much."

"He needs just a little encouragement," said Betty complacently. "He is really quite interesting. I enjoyed the conversation greatly. Sally Evans, whatever is the matter?"

"Oh! oh!" screamed Sally. "She enjoyed the conversation greatly. I should think she would. Why, she did all the talking. Robert and I commented upon it. Oh, Betty! Betty!"

"I did not do all the talking," retorted Betty indignantly. "How could I have learned all the things I have said if I did the talking?"

"The conversation went like this, Peggy," giggled Sally: "'Is the farm a large one that thy aunt hath taken, Friend Fairfax?' 'Yes,' answers he. Then Betty with a smile: 'I believe [Pg 36] Southerners call a farm a plantation, do they not?' 'Yes,' he said. 'Is being with the military so much the reason thou and thy mother left Williamsburgh?' 'Yes,' he said again. 'It really must be tiresome,' goes on Betty, 'though it hath been said that the French are exceedingly well behaved troops. Does thee not think so, Friend Fairfax?' 'Yes,' he said once more. And that is the way the whole conversation went. I don't believe the poor fellow said anything else but that one word, yes."

"He did," declared Betty with heat. "I remember quite distinctly that once he said, 'It doth indeed;' and—and—oh! lots of other things. Ye are both just as mean as can be. And he did listen most attentively. I really enjoyed the talk, as I said."

"I'll warrant thee did," laughed Peggy while Sally was convulsed with mirth. "I think thee did well, Betty. Thou art to be congratulated."

"There, Sally Evans," cried Betty. "I knew that Peggy would think about it in the right way."

"Listen to her," sniffed Sally. "Didst ever hear the like? Betty," she ejaculated suddenly, [Pg 37] "thee should not have helped with the dishes in such a gown. Thee has got a spot on it. This

is no place for a belle. Suppose that thee goes back into the sitting-room now, and find out some more of Master Fairfax's plans."

"So thee can have a chance to talk me over with Peggy?" questioned Betty scornfully. "I don't see any spot."

"Here it is," answered Sally, lifting a fold of the pink paduasoy on which a small spot showed darkly. "It may be just water, which will not stain. I should not like anything to happen to that gown. Thee looks so charming in it."

"Thank thee, Sally," said Betty examining the spot critically, quite mollified by Sally's compliment. "I think 'twill be all right when 'tis dry. It might be as well, though, to go back to the sitting-room. I dare say they are wondering what hath become of us. Thee will come too, will thee not?"

"Yes, go; both of you," said Peggy, picking up the dish-pan, and starting for the kitchen. "I will come too in a few moments. No, Sally, thee cannot help in the kitchen. Sukey and I will finish the pots and pans. It won't take long. And thee needs to be there to keep Betty in order," she ended merrily. [Pg 38]

"Well, if thee won't be long," agreed Sally reluctantly.

Both girls passed into the sitting-room, while Peggy proceeded to the kitchen. As has been said, the kitchen was attached to the main dwelling by a covered entry way. On one side of this was a door leading out to the west terrace, which, the girl noticed, was partly open.

"No wonder 'tis hard to keep the kitchen warm with that door open," she cried. "That must be some of Tom's carelessness. I must speak to him."

She put down the dish-pan on the wash bench, and went to the door to close it. As it resisted her efforts to shut she stepped outside to see what the trouble was. A startled ejaculation left her lips as the form of a man issued from behind it.

"What does thee wish, friend?" demanded Peggy sternly. "Why does thee not come to the door like an honest man instead of sneaking behind it? I shall call my father." [Pg 39]

"Don't, Peggy," came in low tones from the man. "I was watching for you. Will you shelter an escaping prisoner, my cousin?"

"Clifford!" she cried in amazement. "Oh, Clifford!"

CHAPTER III

[Pg 40]

ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA

"Nature imprints upon whate'er we see,
That has a heart and life in it,
'Be free.'"

—*Cowper*.

"Yes, 'tis Clifford," he said in a low tone. "I have escaped from Lancaster, where I was a prisoner, and am trying to reach New York. I should not have troubled you, Peggy, but the storm is so severe that I can go no further. But, my cousin, it may be of risk to shelter me."

"Oh," she cried clasping her hands in dismay. "What shall I do? What shall I do? Why, Clifford, both father and Robert Dale are here. They are of the army, and may deem it their duty to give thee up."

"I see," he said with some bitterness. "I should not have troubled you, but I thought—— It did seem for the sake of our kinship that you would give me shelter at least for the night."

"Stop!" she cried, laying a detaining hand on his arm as he turned to go. "Thee is so hasty, Clifford. Of course I will help thee, but I must think how to do it. As I said, father and Major Dale are here; and Fairfax Johnson too. Of Virginia, thee remembers? Remain here for a moment, my cousin. I will send Sukey out of the kitchen, and then thee shall come in. 'Tis cold out here." [Pg 41]

"After all," he said, his lips meeting in the straight line of determination that she remembered so well, "I do wrong to ask aught of you. There may be—nay, there is, risk in

harboring me, Peggy. I must not get you into trouble. Is there not a barn where I could abide for the night?"

"Thee would freeze in the barn to-night," she cried. It had stopped snowing, but the wind had increased in violence, and it was growing colder. It would be bitter by night, the girl reflected, noticing the fact in a perfunctory manner. "I could not bear to think of thee there, my cousin. Thee is cold now. Thy lips are blue, and thou art shaking. Wait for a moment. Thee must."

She pushed him back behind the door, then catching up the dish-pan entered the kitchen hurriedly. Sukey, the black servant, was its only inmate. [Pg 42]

"Sukey," said Peggy trying to speak naturally, "has thee seen to the beds yet? They should be well warmed for so cold a night as this will be. And the fires? Is there wood in plenty? I will set the kitchen in order if thee will look well to the up-stairs."

"Hit am done looked aftah," said Sukey drawing closer to the fire. "Eberyt'ing's all right, Miss Peggy. Now yer kin jest go right erlong ter yer fren's, and let ole Sukey red up."

"Thee must take more wood up-stairs," spoke the girl desperately. "There must be an abundance, Sukey. Does thee hear?"

"Yes'm; I heahs, Miss Peggy," answered the black rising, and giving her young mistress a keen glance. "I heahs, an' I'se gwine. Dem wood boxes am full, ebery one of dem, but I'se gwine. Ef yer want ter talk secrets yer might hab tole ole Sukey widouten makin' a 'scuse ter git rid ob hur."

"Oh, Sukey, forgive me," cried Peggy laughing in spite of her anxiety to get rid of the black. "Thee is the dearest thing that ever was. I do want the kitchen a little while. Go up to my [Pg 43] room, and thee will find a string of yellow beads on the chest of drawers. Thee may have them, Sukey, if thee will stay up there for a little while."

"Yes'm," answered Sukey, preparing to take her departure. "I don't 'prove nohow de way you all takes on wid Miss Sally," she grumbled as she left the room.

Peggy sped to the entry as soon as the black had left it. "Come, Cousin Clifford," she called, and Clifford Owen stepped forth. "Sukey hath gone up-stairs, and thee can come in while I think what to do. Come!"

She led the way to the kitchen as she spoke, and her cousin followed her with visible reluctance. He brightened perceptibly at sight of the great fire of hickory logs that blazed in the fireplace.

"Sit here, my cousin," said Peggy placing a chair in the corner between the dresser and the wall where the light was shaded. "Keep thy beaver on thy head as the Friends do, then if any one should come in it will seem as though thou wert but a passer-by asking for something to warm thee."

"'Fore George, but that smells good," ejaculated Clifford as the girl placed a bowl of [Pg 44] smoking hot pepper-pot before him. "What is it, Peggy?"

"'Tis pepper-pot, Clifford. 'Tis made nowhere else in the states but here in Philadelphia. It hath dumplings in it, which pleases most boys. And now let me think while thee is getting warm."

Clifford regarded her anxiously for a moment, then the seductive aroma of the pepper-pot overcame whatever of uneasiness that he may have felt, and he fell to with a relish. Meantime Peggy's brows were puckered in thought. What should she do with him? she asked herself in perplexity. The temper of the people was such that it would not easily brook any indulgence to the enemy. The penalty for harboring, or aiding and abetting an escaping prisoner was fine, imprisonment, and sometimes even public whipping. Should her father, pure patriot though he was, be suspected of giving aid to one of the British prisoners it would go hard with him. Not even his previous good record would save him from the punishment. And so the girl found herself confronted with a serious problem. She [Pg 45] could not let her cousin go forth in such weather, and yet her father must not be implicated in his escape. The house was full. Where could the lad stay?

At this moment her eye fell upon a trap-door in the ceiling. There had been until of late a ladder leading up to it, but two of the rounds had been broken and it had been removed to the carpenter's shop. The door opened into an airy apartment extending the whole length of the kitchen, which was used for drying herbs which were cultivated in ample quantities in the garden. Indeed the Owen house was the only place in the city at the time where herbs could be had, and it was a pleasure to Peggy and her mother to be able to answer the

demand for them. Could Clifford but climb up there, she reflected, he would be safe for a time.

“Can thee climb, my cousin?” she cried eagerly. “Because if thee can thee can stay up in the kitchen chamber.”

“Is it warm?” asked the youth, casting a longing glance at the fire.

“Of a verity. It could not be otherwise, being above the kitchen. Thee must not linger, Clifford. Some one is apt to come in at any moment. See the door up there? Well, thee will have to get on the table and I will hand thee a chair. Standing on that thee must try to push the door open, and then draw thyself up into the room above. With the door closed thou wilt be safe from prying eyes, yet thou wilt be able to hear all that goes on below.” [Pg 46]

“That is fine, Peggy,” commented the youth, his eyes lighting up. “You are a cousin worth having, and have thought to some purpose.”

He vaulted lightly upon the table as he spoke, and taking the chair that Peggy handed him placed it firmly upon the table, mounting thereupon. With a creek that set the girl’s heart to beating the trap-door was swung open, and the youth drew himself slowly into the chamber above.

“I say,” he said, peering down at Peggy, laughingly, “this is jolly. It’s as warm as toast and there is a fur robe up here. If I don’t answer you at any time you will know, my cousin, that I have gone to sleep.”

“CLOSE THE DOOR.”

“Close the door, Clifford,” exclaimed Peggy. “I shall be uneasy until thou art hidden.” [Pg 47]

“Don’t be that, little cousin,” he said almost gaily. “I feel like another man already. I shall do royally, and I doubt if any one would think of looking up here for an escaped Englishman.”

He closed the door as he finished speaking, and heaving a sigh of relief Peggy lifted the chair from the table and set it against the wall. She had scarcely resumed her task of washing the pots and pans when the door opened and Sally entered. She glanced about expectantly.

“I thought I heard thee talking to some one,” she remarked. “Isn’t thee ever going to get through with those pots and pans, Peggy? Let me help thee. We want thee to come in with us.”

“Now you all jest go right erlong,” spoke Sukey, who had followed Sally into the room. “Yer ma, she come up and she say, ‘Tell Miss Peggy dat she am wanted in de sittin’-room right now.’ Jest go right erlong, chile. Sukey’ll finish up heah.”

"All right, Sukey." Peggy relinquished the task to the black, and started for the door, saying in a tone that Clifford might hear: "I will be out presently to see how thee gets along." [Pg 48]

"Ef I doan git erlong any fas'er dan you all dese dishes gwine ter be heah twel Chrismus," grumbled the darkey. "An' some-body's muss'd my floah."

Peggy gave a startled glance at the sand, where telltale traces of her cousin's presence were plainly in evidence. From the entry door to the kitchen were tracks of snow, and on the sand in the kitchen there were wet spots where the snow had melted. Clearly they must be obliterated.

"I'll fix the floor, Sukey," she said, beginning to brush up the wet sand. "Sally, bring some dry sand from the box, please, and we will have this fixed in a jiffy. Thee must not expect thy floor to keep just so, Sukey, when there is so much company."

Presently, the floor resanded and the entry way swept, the two girls started for the sitting-room. Peggy was thoughtful and Sally too, for the nonce, was silent.

"Clifford will be all right where he is for a short time," mused Peggy. "If he has to stay there for any length of time, though, 'twill be most uncomfortable. I wonder if it would not be best to consult with mother? Perchance she could think of some way out of the difficulty." [Pg 49]

She brightened at the thought, and just then Sally opened the door of the sitting-room. Mr. Owen was in his great easy chair with his wife, and Mrs. Johnson sitting near, interested listeners to some narrative. The young people had withdrawn to the far side of the apartment and formed a little group by themselves, of which Betty was the center. She was giving an animated account of a recent assembly, and the youths were so absorbed in the recital that they did not hear the two girls approach. A smile came to Peggy's lips.

"Why, Betty is in truth a belle, Sally," she whispered. "How pretty she hath grown! That gown doth indeed become her as thee said. It may be that we tease her too much, for she is of a certainty entertaining. I have never seen Fairfax so interested."

Betty caught sight of them before Sally could reply.

"Have ye come at last?" she cried. "I thought thee was never coming, Peggy. It is not treating us right to leave us alone so long. And what does thee think? Sally talks of going home. Has she told thee?" [Pg 50]

"Oh, Sally!" uttered Peggy reproachfully. "Thee can't mean it? Why, mother and I expect all of you to stay the night. Beside, 'tis too cold for thee to go out."

"The very thing I told her," exclaimed Betty. "And she said," and a note of indignation quavered into Betty's voice, "that if it were warm enough to need a fan it was warm enough to go out."

"But, Betty, why do you use a fan in such weather?" questioned Robert Dale laughing. "Here it is so cold that we can scarce keep warm, and Mistress Owen hath called Sukey twice to attend the fire. Yet there you sit and wave that fan. I have wished to ask you about it all day."

"Why, Robert, does thee not know that a fan is to a woman what a gun is to a soldier—a weapon of offense and of defense?" explained Betty airily. "When one is conversing should a pause occur in the conversation one may offset any embarrassment by fanning slowly. So!" She plied the fan to and fro as she explained. [Pg 51]

"And do you need it often, Betty?" he asked slyly.

"Now that is mean, Robert. I would not have thought it of thee," pouted Betty. "I shall tell no more secrets anent the use of the fan, sir. Thee would not insinuate anything so ungallant, would thee, Captain Johnson?"

"No," answered the youth blushing deeply at being so appealed to, and speaking with difficulty. "I would not, Mistress Betty. You—you mean—there would be no pause, would there?" He stopped short as a burst of merriment in which even Betty joined broke from the others. "What did I say?" he asked in alarm. "What is it?"

At this moment there came the sound of many feet in the hallway, and Sukey's voice was heard protesting loudly:

"Dar ain't nobody heah but de fambly, Mistah Officah. De fambly and der company. 'Tain't no mannah ob use disturbin' dem. Der ain't no Britisher 'roun' heah nohow."

"Why, what does this mean?" ejaculated Mr. Owen, rising and going to the door. "What is [Pg 52]

the matter, Sukey?” he asked as he threw it open.

CHAPTER IV

[Pg 53]

THE SEARCH

“Like bloodhounds now they search me out,—
Hark, to the whistle and the shout!
If farther through the wilds I go,
I only fall upon the foe;
I’ll couch me here till evening gray,
Then darkling try my dangerous way.”

—*Sir Walter Scott*.

Sukey was standing before the entrance valiantly trying to keep the half dozen men who stood in the hall from entering. She turned toward her master with relief.

“Dese men dey sayin’ dat dere’s a Bristisher ’roun’ heah,” she explained. “Dey would come in. I dun my bes’ ter keep dem from ’sturbin’ yer.”

“That is all right, Sukey,” he said kindly. “Perhaps these friends have good reason for coming.”

“That we have, Mr. Owen,” cried one stepping forward. “I am William Will, Sheriff of the city and county of Philadelphia. With me is Mr. Ledie, Commissioner of Prisoners. We are [Pg 54] on the track of some prisoners who have escaped from Lancaster. One hath been traced to this house. We have reason to believe that he is in hiding somewhere about the premises. I am sorry to disturb you, sir, but ’tis my duty to make a thorough search of the dwelling.”

“Thou art quite welcome to make the search, Friend Will,” returned Mr. Owen courteously. “I think thee will find thyself mistaken about any one being in hiding here unless he hath concealed himself in the barn. I have neither seen nor heard anything of any one.”

“Then with your permission we will begin right away,” said the sheriff. “Do two of you take the barns and outbuildings; two others the gardens and orchard, while Mr. Ledie and I will make a thorough investigation of the house. We will begin with this room, Mr. Ledie,” he continued stepping inside the sitting-room. “Your pardon, ladies. Knowing that every well affected inhabitant of the county will cheerfully assist in the apprehension of an escaped prisoner my presence, I trust, will be excused. These seem to be good American citizens, [Pg 55] Mr. Owen,” with a keen glance about that embraced every member of the company. “Your wife and daughter I know by sight, and these two young ladies also. This gentleman’s uniform speaks for itself, and this young man is without doubt an American.”

“Yes; he hath served with the militia in Virginia against the enemy, and hath recently obtained a captain’s commission in the regular troops of New Jersey,” explained David Owen. “He is Captain Johnson, who with his mother will stop with us until after the storm hath passed.”

“I see,” remarked the sheriff, passing into the dining-room. “Everything seems to be all right in these two rooms, Mr. Ledie. Now,” addressing the company collectively, “there is one thing more: Does each one of you affirm that you have not seen any one who might be an escaped prisoner?”

Peggy’s heart beat so wildly at this that she feared it could be heard. She had risen at the sheriff’s entrance, and stood with pale face waiting the discovery that she was afraid was imminent. She said nothing as the sheriff asked his question. The others had spoken quickly [Pg 56] disclaiming any knowledge of such person, and she hoped the fact that she had made no reply would escape notice. To her relief Sally spoke up:

“Will thee let us see him if thee finds him, Friend Will? Especially if he be good looking.”

“Oh, yes, Friend Will,” broke in Betty. “Do let us have a look at him if thee catches him.”

“Now, now,” protested the officer, “I’m not going to grant any indulgences to further an Englishman’s enjoyment. I know your sex, Miss Sally. If the fellow is good looking I’ll have all of you girls on my back to let him off. And the temper of the people won’t permit such

things at present. Well, there is nothing to be gained here. We will take the up-stairs now."

"I think I shall accompany you," spoke Mr. Owen. "I like not to think of any prowlers about. I wonder where he escaped from, and if there is but one?"

"Suppose we go too," said Robert Dale, addressing Fairfax. "We might be of assistance to the sheriff."

The three left the room, and the women and the girls drew close together while overhead, [Pg 57]
in every room, and without in the barn and other buildings the search was prosecuted. Nurse Johnson shivered as the sounds of the hunt came to them.

"A man hunt is always such a dreadful thing," she remarked. "And whether it be for a slave or an enemy, I find my sympathy going with the hunted. I hope they won't find this poor fellow. Yet I have no love for the English."

"Thee is like the rest of us," replied Mistress Owen. "A good hater of the enemy in the aggregate, but a commiserator of one who happens to be in a plight. Peggy, how restless thee is!"

"I am, mother," answered Peggy rising, and going to the window. "This hath upset me."

"It is in truth a most unpleasant ending to an otherwise pleasant day," commented her mother.

Peggy made no further remark, but wandered restlessly about, finally going into the dining-
room. She was filled with apprehension lest at any moment Clifford's hiding-place should be [Pg 58]
discovered. He must not stay, she reflected. It was no longer safe to conceal him anywhere on the premises. But where could he go? At this point in her musings she felt an arm slip about her waist, and turned to find Sally Evans beside her.

"And who is it, Peggy?" whispered Sally. "I know that 'tis some one thee knows, else thee would not have helped him."

"Oh, Sally! how did thee know that 'twas I who helped any one?" asked Peggy alarmed. "Did I show it so plainly? Does thee think the sheriff could tell that I knew aught?"

"Nay," Sally whispered back. "I knew because I know thee so well. Thee remembers I thought I heard thee talking with some one in the kitchen. Who is it?"

"Clifford," whispered Peggy.

"Harriet's brother?" asked Sally, after a little gasp of surprise.

"Yes; he hath escaped from Lancaster, and is trying to get to New York. I could not do otherwise than help him, Sally. He would not have come here had not the storm rendered traveling difficult. But father must not know. 'Twould go hard with him were it known that [Pg 59]
he assisted Clifford, if he should assist him. He might not do it. Thee knows how he feels about such things. He might deem it right to give Clifford up even though he be our cousin. I want father to do right, Sally, but I don't want Clifford given up, either."

"Why, of course thee doesn't," answered Sally briskly. "And of course, Peggy, 'tis quite right for thy father to feel as he does. I dare say Robert and Fairfax feel the same toward any who is an enemy to the country. 'Tis right for them, but we females are made of softer stuff. Don't worry, but let thy cousin go home with me. Mother and I will be glad to conceal him until the weather permits him to continue his journey."

"Oh, Sally! does thee mean that?" cried Peggy breathlessly.

"I do, Peggy. Thee would be surprised to know how many of the British we have helped during the war. As a whole I dislike them intensely," and Sally drew her lips together vindictively. "When there is a battle I rejoice when we defeat them; but when any of them are in trouble, or danger, I never can think of them only as mothers' sons, and so, and so [Pg 60]
——"

Peggy leaned forward and kissed her.

"I think thee is the dearest girl in the world, Sally Evans," she said. "Does thee remember that there is a penalty for harboring escaping prisoners?"

"Well, yes; but friendship would not be worth much if it were not willing to incur some risk," answered her friend sagely. "Where is he?"

"In the chamber above the kitchen, Sally. Let's go out there. I am consumed with anxiety lest he be discovered."

The sheriff, followed by his associate Mr. Ledie, David Owen, Robert and Fairfax, having made the rounds of the house came into the entry way just as Sally and Peggy entered it. The men who had been detailed to make the search of the outbuildings and grounds joined them a few moments later.

"He stood just here," observed the sheriff indicating the place behind the door. "You can see his tracks. What puzzles me is the fact that there are no further traces. He did not go away, as there are no tracks leading away from this place. Neither are there any inside, and [Pg 61] the sand on the kitchen floor hath not been disturbed save by the darkey."

"Hast thou searched the wash-house and the servants' quarters?" queried Mr. Owen anxiously. "They are all in this building."

"We have looked through it thoroughly," declared the sheriff emphatically. "And the barn, and all other buildings. 'Tis most mysterious. He hath disappeared as unaccountably as though whisked out of sight on a witch's broom. Well, boys, scatter about the grounds again, and see if you can't find some trace. Some one in the house hath aided in the escape," he said, turning again to Mr. Owen as the men obeyed his order.

"I do not see who could have done so," returned David Owen with a troubled look. "There is not one of the household who is not a consistent Whig, and there hath been no opportunity for anything of the sort. When we have not been together in the sitting-room we have been at the table. The girls washed the dishes in the dining-room, but joined us immediately afterward. From the laughter that accompanied the act I would be willing to wager that no [Pg 62] British prisoner had any share in it."

Peggy did not see the quick glance that passed between Robert Dale and Fairfax Johnson. She had been absent from the room fully a half hour longer than the other girls, but evidently her father had not noticed the fact. Fairfax Johnson spoke abruptly:

"Suppose we take a look about the grounds, Major Dale."

"Your pardon, gentlemen," interposed Sheriff Will. "I cannot allow you to go unless one of my men accompanies you. You see all of you are more or less under suspicion until the matter is cleared up, and I prefer that you remain in sight."

"Just as you say, sir," replied the youth quickly. "I thought only to be of service."

"I see not where the fellow could have gone," mused David Owen, whose distress was evident. "Would that he might be found, if only to release us from suspicion."

"Well, have you found anything?" demanded the sheriff as his men reëntered the dwelling. "Come into the kitchen, boys. It grows cold."

"And dark, Mr. Will," announced one of the men. "Too dark to see much. We shall have to [Pg 63] give up for the night."

"I fear so," answered the sheriff grumblingly. His manner showed that he was far from satisfied with the result of the search. The house had been gone through thoroughly, and every place that could afford a possible hiding-place ransacked. David Owen and the two youths were of the army. The family was noted for its patriotism, and had offered no objection to the search, yet he showed that he was reluctant to give up. He stood meditatively before the fire, his hands clasped behind him, his glance roving about the room. Suddenly he started forward, and an excited "Ah!" escaped him.

Peggy turned pale, for his eye was resting upon the trap-door. Her father's glance followed the sheriff's.

"If any went through that door, Friend Will," he said casually, "'twas one who is much younger than either of us. In truth, none but a slender youth could draw himself through that door."

"True," answered the officer gazing at the door thoughtfully. "True, Mr. Owen, yet am I [Pg 64] minded to explore it. I like not to leave any place unsearched. It may be that our man is young, and that that is the very place where he lies concealed. Is there a ladder?"

"There was one, but 'tis at the carpenter's shop to be mended," answered Mr. Owen. He looked vaguely about the kitchen. "I see not how thee is to get up," he said.

"I think I could get up there." Fairfax Johnson sprang lightly upon the table as he spoke. "Will some one hand me a chair?"

"That's the idea," cried the sheriff approvingly. "Still, young man, before you undertake this you must understand that there is risk attending it. You will be completely at the mercy of

any one who happens to be up there. You understand that, don't you?"

"Well, some one must go," replied Fairfax. "One of your men would take the risk in case I don't. Won't he?"

"Yes; but—— Well, go on." A chair was passed up to him, and the youth mounting it pushed the trap-door back slowly.

Peggy's hand involuntarily went to her heart, and she trembled so that she could scarcely [Pg 65] stand. The watchers grew very still as Fairfax Johnson stood for a moment before swinging himself up through the opening. Sally gave a little gasp as he disappeared into the darkness.

"What if—if he should shoot?" she murmured unconsciously speaking aloud.

"'Tis what I'm afraid of," answered Sheriff Will. "What is it?" he cried, springing upon the table and mounting the chair in a vain effort to see what was taking place in the attic. "Have you found him?" For an unmistakable chuckle came from overhead. It sounded to Peggy as though it were her cousin's voice. She told herself that she was mistaken, however, when Fairfax Johnson appeared at the opening.

"It's a rug," he called, a broad smile illuminating his countenance. "When I stumbled over it I thought it was a bear. I suppose Miss Peggy hath put it up here anent her housekeeping time. Shall I throw it down?"

"No," answered Sheriff Will, in disgusted tones. "If that's all there is up there you might as [Pg 66] well come down. We are not hunting articles to set Miss Peggy up."

"If any of the rest of you wish to come up I think I could help draw him up." The youth leaned over the side of the opening suggestively.

"No, no," interposed Mr. Ledie, commissioner of prisoners. "The fellow is evidently not up there, and there is no use wasting time. He must be somewhere else about the premises, or else we have overlooked his tracks."

"I don't see how we could," declared the sheriff. "Anyhow, 'tis getting too dark to do any more to-night. You seem to have found some cobwebs, if you did not find a prisoner, my friend," he said as Fairfax Johnson swung himself down to the table. "I suppose that we must wish you good-night, Mr. Owen. We may drop in to-morrow."

"Nay, gentlemen, go not so," spoke Mr. Owen. "Come, refresh yourselves, I pray you. You will take supper with us after so hard a search. It will not be long before 'tis ready, and 'tis o'er cold to go forth without something warming. Lass, canst thou not help Sukey to get it quickly?"

"Yes, father," answered Peggy. She was quite herself by this time, but filled with [Pg 67] amazement at Fairfax. What a queer compound he was, she thought, glancing over to where the youth stood. He was blushing as Sally helped him to remove the cobwebs from his clothing, and seemed unable to answer the chaff with which she and Robert were plying him. Yet but a short time since he had made that little joke concerning the fur rug and her housekeeping. Had he really seen Clifford?

"Let all of us young people help," cried Betty gayly coming into the kitchen as Mr. Owen with the sheriff and his men left it.

"Thy help must be confined to the dining-room, Betty," answered Peggy. "Thee must not be out here in that gown."

"Then I will set the table," said Betty. "My, my! what a party we're having."

"And we will help too, Peggy," spoke Robert Dale. "Have you nothing that two great fellows like the captain and myself can do?"

"Plenty, plenty," laughed Peggy. "Thee may slice the roast beef, Robert, while Friend Fairfax may take the ham. Sally and I will attend to the bread and cake. Sukey, will thee [Pg 68] need more wood?"

"No'm," grumbled Sukey. "I shouldn't t'ink yer pa'd want ter feed dem folkes aftah de way dey done pried 'roun' inter ebberyt'ing."

"Well, it is annoying, of course, Sukey, but after all they were but doing their duty," answered Peggy slowly.

"Yes'm," said the black giving her young mistress a sharp look, then turning she busied herself about the fire.

Each one was attending strictly to the task before him, and resolving to embrace the opportunity to talk a few moments with Fairfax Johnson, Peggy took the loaf of bread she was cutting over to the table where the youth was slicing ham.

CHAPTER V

[Pg 69]

FRIENDS IN NEED

"Thanks for the sympathies that ye have shown!
Thanks for each kindly word, each silent token,
That teaches me, when seeming most alone,
Friends are around us, though no word be spoken."

—*Longfellow*.

"He must not stay there, Mistress Peggy," said Fairfax in a low tone as the maiden joined him. "The sheriff is not satisfied, and I doubt not will make the search again. He will not wish me to go above again, but will choose one of his own men. It is not safe for your cousin."

"Thee saw him, then?" breathed Peggy. "Oh, Friend Fairfax, how good thee is not to betray him."

"It is your cousin," he said simply. "It was my duty, but friendship hath a duty too. But of that more anon. The thing to do now is to get him down from there while they are at supper."

"Sally says he may go home with her," Peggy told him eagerly. "Will thee help us to manage it, Friend Fairfax?" [Pg 70]

"I'll do what I can," he promised earnestly. "Is she not talking of going after supper?"

"Yes."

"Let him get down, then, while they are at table, and come boldly to the front door for her. 'Twould be quite natural for some one to call for her, would it not?"

"Why, 'tis the very thing," cried Peggy. "Of course her mother would send for her on such a night. Only I like not to send her away before she hath finished her supper. 'Tis monstrously inhospitable."

"'Twill be easier to get him away then than at any other time," he declared. "She will mind it not if she really wishes to aid you."

"She will do anything for me," said Peggy tremulously. Her heart was very full of love toward these friends for the aid they were rendering. "Friend Fairfax, thee has certainly hit upon the very thing."

"And his boots," continued the youth. "He hath on the English top-boots of narrow make. 'Twas by them that he was so easily traced. Of late we of the states have manufactured our own boots, and all citizens wear them save the macaronis. They are not so well finished," he glanced at his own boots as he spoke with something of regret, "but 'tis that very thing that makes the difference. I have another pair in my portmanteau, Mistress Peggy. I will get them, and you must contrive to have your cousin wear them. He can take his own with him. In this manner the snow will give no trace of his going, for the boots are such as all citizens wear." [Pg 71]

"Thank thee," said Peggy gratefully. "Thee has taken a great load from my mind, Friend Fairfax. I make no doubt but that all will fall out as thee has planned. What is it, Betty?"

"I was just wondering what there was about slicing cold ham that called for such absorbing interest," cried Betty who vacillated between the kitchen and the dining-room. "Robert spoke to thee once, and I asked Captain Johnson a question. Neither of you deigned to answer us."

"Thee may take my place and find the secret," said Peggy mischievously, so relieved over

the plan as outlined by Fairfax that she could enjoy the diffidence that once more overwhelmed him at Betty's approach. "I will help Sally with that cake." [Pg 72]

"'Tis just the thing," declared Sally as Peggy unfolded the arrangement. "And how simple! I like thy friend, Peggy, and yet I cannot help but laugh at his blushes and shyness."

"I feel the same, Sally," confessed Peggy with remorse. "He is a dear lad, for all his diffidence, and yet there are times when I am beset with a desire to tease him. Why is it, I wonder, that we females delight to torment such even though they are in very truth heroes?"

"I know not," answered Sally. "I only know that 'tis true, and 'tis pity we are so constituted. And see, Peggy! The poor fellow is so beset by Betty that he can scarce cut the ham. Shall we go to his rescue?"

"Indeed 'tis time," laughed Peggy. "Everything is ready for the supper too. Robert, thee has cut that beef well. I knew not that the domestic arts were so well taught in camp."

"We learn many things, Peggy," returned he. "Camp hath taught me to carve all foods. And not only the art of carving hath been taught me, but the far greater one of obtaining the food to carve. Our friend yonder hath evidently not had so much experience, or else Betty's presence hath converted his fingers into thumbs." [Pg 73]

"'Tis Betty, I fear," answered Peggy with a laugh. "Do help him, Robert, while the rest of us carry in the things."

Fairfax resigned the ham to Robert Dale with relief, but did not stay to profit by his expertness. Instead he took a large platter which Peggy was carrying from her, and passed through the entry into the dining-room.

"I will run up for the boots," he told the girl on coming back to the hallway. "I shall put them in the entry way."

Peggy nodded, and went in to see that all was in readiness for the meal. The sheriff and his men viewed the bountifully spread table with looks of complacence, and presently every one was gathered around the table. As was natural in the daughter of the house Peggy assisted in the waiting, and was back and forth from the kitchen with tea, hot chocolate, rusks, or whatever might be needed. At length, the opportunity she wished for came, and she found herself alone in the kitchen with Sukey safe for the time being in the dining-room. She lost not a moment. [Pg 74]

"Clifford," she called softly.

"Yes, my cousin." The trap-door was swung back, and Clifford Owen's face appeared at the opening. "I say," he said, "that was a close shave, wasn't it? If our friend Fairfax had not been the prince of good fellows where would I be now?"

"Where thee will be unless thee acts quickly," replied his cousin. "He fears that the sheriff will make another search. Thee must swing thyself down, Clifford." She placed a chair upon the table as she finished speaking, and held it to steady it. In an instant he stood beside her.

"Thou art to go home with my friend, Sally Evans," explained the girl. "'Tis dangerous to stay here, my cousin."

"Yes, I know," he answered. "I heard them talking. I tell you I held my breath when Fairfax stumbled over me."

"Yes, yes," she said hurriedly. "Thee must not talk now, Clifford, but act. Fairfax brought down a pair of his boots for thee. Thou art to put them on, and carry thine own. Thine are of English make, and leave telltale marks. Then thee must betake thyself to the front door, and sound the knocker boldly. Thou art to say that thou hast come for Mistress Sally Evans. Sally will join thee, and take thee to her mother's where thee can remain safely until 'tis fitting weather for thee to pursue thy journey to New York. Does thee understand?" [Pg 75]

"Peggy," he said sorrowfully, "I am putting too much risk upon you and this friend of yours. I might as well let the sheriff take me and be done with it. I will do it rather than cause you so much worry."

"Oh, will thee hurry," pleaded the girl bringing the boots from the entry way. "There is so little time, my cousin. To-morrow I will come to thee at Sally's, and then we can have a long talk. Now thee must act. Sukey may come in at any time. Or Tom. Oh!" in a despairing tone as the latch of the door leading into the main building clicked its warning. "'Tis too late. Why, 'tis Sally!"

"Thee forgot the quince conserve, Peggy," said Sally trying vainly to act as though Peggy was alone. "Thy mother sent me for it. She told Sukey to come, but I jumped up and said that I would get it." [Pg 76]

"Sally, this is Clifford," spoke Peggy. "And oh, he won't hurry. He talks of trouble and worry when he should be doing. Clifford, this is my dearest friend, Sally Evans."

"Truly thee would better be in haste," said Sally, making her best bow. "Thee must see that every moment adds to thy cousin's distress, and also to thy danger. I marvel that the sheriff's men have left us so long alone. Mother and I will in truth welcome thee."

"But I have no claim upon you," he expostulated. "For you to take such a risk for an Englishman——"

"As an Englishman thee hasn't a particle of claim, of course," interrupted Sally. "As an Englishman thee deserves anything that might happen, but as a human being in distress thee has every claim upon us. Now hadn't thee better be moving? Where is the conserve, Peggy?"

"How do I know that I can trust you?" he said abruptly. [Pg 77]

"Clifford!" exclaimed Peggy indignantly, but Sally laughed, and swept him a deep courtesy.

"Peggy must have told thee what an ogress I am," she said. "Know then, Friend Clifford, that I have a deep and dark dungeon where I cast all Englishmen of thy profession. If thee is afraid thee would better take thy chances with the night and storm."

"Afraid?" he echoed, a deep flush mantling his brow. "I, Clifford Owen, afraid?"

"Then thee had better put on those boots, and be about thy departure," said Sally calmly. "Peggy, if we don't take in those conserves the supper will be over. Hurry, friend. Keep thy cloak well about thee to hide that uniform, and on no account venture into the hall. Thee will not have to wait for me. Come, Peggy."

But before Peggy followed her she ran to Clifford and clasped his hand.

"'Tis the only way, my cousin," she whispered. "And oh, do be quick."

"I will, Peggy," he replied. "Fear nothing. I will carry out my part." [Pg 78]

With palpitating heart Peggy went with Sally into the dining-room, and resumed her task of waiting on the table. Sally reseated herself and joined merrily in the conversation. It seemed a long time ere the great knocker on the front door sounded. In reality it was but a few moments after the girls left the kitchen. Sukey entered the hall to answer it before Peggy could reach the door. The darkey reëntered the room almost immediately.

"A pusson has come fer Miss Sally," she announced. "He say he am come ter take her home."

"He?" Sheriff Will looked up with a laugh. "Come, come! that sounds interesting. Let's have him in, Miss Sally, and see what he looks like."

"Yes, my dear," spoke Mrs. Owen. "Thee has not finished thy supper. Sit down, and thy escort shall come in, and have supper too."

Peggy's heart almost stopped beating at this, and the color forsook Sally's cheeks. Neither of them had foreseen anything of this kind, and they were rendered speechless by the untoward incident. Sally was saved the necessity of a reply by Robert Dale. [Pg 79]

"I think I object, Mistress Owen," he said speaking with deliberation. "Any one who is going to take Sally away from us doesn't deserve any supper. I was promising myself the pleasure of seeing her home."

"Oh, ho!" roared the sheriff. "Sits the wind in that quarter!"

"Never mind, Mrs. Owen," spoke Sally, her quick wit taking advantage of the diversion. "I will bring him to see thee when Robert isn't about. And I really must go. Mother expected me this afternoon, but so much hath happened that I overstayed my time. I dare say she is waiting supper for me. Good-night, and good-bye to all," she added. She made a fetching little mouth at Robert as she went through the door but her eyes held a look of gratitude.

Peggy accompanied her into the hall. Clifford was waiting outside on the steps, and none of the three spoke until, wrapped and bundled for the trip, Sally joined him.

"I'll never forget this, Sally," murmured Peggy, giving her friend a little squeeze. "And I'll be down to-morrow." [Pg 80]

“Be sure to,” answered Sally. “Come, friend,” turning to Clifford. “We must not linger.”

Full of relief and gladness Peggy reëntered the dining-room.

CHAPTER VI

[Pg 81]

APPEARANCES AGAINST HER

> “Who trusts himself to woman, or to waves,
> Should never hazard what he fears to lose.”
>
> —*Oldmixon*.

During the evening Peggy congratulated herself more than once that Clifford was well away from the house; for the sheriff, in company with her father, again went over the dwelling. Every nook that might afford a hiding-place was examined thoroughly, and, as Fairfax had foreseen, another man was sent up to search the kitchen chamber. At length, all his joviality gone, Sheriff Will sat down by the sitting-room fire in puzzled perplexity.

“I can’t understand it,” he said more to himself than to Mr. Owen. “We have found no track going away. His boots make an impression that could not be mistaken. Unless he hath taken wings unto himself he should be somewhere in the house.”

[Pg 82]

“Nay, friend; it cannot be,” replied Mr. Owen, shaking his head positively. “We have searched every place that ’twould be possible for a man to be concealed. We have even gone into places where no one, not a member of the family, would think of hiding.”

“That’s just it,” exclaimed the officer. “Some member of the family helped him. Were it not so we could not have missed the fellow.”

“In that, friend, thou art mistaken. I believe that I could give an account of the actions and whereabouts of each member, yea, I will include our guests also, since my arrival home.”

“What time was that, sir?”

“About one of the clock, I should judge.”

“Well, the matter is beyond me,” responded the sheriff rising. “There is naught to do but to go home and think it over.”

And to Peggy’s great relief he left, taking his men with him. The occurrence seemed to have thrown a damper over the spirits of the party, even Betty being unusually silent, so the household soon separated for the night.

[Pg 83]

It was not until the afternoon of the next day that Peggy found an opportunity of going to Sally’s. By that time, accompanied by Robert Dale, Betty had left for home; Mr. Owen had taken Fairfax with him into the city, the two ladies were deep in conversation on the mysteries of preserve making, and Peggy was at liberty. With a word of explanation to her mother the girl slipped on her wraps, and started for Sally’s house.

Though still cold the day was clear and bright. The footways had not been cleared of snow, but paths had been beaten by the impact of many feet, and Peggy found walking not at all difficult. As she turned into Fourth Street she was astonished to encounter Sheriff Will. He returned her courteous greeting with an abrupt bow, and passed on.

“I wonder if he is going to the house again,” she mused, stopping to look after him. “He must be,” she concluded as she saw that he turned into Chestnut Street. “He is not satisfied about not finding Clifford. Oh, dear! what would have happened if Sally had not taken my cousin home with her? Well, I must hasten.”

[Pg 84]

A brisk walk soon brought her to Sally’s house on Little Dock Street. The dwelling was of stone. It was two stories in height, with a high-pitched roof, and with a garret room lighted in front by three dormer windows, and in the rear by a dormer on each side. Sally herself came to the door in answer to the knocker.

“I have been watching for thee all day, Peggy,” she cried, drawing her into the room. The front door did not open into an entry, but directly into a large room occupied as a sitting-room. “I thought thee would never come. Thy cousin hath worried lest some ill had befallen

thee. Come in, and tell me all that happened after we left. Was it not fine in Robert to speak as he did? Does thee think that he knew what we were about? And oh, Peggy! I do like thy cousin so much. Thee remembers how we used to laugh at Harriet because she was always extolling her brother at the expense of any youth she met? Well, I blame her no longer. Mother, too, is charmed with him. Well, why doesn't thee talk, and tell me all that hath occurred?"

Peggy laughed outright.

"I was just waiting for a chance, Sally," she replied. "Let me see. About Robert first: How could he have known anything anent Clifford, yet what he said was so opportune? It hath puzzled me. I know not what we should have done had he not so spoken. I could think of naught to say, and I saw that thee was affected in the same manner. Where is my cousin? Let us go to him at once, for I must not stay long. I will tell ye both what hath occurred." [Pg 85]

"Come," quoth Sally, leading the way to the staircase, which was at the back of the house, and approached from a side entrance. "We have put him in the front chamber, which contains the 'Auger Hole.' Thee remembers it, Peggy? For further safety we have drawn the bedstead in front of the door. Unless 'twas known no one would think of looking in that closet for a hiding-place. There is also an old loom in a corner up attic which might serve right well for concealment, but mother thought the chamber with the 'Auger Hole' best; although we showed Clifford both places."

"Thee has done thy best, Sally," remarked Peggy approvingly. The "Auger Hole," as it was playfully called, had been built, for what reason was not known, as a place of concealment. It was a small room, entirely dark, which could be approached only through a linen closet. In order to get at it, the linen had to be taken from the shelves, the shelves drawn out, and a small door opened at the back of the closet, quite low down, so that the room could be entered only by stooping. Its existence was known to but few people. So Peggy smiled with satisfaction, as she added: "I dare say that he will not need to use either. Thee would never be suspected of having a British prisoner in hiding." [Pg 86]

"True," answered Sally, "but 'tis as well to be prepared for an emergency. Here we are, Peggy."

"And how does thee do to-day, my cousin?" cried Peggy as her friend opened the door.

Clifford Owen rose from the easy chair drawn up before the fire, and turned toward her beamingly. Peggy reflected that she had never seen him appear to better advantage. His fine eyes were glowing, his form was erect, and his manner held a graciousness that was charming.

"Well, my little cousin! well indeed," he responded. "Methought that fur rug yesterday was sumptuous after my experience with the wind and snow, but your friends have lodged me like a king. Yon tester bed feels as though 'twere meant for royalty. I doubt if King George rests upon one so easy." [Pg 87]

"It wouldn't rest easy if I had the making of it," spoke Sally pertly.

"The sheriff made another search after thee left, my cousin," interposed Peggy hastily. "And, just as Fairfax thought, he sent another man to explore the kitchen chamber. What if thee had been there?"

"'Twould have been all up with me," remarked Clifford easily. "How seemed he, Peggy? Suspicious?"

"He was greatly dissatisfied," returned Peggy, a troubled look clouding her eyes. "He said that some member of the family must have helped in the escape, though father insisted that it could not be. And oh! I met him as I was coming here."

"Who? The sheriff?" questioned Clifford startled.

"Yes; he was going to our house, I think. At least I saw him turn into Chestnut Street." [Pg 88]

"Did he turn to watch you, Peggy?" inquired her cousin with some anxiety.

"Why no; why should he?" asked she simply.

"Because——" he began, when a loud peal of the knocker brought the remark to an abrupt stop.

Sally arose with precipitancy.

"Mother is busy in the kitchen," she said. "'Twill be best for me to see who it is. I don't believe that 'tis any one who will wish to come up here, but if it should be thy cousin must

run for the closet, Peggy. I will leave the door ajar, and should I be saying anything when I come to the stairway thee will know that 'tis some one who insists upon coming up."

The two cousins sat in silence as Sally went down-stairs, fearful of what the visit might portend. Peggy was openly anxious, and Clifford, too, seemed uneasy. The murmur of voices could be heard, and while the words could not be distinguished it seemed to Peggy that the tones were those of command. A slight commotion followed as though several [Pg 89] persons had entered the dwelling, and presently the stairway door opened and closed quickly.

"Peggy!" came in a shrill whisper from the foot of the stairs. Peggy was out of the chamber and at the head of the stairs in an instant. Sally stood below, and though the stairway was so dimly lighted that Peggy could scarcely distinguish the outlines of her form, she knew that her friend was greatly excited. She was telling her something in so low a tone that Peggy could hardly hear what it was, but she gathered enough to send her flying back to her cousin.

"'Tis the sheriff," she cried. "Get into the closet, quick."

Clifford Owen stayed not for a second bidding. He darted into the closet back of the great tester bed, and the door of the concealed room clicked softly. In anticipation of such an emergency the shelves had been removed, and Peggy now replaced them. Hurriedly she tossed some piles of linen on them, and then resumed her seat before the fire. She had barely done so when the door opened, and Sally, followed by Sheriff Will and two of his [Pg 90] men, appeared on the threshold. To Peggy's amazement the girl was laughing.

"What does thee think, Peggy?" she cried gaily. "The sheriff insists that he must look here for that escaped prisoner. He hath almost scared mother out of her wits, and now he is trying to fright us. I have told him to search all he wishes."

"I hope that you are as innocent as you appear, Miss Sally," spoke Sheriff Will gruffly. "I've a suspicion that you two fooled me nicely last night, but 'twon't happen again. I said down-stairs that I was aware that the closet in this room concealed a hiding-place."

"La, la!" laughed Sally saucily. "So thee did. And how will thee find it, friend?"

"Sam, give a hand with this bed, will you?" ordered the sheriff.

To Peggy's consternation the men moved the heavy bedstead out into the room, and Sheriff Will opened the door of the closet. Deliberately he threw the linen on the floor, and began to draw out the shelves. A mist swam before her eyes. She felt her senses going, and then [Pg 91] sat up suddenly as Sally ran to the door, now fully exposed to view.

"Doesn't thee want me to open it for thee, Friend Will?" she asked merrily. "Behold what thee will behold!" With this she flung wide the door.

"Sally!" gasped Peggy in agonized tones. "Oh, Sally, how could thee?" For the open door revealed Clifford Owen sitting on the floor of the concealed room.

All the color faded from Sally's face at sight of him. She stood a picture of consternation, looking from one cousin to the other seemingly unable to speak.

"Thank you, Miss Sally," spoke Sheriff Will sarcastically. "'Twas well played, but I think you overreached yourself for the nonce. Something went awry. Come out, young fellow! 'Tis a pretty chase you've given me. Come out, or I'll shoot."

"I yield, sir," answered Clifford Owen crawling out. "I yield—to treachery. I congratulate you, Mistress Sally. The dungeon of which you spoke was not so much of a myth as I had supposed."

But at that Sally regained her tongue.

"Peggy," she cried flinging herself down beside her friend, "didn't thee hear me? I said the [Pg 92] loom. I said the loom, Peggy. Oh, I never meant—I didn't think he was there. Tell him, Peggy! Make him believe me. Thee knows that I wouldn't do such a thing. Tell him, Peggy."

"'Thus do all traitors,'" quoted Clifford with an upward curl of his lip. "'If their purgation did consist in words, they are as innocent as grace itself.' I was a fool to trust a woman. Officer, take me where you must. Any place is preferable to breathing the same air with treachery."

"Clifford, Clifford!" cried Peggy going to him. "I am so sorry that it hath come out so. Oh, Clifford, what can I do for thee now? And Sally! I know that it happened as she hath said. She would not——"

“You can do naught, my cousin,” answered he, his eyes softening as they rested upon her. “You, at least, are guiltless of overt act toward me.”

“And Sally also,” she began eagerly, but the boy’s lips set in a straight line.

“We will not discuss it,” he answered loftily. “I hope that no trouble will come to you, Peggy.” [Pg 93]

“Trouble,” echoed Sheriff Will “They shall both be indicted for this. ’Twas a neat trick, but ye won’t find the Supreme Executive Council so easily deluded. Was your father concerned in this, Miss Peggy?”

“No,” replied she quickly. “He knows no more of it than thee does, Friend Will. I alone am to blame for all that hath occurred. Sally only helped for friendship sake.”

“You shall hear of it,” spoke the sheriff grimly. “Come on, young man. We have wasted too much time on you already.”

“Don’t hurry him away, Friend Will,” pleaded Sally sobbing. “Let me tell him how it was. Do let me talk to him a moment.”

“Lead on,” commanded Clifford, turning his back upon her decidedly. “Why dally longer?”

Without another glance at the weeping Sally he was led away between two of the men.

CHAPTER VII [Pg 94]

DAVID OWEN IS INFORMED OF THE FACTS

“Why are our bodies soft, and weak, and smooth,
Unapt to toil, and trouble in the world,
But that our soft conditions, and our hearts,
Should well agree with our external parts?”

—“*Taming of the Shrew.*”

“I didn’t mean it, Peggy,” sobbed Sally over and over. “Thee knows that I didn’t mean it to turn out so. Thee knows that I wouldn’t do such a thing, doesn’t thee? I said the loom. Truly I said the loom. I ran to the stairway just as quickly as I could after the sheriff said he knew of the closet, and I called to thee to tell him to go to the loom. And thee didn’t hear me? Oh, Peggy! Peggy I thee knows that I wouldn’t betray thy cousin knowingly. Thee knows it, Peggy?”

“There, Sally,” soothed Peggy. “I know that thee would do naught that was not honorable. I see it all. All that was intended. Thee thought that Clifford would go up attic behind the loom, and that by assuming a bold front thee could deceive the sheriff into believing that he was not on the place. Sheriff Will would naturally go to the closet, as he knew of it. I am to blame too, Sally. It was just a miserable misapprehension on both our parts.” [Pg 95]

“But Clifford will always believe that I betrayed him,” said Sally chokingly, lifting her tear-stained face. “And oh, I did like him so much! What will they do with him, Peggy?”

“I don’t know,” answered Peggy thoughtfully. “Take him back to Lancaster, probably. Father said this morning that the sheriff told him a number of the prisoners had escaped. Clifford, it seems, had stopped at the sheriff’s own house to inquire the way to the State House. I told him, I remember, that we lived just across from it. His cloak had fallen apart and disclosed his uniform, and some one suspected that ’twas one of the British prisoners. The sheriff was not at home at the time, but when he came he was told of the occurrence, and at once went in pursuit of him. But now,” Peggy concluded soberly, “we must take heed to ourselves. I hope that he believed me when I told him that father had naught to do with the matter. If only the punishment would fall on me, and not on thee, or father, I would not mind what happened.” [Pg 96]

“Thee must go to him at once and unravel the whole affair,” counseled Mrs. Evans who had joined them as soon as the sheriff left. “’Tis best that he should know of it at once. Sally, thee must go with Peggy, and tell of thy share in it.”

“Yes, mother,” assented Sally meekly. “Peggy, will thee ever love me again?”

“I haven’t stopped yet, Sally,” replied Peggy kissing her. “Thee must not feel so bad. After all the sheriff might have found him up attic. Thee knows how carefully he searches.”

“I would not have been to blame for that, Peggy. Now Clifford will always believe that I did it on purpose.”

“Perchance there may come a time when thee can explain all to him,” comforted her friend. “Let us go to father now, Sally. He must know all that hath occurred.”

THE TWO GIRLS SET FORTH.

Without further ado the two girls set forth for Peggy’s home. The distant hills that ridged the west bank of the Schuylkill stretched a luminous belt in the glistening sunshine. The city was clothed in a garb of pure white, a dazzling garment that was symbolical of the peace with which The Founder desired his beloved city to be filled. But there was little peace in the hearts of the two maidens who wended their way sadly and silently toward the Owen home in Chestnut Street. [Pg 97]

David Owen, his wife, Nurse Johnson, Robert and Fairfax were assembled in the living-room of the dwelling. They rose with exclamations of dismay at sight of Peggy’s pale face, and Sally’s red eyes.

“What hath happened, lass?” cried her father. “Thou art in trouble. Is it of a serious nature?”

“Yes, father,” answered the girl tremulously. “It may be grave trouble for thee, though it should be for me alone, as I am solely to blame.” She paused for a moment to steady her voice, then continued: “Father, the escaped prisoner whom the sheriff sought was Clifford. He came here yesterday just after dinner asking for shelter. I could not turn him away in such a storm. Indeed, he would not have sought us out at all had it not been for the weather. And—and I hid him in the kitchen chamber.” [Pg 98]

“Clifford!” ejaculated her father. “Thy Cousin Clifford? But where is he now? The kitchen chamber was searched, but we found no one there. Where is he?”

“The sheriff hath him,” Peggy told him chokingly. “Sally took him home with her last night, and I went there to see him this afternoon. I met the sheriff in Fourth Street as I left here, and he must have followed me; for I had scarce begun to talk to Clifford when he came and took my cousin. He talks of an indictment.”

Both girls were crying by this time, and with an exclamation of concern Mrs. Owen hastened to them, and drew them into an embrace.

“There! There!” she said soothingly. “David will manage it somehow. Don’t sob so, Sally. After all thee is not so much to blame. Perchance the Council will excuse what thee did, as

’twas to help Peggy.”

“I don’t care for the old Council,” flashed Sally through her tears. “’Tis that Peggy’s cousin thinks that I betrayed him. I thought he was up attic, and he wasn’t. I told Peggy to tell him to go there, but she did not hear me. Thee knows my fault, Mrs. Owen,” she wailed in an agony of self-reproach. “Thee knows just how froward and saucy I can be, and I was just that way with the sheriff, and—and pert. He spoke of the closet, showing that he knew of it, and I was so sure that Clifford was up attic that I asked the sheriff if I should open the door for him. I did, and there was Clifford,” she ended with a fresh burst of tears. [Pg 99]

“I know just how you feel,” interposed Nurse Johnson sympathetically. “And so the prisoner was Clifford? Well, I am sorry that he was taken. Tell us all about it, Peggy.”

“Yes, lass,” spoke David Owen. “Calm thyself as soon as may be, and let me know the matter in detail. I must know all concerning it.”

Mr. Owen spoke gravely. Well he knew what the feeling was toward those who assisted prisoners of war in escaping. Aiding or abetting the enemy in any way was not tolerated, either in the city or the country at large. The systematic cruelties practiced toward the American prisoners both in the dreadful prison ships and the jails, the barbarities perpetrated toward their countrymen in the South, the harassing of the coasts, the raids of the refugees, the capture of their merchantmen by British privateers; all these things and many others served to keep the hearts of Americans inflamed with rancor toward the English. They were not disposed to overlook any indulgence displayed toward such an enemy. [Pg 100]

Presently Peggy had so far recovered her usual composure that she was able to relate succinctly all that had occurred. Her father listened attentively.

“Why did thee not come to me for aid, lass?” he asked when she had finished the recital.

“Why, father, ’twould go hard with thee were it to become known that thee had given aid to a prisoner,” answered Peggy. “I wished to keep thee clear of it. Then, too, thee might have deemed it duty to give up my cousin, and I could not bear that; yet I should want thee to do what was right.” [Pg 101]

“I think I understand, lass,” he said, “’Twas most ingenious to think of having him come to the door as Sally’s escort. I knew not that thou hadst so much of daring in thee to originate such a plan.”

Peggy flushed scarlet at this. She had suppressed all mention of Fairfax’s connection with the matter, wishing not to implicate him. So she stared at her father in an embarrassed silence, uneasy at the praise she did not merit.

“But why was he not discovered?” went on David Owen musingly. “The room was searched twice. By the way,” turning suddenly toward Fairfax Johnson, “captain, was it not thee who went up there first?”

“It was, sir,” answered the young man promptly. “I stumbled over Clifford, who was lying wrapped up in a fur rug. He chuckled as I did so, and I knew at once who it was. I had known him in Williamsburgh, you remember.”

“Why didst thou not cry out? Thou wert taken unawares, as it were. I marvel at thy command,” and Mr. Owen regarded him keenly. [Pg 102]

“Well,” hesitated the youth, “I went up there because I suspected that Miss Peggy had some one hidden there, and I wanted to help her.”

“Thou knew of it? But how?”

“Because she was out of the room longer than any one after dinner, and had time to make arrangements of that nature if she so desired, sir. Then too she did not reply when the sheriff asked us all to say whether we had seen anything of a British prisoner.”

“All this went on, and I saw naught of it!” exclaimed Mr. Owen. “Why! where were my eyes? I would have affirmed that I could account for every action of every member of the household.”

“We younger people were together a great deal yesterday, sir. We had more opportunities for observing if anything was amiss with one of our number than you would have.”

“Was it thou who wast responsible for the plan of getting away?” questioned Mr. Owen. “Methought ’twas too daring to have originated with Peggy.” [Pg 103]

“Well, yes,” acknowledged Fairfax flushing. “The daring lay only in the execution of it. The

girls and Clifford furnished that."

"But to risk thy liberty for such a thing, lad! Was it worth while to jeopardize thy new commission to aid Peggy with her cousin?"

Fairfax stirred restlessly.

"But I was under great obligations to Clifford too, sir," he made answer presently. "He kept my mother from molestation in Williamsburgh when the enemy was in possession of the place. I was in duty bound to help him."

"And next I shall hear that Robert hath been concerned in the affair too," uttered David Owen, turning to Robert Dale with a glimmer of a smile. "I begin to believe that there hath been a regular conspiracy among you young people. Speak up, lad. What did thee do?"

"Very little," answered the youth frankly. "Not so much as I should have liked to do, Mr. Owen. I did not know that 'twas Peggy's cousin whom she was hiding. I did know that there [Pg 104] was some one. I suspected who Sally's escort might be, and when I saw that she was dismayed at the prospect of having to bring him to the table, I spoke as I did to help her."

"Without knowing who it might be, Robert?" exclaimed Mr. Owen in amazement.

"Peggy would conceal no one without thinking it right, sir," returned Robert simply. "I think we all know that is the reason we stood by her."

"Well, upon my word!" David Owen rubbed his hands thoughtfully. "And how is Betty concerned?"

"Betty is entirely exempt from the matter, I believe," remarked Major Dale smiling. "The rest of us are guilty."

"Did I do wrong, father?" asked Peggy timidly. "Is thee angry with me?"

"Nay, lass. With thy soft heart thee could not do otherwise. Yesterday was no day to turn any one from shelter, even though he were not thy cousin. I would not have thee insensible to mercy, no matter who asked it. I grieve only that such an act should involve thy young [Pg 105] friends in consequences which may prove of serious character to all concerned."

"We are willing to abide by the consequences," spoke the two youths simultaneously. Mr. Owen shook his head.

"Nay," he said. "I will not permit it. Peggy alone must be held responsible for what hath occurred. 'Tis just and right. I will see if aught can be done with the Council. I want also to find where Clifford hath been put, to see if I shall be allowed to do anything for him. At times food and comforts are given to prisoners, and perchance we may be permitted to do this for him."

"And oh, Mr. Owen! if thee does see him, tell him how it happened," pleaded Sally. "I could bear a term of imprisonment better than that he should esteem me a treacherous friend."

"I will do what I can, Sally," he promised her.

David Owen was absent for nearly two hours, and an anxious time of waiting it proved. The girls were comforted and petted by the two ladies, while the youths made them relate over [Pg 106] and over all the incidents leading to the capture of Clifford. At length Mr. Owen returned.

"Clifford is in the new jail pending his return to Lancaster," he told them. "I saw and talked with him. I told him all that thee wished, Sally, and that thee had naught to do with his capture. He exonerates Peggy from all thought of treachery, but I grieve to say that the lad exhibits a perverse disbelief in thee, Sally. He would hear of no excuse for thee, though I tried to make him understand how it all came about."

"I knew it," said Sally with tears. "I knew he would not believe in me."

"Never mind, Sally," said Peggy. "I will try to see him, and I will make him listen to reason."

"Thee will not be permitted, lass. It was granted me as a great favor, but, because of the aid which thou didst render him, 'twould be most unwise for thee to seek to see him. I arranged with Mr. Ledie that as much comfort should be given him as is compatible with his state as prisoner. 'Tis all that can be done."

"And the Council, David?" queried his wife, anxiously. "Could thee do anything about that?" [Pg 107]

"The Council have consented that Peggy and Sally shall appear before them on the morning of Second-day at ten of the clock, to show cause why they should not be indicted. 'Tis an unheard of thing to permit it, as 'tis usual to petition, but I asked for their appearance,

knowing that their youth would be in their favor. 'Tis a grave matter, as they acknowledged, but I think the most of them feel kindly toward ye. I talked with several."

But Mrs. Owen saw that he spoke with assumed lightness. "I think," she said, "that we ought to have Sally's mother with us. To-morrow is First-day, which will give time to discuss the subject in all its bearings. She should be with us. Robert, wilt thou go for her?"

"With pleasure, Mrs. Owen," he responded rising. "And we must not forget that Uncle Jacob Deering is one of the Council."

"True," exclaimed Lowry Owen, her face lighting up. "True; I had forgotten."

CHAPTER VIII

[Pg 108]

BEFORE THE COUNCIL

"Then call them to our presence. Face to face,
And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear
The accuser and accused freely speak."

—*Richard II.*

Monday, Second-day in Quaker parlance, dawned. The intense cold had abated though the air remained crisp and keen. A venturesome robin perched upon the bare bough of a cherry tree that grew near one of the sitting-room windows, and gave vent to his short and frequent song. Sally called Peggy's attention to him.

"Dost hear what he says?" she cried. "Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheer up! 'Tis a harbinger of spring, and flowers, and warmer weather. Who knows but that he brings good luck to us too, Peggy?"

Peggy smiled sadly.

"I hope so," she made answer. "But oh! I do wish this interview with the Council were over."

[Pg 109]

"And so do I," agreed Sally soberly. "'Twill soon be now, Peggy, for here comes thy mother to call us to get ready."

"Yes," spoke Mrs. Owen overhearing the words. "David says that as soon as ye have donned your wraps 'twill be time to go."

Peggy and Sally were Quaker maidens, well drilled in art of self-repression, so they made no scene as they bade their mothers farewell, and took leave of Nurse Johnson, her son and Robert Dale. In spite of their training, however, their eyes were wet, and neither was able to speak for a few moments after they left the house. Then Sally broke the silence.

"Peggy," she said, "after this I shall always have the greatest sympathy for the poor wretches who are executed. I feel just as though I was about to be hanged."

"So do I, Sally. How great a change is wrought by war! A few short years ago neither of us thought to be called before the highest tribunal of the state. How happy we were before this awful war with its weary years of fighting came! Then we had no thought of sorrow, and friend was not against friend, misconstruing every act and deed of kindness."

[Pg 110]

"I think I would not pursue that line of talk, lassies," commented David Owen who walked in front of them. "See how brightly the sun shines! How blue the sky is! Beyond that azure is One in the hollow of whose hand ye are. Have courage."

"Yes, Mr. Owen," gasped Sally, stopping abruptly as they reached the walk leading to the State House entrance. "Yes; but what hath happened to the State House? 'Tis so big. I knew not that 'twas so large."

Peggy stopped too and looked up at the State House, which stood some twenty-five or thirty feet back from the street. It was large, she reflected, its size impressing for the first time in her life with a sense of awe. She had always lived across from the building. Had loved it, and had been proud of the fact that it was deemed the most imposing edifice in the new

world; now its aspect was one of forbidding unfamiliarity. David Owen gave them no time to indulge in fears, but hurried them at once along the walk and up the flight of five steps which led to the entry. The door opening into the East Chamber stood ajar. He glanced toward it quickly.

"The Congress is in session," he remarked. "There are matters of import before it to-day, I hear. His Excellency meets with it." [Pg 111]

Lingering not, though he cast a wishful look toward the room, he led them to the second story of the building, pausing presently before the door of a chamber on the west side.

"I can go no further with ye," he said sadly. "Ye will have to depend upon yourselves now, but there is naught to fear. Be of good courage, and answer all that is asked of ye with exact truth. And now farewell!"

He turned from them abruptly, and went hastily down the stairs as though he feared that he might give way to emotion. For a brief second the maidens stood, and then the door was opened, and the doorkeeper bade them enter. Summoning all her courage, Peggy grasped Sally's hand, and went in.

At this time the government of Pennsylvania differed slightly from that of the other states. The old Committee of Safety had merged into what was called The Supreme Executive Council. There was an Assembly, which, in session with the Council, elected a Governor who was called the President of the state, the Vice-president being elected in the same manner. The President was Captain-General, and Commander-in-chief of all of Pennsylvania's forces, and upon the Council devolved the administrations of all war matters. Its chief executive committees constituted a Board of War and a Navy Board. The former had charge of the land service; the latter of the water, both under the direction of the Council. A very careful and exact account of affairs in the state was kept by means of ward committees in the cities and districts, and any infraction of measures adopted for the public safety was known almost immediately to the Council. It was before this high tribunal that the girls had to appear. [Pg 112]

Peggy's heart sank as they entered the chamber, and she encountered the grave glances of the men assembled there. There were not more than a dozen in session, for the Council was a small body. Some of the members she knew well, others only slightly. They were courteous, kindly men with the best interests of their country at heart, but stern and implacable toward the least infringement of patriotism. And so the girl's heart beat tumultuously as she advanced timidly toward the platform upon which the President, Mr. Moore, was seated. [Pg 113]

He rose as the trembling maidens paused before him, and stood for a moment looking at them in silence. It seemed to Peggy that his glance searched every recess of her heart. She grew pale before his intense gaze, and her eyes fell. Sally, on the contrary, seemed to have recovered her customary composure. She suddenly stood erect, and looked about her. Presently she saw Mr. Jacob Deering, and smiled a greeting. The old gentleman was visibly uneasy under her glance, and opening his snuff-box he took a huge pinch of snuff.

"Margaret Owen." Peggy started as the unaccustomed appellation fell from the lips of the President. "It hath been brought to the attention of this Council that you have given aid to a prisoner of war. That you have harbored one of the enemy, and have tried to abet his escape. What have you to answer to this charge?"

"'Tis true," faltered the girl in a low tone.

"When did it occur?" [Pg 114]

"Last Sixth-day."

"Which was Friday, the first day of this month. Was your father at home at the time?"

"Yes," answered Peggy quickly, "but he knew naught of it."

"And did you not know that it was a misdemeanor to succor one of the enemy?"

"Yes, friend; I knew it."

"You knew that 'twas a misdemeanor, and yet unbeknown to your father you still committed it?" he asked, as though amazed at such duplicity. "Did you not know that such an act might bring suspicion upon him? Did you not know that even though he had given good service to the cause, even that would not avail him if he were suspected of abetting a prisoner's escape? Whom can we trust since General Arnold failed us?"

Peggy was too full of emotion to be able to do more than nod acquiescence.

“Then if you knew these things, why did you do this?” he demanded, his brow darkening.

“He was my cousin, Clifford Owen,” she told him brokenly. “I could not refuse him shelter in such a storm.” [Pg 115]

“Clifford Owen? A son of that Colonel Owen who as a prisoner on parole stayed at your house?”

“Yes,” answered Peggy.

“A brother to that Mistress Harriet Owen who played the spy with our army at Middlebrook, and who while at your house tried to communicate with the enemy at New York and was banished for so doing?”

“Yes,” answered the girl again.

“And to favor one of these cousins you would do that which might cause doubt to be cast upon your father’s patriotism, and bring this friend here under displeasure of this tribunal? This friend who hath served us so nobly as nurse.”

“Thee must not do anything to Sally,” cried Peggy, roused by this speech. “I alone am to blame for everything. None knew that I hid my cousin, and Sally helped only because she saw how greatly I was distressed lest Clifford should be taken. She did not know him, and only helped me out of friendship. Ye must do naught to her. There is no one to blame but me.” [Pg 116]

“And do you justify yourself for involving a loyal friend in difficulty by the mere fact that the prisoner was your cousin?” he asked, and the cold incisiveness of his tone made the girl shiver. “You have said that he was your cousin, Margaret Owen, as though that were excuse for disloyalty. Ye have both attended Master Benezet’s school; while there did ye not read of one Junius Brutus, who sentenced his own sons to death when he found them implicated in a conspiracy against the country?”

“Yes, we read of it,” interposed Sally so shrilly that the grave men who composed the semicircle were startled into keen attention. “We read of it, Friend Moore; but does thee think their mother would have done it? I’ve often wondered where Mistress Junius Brutus was. Had he been my husband,” with an impressive shake of her curly head, “I’d have led him a life of it after such an act. ’Twas unnatural and cruel, I think. Of course Peggy hid her cousin. Is she not a female? Think ye that females are made of such stern fiber that a [Pg 117] relative, even though he were an enemy, would ask aid and be refused? I don’t believe that there is one of ye but what would do the same thing under like circumstances. Thee has spoken of what I have done for the Cause. Why doesn’t thee mention Peggy’s services? Didn’t she ride in the cold and the storm to inform General Putnam of the spy, Molesworth’s plot? Hasn’t she worked to keep the hands, and the feet, and the backs of the army warm? I don’t believe that another girl in the Union hath knit so many mittens and socks, or made so many shirts as Peggy Owen hath. I can’t begin to tell all she hath done for the Cause; and yet just because she hath regard for her kin, which being a woman she cannot help, ye want to convict her of a misdemeanor. ’Tis monstrous! How can she help softness of heart? Hath she not been taught every First-day to do good to them that despitefully use her? When I first went into nursing I hated the English intensely, and when the wounded were brought in I’d attend to our own soldiers first, no matter how badly the others were hurt. And then one day, Dr. Cochrane said to me: ‘They’re all mothers’ sons, [Pg 118] Miss Sally. Somewhere, some woman is waiting and praying for each one of them. Our own boys might be in like predicament with the enemy. Treat them as you would like our own treated.’ Since then,” Sally continued half crying, “I’ve tended them all alike—American or English, French or Hessian.”

“Bless my soul!” ejaculated Jacob Deering, as the maiden’s voice broke. Like a flash she turned upon him.

“Thee has a niece, Kitty, hasn’t thee, Friend Deering?” she cried.

“Why, so I have, Miss Sally. So I have.”

“And she married an Englishman, didn’t she?”

“Yes,” he answered with a bewildered air. “Yes, she did.”

“Now, Friend Deering,” she cried, shaking her finger at him earnestly, “just suppose that Kitty’s Englishman had come to thy house for shelter last Sixth-day, when it was so cold and stormy that thee would feel bad if the house cat was left outside? Suppose he had come asking for shelter? Would thee be any the less a friend to thy country if thee should listen to [Pg 119] the dictates of humanity and give him shelter?”

“Bless my soul!” ejaculated Mr. Deering, again helping himself liberally to snuff. “Bless my soul!”

“Wouldn’t thee give him shelter?” persisted she. “Wouldn’t thee, Friend Deering?”

“Zounds! Of course I would,” he cried. “Englishman, or not. No matter what he was, I would turn no man from my door on such a day.”

“Of course thee wouldn’t,” she cried in a blaze of indignation. “Yet thee and thy fellows here want to indict Peggy and me for the very thing ye would do yourselves. Shame on ye!”

“Indict ye!” cried the old gentleman, getting to his feet with the agility of a youth. “Indict ye!” he roared, shaking his fist at the council belligerently. “If any man dares to indict so much as a hair of your pretty heads he shall answer to Jacob Deering.”

CHAPTER IX

[Pg 120]

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN INTO THE FIRE

> “Long war without and frequent broil within
> Had made a path for blood and giant sin,
> That waited but a signal to begin
> New havoc, such as civil discord blends,
> Which knows no neuter, owns but foes or friends.”
>
> —*“Count Lara,” Byron.*

The two mothers were at the door to greet them as David Owen brought the girls back. Both girls were much excited, half laughing, half crying, over the turn events had taken.

“’Tis good news, I can see,” said Mrs. Owen leading them into the sitting-room. “As to how it came about I can gather nothing clearly.”

“Oh, ’twas Sally, Sally,” cried Peggy. “’Tis said that Mr. Henry of Virginia is eloquent, but ye should have heard Sally. He could not excel her.”

“’Twas a complete rout,” declared Mr. Owen, his usual composure somewhat ruffled. “Here I was down-stairs beset with anxiety lest untoward sentences be passed upon the girls [Pg 121] when down from the Council chamber they came, escorted by Mr. Jacob Deering and President Moore himself. Sally addressed the honorable body with so much unction, I hear, that thy uncle, Robert, at once declared for them. In fact, his championship took the form of a direct challenge, which caused so much merriment that the Council was unable to proceed with the business before it, and an adjournment was taken until this afternoon.”

“But what happened? What did you say? Do tell us, Sally,” urged Robert Dale. “I acknowledge that I am consumed with curiosity. I am sure the others are affected in like manner. We were just sitting here while you were gone trying to cheer each other by hoping that the sentence would be fines rather than imprisonment. And here you come back with neither, it seems, and colors flying. Do tell us what happened.”

“Well,” laughed Sally, who was plainly elated over the matter, “I was greatly frightened until we entered the Council chamber; but do ye know,” she broke off excitedly, “just as soon as I saw those men I knew that there was not one of them who would have refused [Pg 122] Clifford shelter that stormy day? So I told them so. That’s all.”

A shout of laughter greeted this explanation. When it subsided Peggy spoke.

“Thee didn’t tell them about Brutus, Sally,” she chided. “’Twas that that first excited thy ire.” With that she related in detail all that had taken place.

“Hurrah for Sally! And hurrah for Uncle Jacob too,” cried Robert. “’Twas wonderful, as Peggy says. How did you happen to think of it, Sally?”

“’Twas high time that I did something to redeem myself,” answered Sally. “After all,” she continued a trifle wearily, for in spite of the petting and being made much of even her buoyant nature was beginning to feel the strain of events, “after all, I should not have been obliged to do it. Peggy and I are in our own city. It hath been a long war, and from the first

we have shown our patriotism by doing what we could. Whenever anything of this sort occurs it should not be necessary to do aught but explain how the matter came about without fear of punishment."

"War breeds suspicion, my child," explained Mr. Owen gravely. "The purest patriots are [Pg 123] open to it; for sometimes treason lurks where 'tis least suspected. Were it not that a close watch is kept we should have been betrayed to our undoing long since by traitors and spies. For greater security, therefore, Whigs submit to an espionage that at times is most irksome and unpleasant."

"I see," said Sally. "I see. I—— Oh, I'm so tired!"

And with that—here was Sally on the floor in a dead faint. With an exclamation of alarm Peggy bent over her.

"All this hath been too much for her," she cried. "And 'tis my fault. Oh! I should not have let her help with Clifford."

"Nay, Peggy; she hath not been strong for some time," returned Mrs. Evans, as Mrs. Owen and Nurse Johnson brought burnt feathers and vinegar. "She overtaxed her strength at the hospital which is the reason that she hath remained at home this spring. She must have a change when a little stronger."

So, on her return to consciousness, Sally found herself put to bed and declared an invalid. [Pg 124] Peggy insisted on being installed as chief nurse.

"But I shall go down-stairs to-day, Peggy," spoke Sally on the morning of Wednesday. "I heard Nurse Johnson say last night that thy father was to start for Lancaster this afternoon."

"He is, Sally. And what does thee think? Robert is to go with him."

"Robert?" exclaimed Sally amazed. "Why, Peggy, his furlough hath but just begun."

"I know. Father reminded him of it, but he thought the prospect alluring, because father spoke of the danger of robbers. It seems that the woods of the great road to Lancaster is infested with them, and that government stores are their especial prey. The journey will be fraught with no little peril."

"How quickly he tired of us," mused Sally. "Here 'twas only Fifth-day of last week that he came, and now he is to take to the field again. Fie, fie! Is that the gallantry of the military?"

"Perchance," answered Peggy laughing at her friend, "perchance, Sally, he hath been without leave for so long that he doth not know what to do with himself when off duty." [Pg 125]

"I dare say, Peggy. Oh, dear! would I were going somewhere. I would not care how much danger there was if I could get away for a time." Sally sighed deeply. "I have been here all my life, Peggy, save for the summers we've spent at the farm. I wish I could have a change."

Nurse Johnson entered the room as the girl concluded her remarks.

"It is anent that very thing that I have come to speak to you both," she said seating herself on the side of the bed. "Why could not you and Peggy go to Jersey with me for a while? You need a change, Miss Sally, and my sister is near enough to the coast for you to have the benefit of the sea air. She hath a large house, and likes young company. We will give you a fine time, and 'twould do you no end of good. Will ye go?"

"Oh, I should like it," cried Sally eagerly. "If Peggy will go I am sure that mother would be pleased to have me accept, Friend Nurse. Will thee, Peggy?"

"I'll have to see mother about it, Sally," answered Peggy slowly. She did not like the [Pg 126] thought of leaving home again even for a few days, but Sally did need a change. She had extricated her from a grave difficulty, and so, stifling a sigh, she added: "I will go if mother will consent to it."

"I'm going to get up," spoke Sally decidedly. "When did thee wish to start, Friend Nurse?"

"I should like to go to-morrow," answered Nurse Johnson. "Fairfax hath made arrangements for a large sled to use in place of the double wagon in which we came. That will make traveling easy, and we should start while the snow is on the ground. Should there come a warm spell the roads would be terrible."

"Let's go right down-stairs to see about it," cried Sally. "If we go to-morrow there will be need for haste. See, Friend Nurse, the mere thought of going with thee hath given me

strength. How much better I do feel already."

"I'll see that you have some color in these pale cheeks before I'm through with you," declared Nurse Johnson pinching them lightly. "With Peggy and me to look after you a few days will make a great difference in you. Yes; let's see about it right away." [Pg 127]

After all the matter was not mentioned immediately. David Owen had received some further orders which hastened his departure, and in the confusion of preparation the subject was not broached. It was at the tea table that Nurse Johnson unfolded the plan.

"And the raids, Friend Johnson?" spoke Mistress Owen. "Doth thy sister live where she would be subjected to them?"

"When Brother Tom wrote he said that there had been no trouble since Yorktown," answered Nurse Johnson. "Did I think for one moment that there was danger I should not wish to take them into it. But Freehold is some distance from the coast, though the sea breezes have an appreciable effect upon the climate, and 'twill be of benefit to both girls to get away for a little while. Miss Sally certainly needs the change. I would take good care of them."

"I do not doubt it, friend," answered Peggy's mother. She saw that Sally was eager for the trip, and knew that the girl's mother would consent to it only on condition that Peggy would go also. Both Mrs. Owen and her daughter felt that it would be ungracious to refuse, and consent was given. [Pg 128]

So it came about that the next morning, so well wrapped up that they declared themselves unable to breathe, Peggy and Sally were helped into the big double sleigh that Fairfax had secured, and the journey toward New Jersey was begun.

There is something exhilarating about the beginning of any journey. Add to it youth, brilliant sunshine, the keen air of a frosty morning, and the high spirits of the maidens will be understood. Sally was almost wild with delight.

"Oh, Friend Fairfax," she cried leaning forward to speak to him as the party sped away, the snow creaking under the runners, "isn't this just the nicest ride thee ever took? Isn't thee having just the best time?"

"Yes," answered the youth so briefly that her face clouded. Fairfax was once more enveloped in his garb of bashfulness, and attended strictly to the driving, letting the task of entertaining their guests fall upon his mother.

"I do believe that he is feeling bad because Betty hath not come," pouted Sally in a mischievous aside. "Doesn't thee, Peggy?" [Pg 129]

To Peggy's amusement the youth turned quickly:

"I am, Mistress Sally. I—I'd like all three here."

And thus, with laughter and light conversation, the day passed. The beautiful country places which had bordered the road near Philadelphia gave way to pleasant villages, and these in turn were succeeded by thick woods whose pure clean beauty elicited exclamations of delight. In many places the road was unbroken, and the sleigh passed under white laden branches which drooped heavily, and which at the slightest jar would discharge their burden over the party in miniature snow-storms. They had made such a late start that it was decided to lie at Bristol for the night, and reached that place as the afternoon sun began to cast long chill shadows through the darkening woods and to shroud the way in fast deepening obscurity.

Across the Delaware the road took them through dense forests, and over trackless vacancies of snow-clad spaces into which the highway disappeared. There were a few scattering villages, and near these they encountered travelers, but on the highroad they met no one. In spite of themselves this fact wore upon them. The cold was not severe, but there was a stillness that held a penetrating chillness of its own. The country was undulating, swelling into an elevation called the Atlantic Highlands near the coast, and into the range of mountains in the north known as the Kittatinny Hills. All were well covered with forests of pine. [Pg 130]

By noon of the third day they emerged from the woods, and found a long stretch of white-clad country before them. A few farms could be seen in the far distance, but otherwise there was no sign of life on the wide expanse. It seemed to Peggy and Sally that the highway lay over vast snow fields, and the glare of the sunlight on the snow began to blur and blind them.

"I should welcome the sight of bird or beast," observed Nurse Johnson. "The stillness hath

been oppressive to-day. 'Tis the hard part of winter travel. In summer there is always the hum of insect, or the song of bird to while away the monotony of a journey, but in the winter there is naught to break the quiet. 'Tis as though all Nature slept under the blanket of snow. Still, the riding hath not been hard. A sleigh is so much easier than a wagon. You girls are tired, though, I can see. What are you looking at, Sally?" [Pg 131]

"There seems to be something moving over there," answered Sally indicating some small elevations about three miles to the north of the road. "Thee will get thy wish, Friend Nurse, for something is surely moving about. We have seen naught for so long that any living thing is curious. What are those specks, Friend Fairfax? They are too large for ducks."

The youth turned and gazed steadily at the sand-hills to which she pointed. They were covered with snow which made them appear like ice hummocks in the sunshine, and which rendered the small black objects moving among them very distinct.

"They look to me like men," remarked Peggy who sat on the front seat beside Fairfax.

"They are men," he responded. "Men and horses." [Pg 132]

"I wonder what they are doing there," cried Sally.

The youth did not reply, and Peggy caught the look that passed between him and his mother. She bent toward him quickly.

"What is it?" she asked. "What does thee fear?"

"I fear they are desperadoes," he replied. "I must make yon farmhouse."

With an exclamation the girl turned to look again at the sand-hills. To her amazement the spots that had been so indeterminate a few moments since now had become a body of horsemen, which was moving rapidly toward them. Fairfax was pale. He leaned forward and spoke to the horses just as Sally cried:

"They see us, Fairfax. They are coming on the run."

"Can you drive, Peggy?" he asked.

"Yes," she told him breathlessly.

"Then take my place," he said. "See the farmhouse to the right on that crossroad? We must make that, Peggy. I must get out the guns. If they catch us there will be a fight." [Pg 133]

"I have the ammunition, son," said Nurse Johnson. "Get over here, and let me do the loading."

Peggy took the lines, and the youth stooped down and drew the muskets from under the front seat of the sleigh.

"Drive, Peggy," he called excitedly as he rose with the weapons. "Drive as you never drove before. They are gaining on us."

CHAPTER X [Pg 134]

A RACE FOR LIFE

"What boots the oft-repeated tale of strife,
The feast of vultures, and the waste of life?

* * * * *

In either cause, one rage alone possess'd
The empire of the alternate victor's breast;
And they that smote for freedom or for sway,
Deem'd few were slain while more remain to slay."

—*Byron*.

Peggy cast a fleeting glance backward, and the rich bloom of her cheeks faded to paleness as she saw what amazing progress the horsemen had made. Their own horses had been on the road since early morning, and should the beasts of their pursuers be fresher she feared for the result. With this reflection she cast aside her scruples and, taking the whip out of its socket, let it fall in a stinging cut. The horses leaped under the lash, then steadied to a rapid trot. Far behind sounded a faint halloa, but she did not turn her head. The horses demanded all her attention. How far away that farmhouse seemed! Could they reach it [Pg 135] before these lawless wretches overtook them? They must. Again she let the lash fall, and the horses were off in a mad gallop.

In some manner Sally and Fairfax contrived to exchange places, and with stern set features the youth sat watching the rapid advance of the enemy, his musket ready for instant use. There were two guns. His mother held the other, and the ammunition lay on the seat between them. Not one of the little party voiced the thought that was in their minds, for each one realized the awful consequences that would follow capture by these desperadoes.

During the latter part of the Revolution there had sprung into existence a class of men which might be termed banditti. They were marauding bands which were restrained from robbery and outrage by no military authority. They infested the woods and preyed upon lone travelers, or small parties journeying upon the highways, and desolated solitary farmhouses at will. No outrage was too great for them to commit. Each state had its quota of these lawless wretches which superadded to the horrors of war. [Pg 136]

The state of New Jersey was particularly beset, owing to its geographical situation between the two large cities of New York and Philadelphia. The pines of Monmouth County, in whose boundaries Peggy and her friends now were, afforded a safe hiding-place for numbers of such robbers. They had caves burrowed in the sand-hills near the margin of swamps in the most secluded situations, which were covered with brush so as to be undiscoverable. The inhabitants were kept in a state of constant terror by their visitations, for the object of such visits was to plunder, burn and murder. The farmers were obliged to carry their muskets with them even into the fields. After Yorktown their depredations ceased for a time, but as the British government delayed peace their atrocities were renewed. It was a mongrel crew of this character that was giving chase to the sleigh and its occupants. They were easily recognized by their accouterments.

On! And on! And on! To Peggy the whole landscape was featureless save for the farmhouse [Pg 137] in the far distance. The sand-hills with their pines, and the salt marshes to the eastward blended together in an indistinguishable white blur. The wind whistled in their teeth, a rushing, roaring gale, filled with a salt flavor. Her calash had blown off, and her hair was flying, but the girl was conscious of but one thing which was that the thud of horses' feet was drawing steadily nearer.

"Faster, Peggy," cried Fairfax imploringly. "Faster!" As he spoke there came the report of muskets.

A scream burst from Sally's lips as a bullet fell just short of the sleigh. An answering roar came from Fairfax's gun, and the unequal fight was on. Peggy dared not look around.

"The whip," she gasped hoarsely to Sally, for the lash had dropped from her hand and lay in the bed of the sleigh. "The whip."

In an instant Sally had found it, and leaning over the dashboard she let it fall again and again on the horses. Infuriated at such treatment the animals plunged forward madly, and it was all Peggy could do to guide them. The crossroad leading to the farmhouse was but half a mile distant now. There were clumps of pines bordering it which would afford some [Pg 138] protection from the bullets of the enemy. Could they reach it? The road swung to the south abruptly, and the horses took it on a sheer run. The noble animals were at their highest speed and doing their utmost, but to Peggy they seemed to move at snail's pace. The yelling, shouting band of ruffians was undoubtedly coming closer. It was amazing with what speed they had borne down upon the sleigh, but they were better horsed. Suddenly the outcries took a louder note. A shower of bullets fell about the sleigh, and in agonized tones Fairfax called to the others to get under the seats. Peggy did not know whether Sally and Nurse Johnson obeyed the command or not, but she did not stir. She could not. She was possessed with the determination to reach the crossroad, with its protecting pines. If they could but reach that road! Sally was sobbing, and Peggy's own breath came gaspingly. She leaned forward, and in utter desperation tried to call to the horses, but her cries were lost in a series of blood-curdling yells from the pursuers.

A SHOWER OF BULLETS FELL ABOUT THE SLEIGH.

Fairfax was making a gallant defense, but the odds were greatly against him. It was a [Pg 139] miracle that he was not hit by some of the bullets that were falling about them. His own aim had been more fortunate, and three ruffians had toppled from their saddles. Still, it could be but a question of time ere the greater number would be victorious, and that the robbers were aware of this was apparent in their shouts of triumph.

Presently the leader of the band, who was astride a big bay, spurred his horse forward.

“Halt!” he cried. “Halt, young man!” The youth’s reply was a shot, and the bay went down.

A howl of rage arose from the marauders, and they tore down the road like so many demons. Just as the sleigh reached the crossroad two of them dashed past to the heads of the horses, and with shouts of exultation reached out to grasp the bits. And then, from out of the thickets of pines, little jets of smoke puffed forth and the two rascals tumbled to the ground. Before the occupants of the sleigh could realize what had happened a body of twenty or thirty troopers rode from among the trees, and made a dash for the enemy. [Pg 140] Fairfax uttered a whoop of joy.

“The Jersey Dragoons!” he cried.

At sight of them the bandits turned to flee, but the dragoons were after them on the run, shouting, yelling, and with pistol-balls flying. All became in an instant a scene of the most lively confusion. Volley after volley the troopers poured into the fleeing ruffians, and here and there men and horses dropped.

The air reeked with the smell of gunpowder, and many riderless horses, snorting with fear and pain, galloped with flying reins up and down the road. The ground was strewn with dead and dying, and the snow was trampled and bloody. The onset of the dragoons was pitiless, incessant, furious; no quarter being given. The state wanted these wretches extirpated, and whenever an encounter took place the conflict was sure to be a sanguinary one. Soon the shattered ranks of the ruffian band scattered for the sand-hills, and the captain, knowing that the bandits would have the advantage once the hills were reached, sounded the recall. Reluctantly, his men gave up the chase.

As the dragoons charged the bandits Fairfax had taken the lines from Peggy, and driven [Pg 141] beyond range of the bullets, then stopped to watch the assault. Their escape had been so narrow that none of them could realize that their safety was assured. Peggy and Sally were white and shaken, and Nurse Johnson retained her composure with difficulty. Now as the troopers came up to them they welcomed them with deep gratitude.

“’Twas a close call,” was the captain’s comment to Fairfax. “You were doing nobly, sir, but the odds were hopeless.”

“Had you not come, captain, I dare not think of the result,” said Fairfax with emotion. “There was but one more round of ammunition left when you appeared with your men, though I knew not of it. Mother here was doing the loading, and she did not tell me.”

“I am glad that we happened along,” said the officer. “The highways are not safe these days. Our state troops are doing what we can toward making them so, but good men are scarce and robbers many. ’Twas the merest accident that we chose that spot for our midday meal. We were right in the midst of it when you were seen with those miscreants in [Pg 142] pursuit.”

“But,” spoke the youth with some bewilderment, “my uncle wrote that their depredations had ceased since Yorktown.”

“And so they did for a time, but the respite was short. What with these robbers, and the raids of the refugees Jerseymen scarce know which way to turn. The state is in truth sorely tried. Where does your uncle live, and for what place are you bound?”

“Thomas Ashley is my uncle. He lives at Freehold, which should not be many miles distant,” answered Fairfax. “We came to make our home there. That is, my mother and I did. These two young ladies are visitors.”

“Their welcome, while a warm one, is not much to their liking, I’ll warrant,” said the officer with a light laugh, and a quick glance at the pale faces of the maidens. “Well, you will have no more trouble from this on. This stretch of the turnpike is the most dangerous in the county, and once past it one is safe from molestation. Good-bye! A safe journey to you. I think we shall finish that dinner now.” [Pg 143]

He would not listen to their thanks, but saluting, wheeled, and rode back to the conflict ground where some troopers were attending to the wounded. Fairfax spoke to the horses, and silently the journey which had had such a tragic interruption was resumed.

CHAPTER XI [Pg 144]

THE CHOICE OF FAIRFAX

“Ours are no hirelings trained to the fight,
With cymbal and clarion, all glittering and bright;
No prancing of chargers, no martial display;
No war-trump is heard from our silent array.
O’er the proud heads of our freemen our star-banner
waves;
Men, firm as their mountains, and still as their
graves.”

—*T. Graves.*

Although each member of the little party had borne himself well in the face of peril, now each one found himself in the utter exhaustion that follows unusual stress of mind or body. It was no longer possible to lighten the tediousness of travel by conversation, and for this reason the remainder of the journey seemed long and exceedingly wearisome. Had conditions been other than they were both Peggy and Sally would have noticed the broad morasses which bisected the wide plains they were now traversing. They would have exclaimed at the acres of reeds which covered the vast extent of these marshes, and at the wild fowl which rose in clouds from them; for already the ducks were flying. They would have discussed how these swamps became dangerous quagmires at a later season, and how the sandy soil, now so firm and solid under its blanket of snow, would become soft and yielding so that horses could scarce travel through it. [Pg 145]

All these things failed to rouse them from the weariness that held them. The over-hanging branches of the leafless trees arched over the highway, and obscured the light of the westering sun. Further on, the road left the forest and ran by open fields and hedgerows of cultivated lands. It was not until they had passed through a low lying plain, and crossed the broad marsh which separated it from the wooded heights of Freehold that it occurred to any of them that they were passing over the battle-ground of Monmouth. Then, as the high peaked roof of the court-house came into view, Nurse Johnson roused herself.

“Is it not somewhere hereabouts that the Battle of Monmouth was fought?” she asked. “Methinks I remember ’twas at the seat of Monmouth County that His Excellency’s forces overtook the English.” [Pg 146]

“Yes.” Fairfax looked about him. “The hottest part of the battle occurred at yon parsonage; although I’ve heard that there was hard fighting over the entire plain.”

“Oh, don’t talk of battles,” broke in Sally glancing about fearfully. “Every bush and tree seems but made to hide an enemy.”

“Give me pardon, my dear,” spoke Nurse Johnson contritely. “’Tis small wonder that you wish not to hear of battles after the experience of the day. I make no doubt but that all of us will be glad when we are within the sheltering walls of a house. Are we almost there, son?”

“Yes, mother. ’Tis just beyond the village a short distance, though I know not in which direction the farm lies. I will have to inquire at the tavern.”

The amber light of dusk was tipping the trees when the youth turned from the highway into the wooded road leading to his uncle’s dwelling. The farmhouse was gray and weather-beaten, set in a circle of cleared land, and ringed by the forest. There was something about [Pg 147] the well-sweep, the orchard, the gardens, that spoke of neglect and desolation, and Peggy felt a chill go through her as she noted no stir of life about the place. From the open doors of the barn came no movement of restless horse, or low of cattle. Not a twitter nor cheep from the hen-house broke the quiet that brooded over everything. Though it was still early twilight the wooden shutters were tightly closed, and had it not been for the light which streamed through their crescentic openings the house would have been deemed deserted. The girl started nervously as a night-owl hooted suddenly from a near-by thicket.

“I wonder if they are at home?” she mused aloud.

“Why, of course they are, Peggy,” answered Sally. “Does thee not see the light?”

“Yes; but——” began Peggy, and paused expectantly as Fairfax, who had alighted, knocked loudly upon the door.

It was a full moment before a reply came; then a man’s voice demanded sharply:

“What’s wanted?”

“’Tis your nephew, Uncle Tom,” answered the lad cheerily. [Pg 148]

“Nephew, heigh? I haven’t any in this part of the country. You can’t put in a take-off like that on Tom Ashley. Clear out! My firelock’s ready.”

“Well, this is a fine welcome, I must say,” cried Nurse Johnson indignantly. “Write for us to come all the way from Virginia to visit you, and then find a firelock ready for us. I don’t think much of such doings, Tom Ashley!”

“Why a pox on me!” came in excited accents from behind the closed door. “Didst hear that, Mary? That’s Hannah Johnson’s voice as sure as preaching. It must be Hannah and her boy.”

There followed the rattle of a chain, the drawing of bolts, then the door was flung wide, and the light from a blazing fire in the fireplace threw into strong relief the forms of a man and a woman standing on the threshold.

“Have in, have in,” cried the man genially. “Mary, see to the opening of the stable while I bring the folks in. Ye are as welcome as the spring would be, though ye did give us a great [Pg 149] scare. ’Twas a most unmannerly greeting, but ’twas not meant for ye. The times are such that no man dares to open his door to a visitor when dark is coming on without he knows who ’tis. This is a surprise. I had writ ye not to come.”

“You had, uncle?” queried Fairfax as they shook hands. Thomas Ashley had left the door by this time, and now stood beside the sleigh. “When? We did not get it.”

“’Tis not to be wondered at considering the state of the country. I sent it the last of January. Still, so long as ye didn’t get it I’m glad ye are here. So you brought your sweetheart along, heigh? Which one is she?”

A ripple of laughter rose to Peggy’s lips at the remark. Her spirits had revived as soon as she understood that their reception was due to caution rather than to the lack of welcome, and she spoke roguishly as the farmer assisted her out of the sleigh:

“We did not bring her, friend. Thy nephew hath had to content himself with Sally and me because Betty could not come.”

“I’ll warrant the boy hath not found the consolation irksome,” laughed Mr. Ashley. A [Pg 150] twinkle came into his eye as he noted the youth’s blushes and the mischievous glances of the girls. “Well, well,” he said, “ye are welcome anyway. Now, Hannah, go right in with these girls while nevvy helps me with the horses.”

“You surely don’t keep that barn door open when there are horses inside, do you, Tom?”

Nurse Johnson's disapproval of the lax fastening of the barn was plainly evident in her tones.

"It won't make any difference, Hannah, whether 'tis fastened or not. If there's horses there somebody gets them anyway. We leave the door open to save them the trouble of breaking the bolt."

"Then why do we put the horses there?" queried Fairfax in blank consternation.

"We don't, nevvy." The farmer chuckled. "If we did we wouldn't have them long. Wait a minute. There! There's Mary now."

The dwelling was a story and a half house, with a lean-to attached to one end. Just as Farmer Ashley finished speaking the whole front of the lean-to swung open in a great door, [Pg 151] disclosing an aperture large enough to admit both horses and sleigh. Mrs. Ashley emerged from the dark interior as the door swung back, and came toward them.

"Well, that is a contrivance," ejaculated Nurse Johnson after she had greeted her sister. "Who would think of finding a stable right in the house?"

"'Tis the only way we can keep a horse," explained the farmer's wife. "'Tis right next the kitchen, so we know the minute anything is wrong, if we have a horse there; which we have not at present. We believe that no one outside the family knows of its use for such purpose, and 'tis something to have a hiding-place for animals. But come in! Here we stand talking, and you must be both cold and hungry. Come, Hannah! And ye also, my dears. I am glad that the supper is belated to-night, for now 'twill be hot, which is well after a long journey."

Thus talking she led them into the house, carefully bolting the door after them. A door on one side the chimney gave entrance to the lean-to. Another, on the other side of the room, opened into another apartment, but the kitchen itself seemed to be the main living-room. It [Pg 152] was large and roomy, and a table drawn up before the hearth was spread for the evening meal. A great fire of pine boughs blazed in the deep-throated fireplace filling the room with fragrance and cheerfulness. The maidens ran to it with exclamations of pleasure.

"Oh!" cried Sally with a deep breath. "How pleasant and homey it is. I feel as though this afternoon were a dreadful dream, and that naught could befall us here. Dost see, Peggy? There is a quilt on the frame. 'Twill be a fine chance to teach Captain Johnson the stitches. 'Twill give him relaxation from military duty."

"He will have small time for relaxation, I fear me," spoke the farmer entering at this moment with Fairfax from the lean-to. "There is to be great activity in the army this summer, I hear. 'Tis to be hoped that something will be done to help us. The Jerseys have suffered greatly in the war, and Monmouth County more than the rest of the state put together."

"We had a taste of what you are going through this afternoon," Fairfax informed them [Pg 153] quietly. "We were set upon by robbers, and had it not been for the opportune coming of some state dragoons you would not have had to give us welcome."

"Robbers!" exclaimed the farmer and his wife simultaneously. "Why did you not tell us sooner? Was any one hurt?"

"No," answered the youth. "Of course we were upset, which is small cause for wonderment."

"Tell us about it, nevvy," began Thomas Ashley eagerly, but his wife interposed:

"Now, father, if no one hath received a hurt let's eat before the supper gets cold. A good story will keep better than hot victuals. We shall have the night to talk in. 'Tis a long journey from Virginia, and belike they are hungry. But first, Hannah, tell us who these young friends are."

"Mercy on me, Mary," gasped Nurse Johnson, drawing the girls forward. "I clear forgot my manners. This is Mistress Margaret Owen, who went back with me to Williamsburgh when I was here last year. I have writ you anent her visit, as I make no doubt you remember. And [Pg 154] this is her friend, Mistress Sarah Evans. She hath been ailing of late, and methought the change would be of benefit. We call them Peggy and Sally."

"You are both welcome," said the hostess warmly, "though I would the times were not so troublous. What with the pine robbers, the freebooters and the Tories we are in daily dread of attack."

"A plague take the rascals," cried Mr. Ashley excitedly. "No man's life, liberty, or property is safe these days. We are set upon in the fields, and upon the highways. Our dwellings are

sacked and burned, and we are thankful if life is left. I tell ye," he cried bringing down his fist upon the table with so much vim that the dishes rattled, "I tell ye New Jersey hath stood the brunt of the war. She hath been, and is now, the battle-field of the new nation. Things have come to such a pass that some way, somehow, relief must be had from these internal enemies."

"But hath nothing been done to rid the state of them?" asked the youth.

"Done? Everything hath been done, nevvy. We have not only furnished our quota of men to the main army, but also formed companies of militia, both cavalry and infantry, to fight these pests. The Legislature is endeavoring to establish a strict patrol of the coast and the highways. In addition, we men who are too old for constant service have formed an association to retaliate upon our greatest enemies, the Tories, and to go out as necessity demands. Why, think of it! Up there in New York City are many of our friends and neighbors formed into a corps called The Associated Loyalists, under the leadership of our former governor, William Franklin. An unworthy son of a great father! At his command this corps harasses the state at will. Knowing the country 'tis easy for it to slip in where the greatest harm can be done, and out it goes before we know 'tis here. Staten Island and Sandy Hook are handy refuges for such raiders. We might handle the robbers, could we be rid of these incursions. We hoped for peace after Yorktown, but the depredations are now worse than ever. Something must be done, for New Jersey's very existence is threatened." [Pg 155]

"There seems to be a need of men," remarked the young man musingly. "When am I to report for duty, Uncle Tom?" [Pg 156]

Mr. Ashley turned toward him quickly.

"There is need of men," he said. "Your commission was to be with the regular army, if you wanted it so. Colonel Elias Dayton, who now commands the Jersey Brigade at Chatham, wants every man to report for duty this month. But——"

"But what, Uncle Tom?" asked Fairfax as the farmer paused abruptly.

"But I wish ye'd stay in Monmouth, nevvy. We need every man we can get to help us defend our homes. We have sent and sent to the main army until we are almost stripped of fighting men. General Washington may have to go against the English this summer, and then again he may have to lie inactive. It all depends upon the instructions which England will give to the new general who is to supersede Clinton. Of course, with a campaign there would be more chance for glory with the regular line. Such distinction as that must appeal to a lad of parts; but, boy, New Jersey needs you. Why, Washington depends on us for flour, and how can we raise the grain when we are shot down as we plow the fields? A man can do service, and great service, right here in the militia. There won't be much glory, nevvy, but there will be plenty of action. In Freehold there is a company now of twenty-five twelvemonth boys that needs a captain. The Legislature will gladly give you the commission. Now, nevvy, the choice is with you. What will you do?" [Pg 157]

The youth let his head fall upon his breast in thought. The supper had long since been finished, and the other members of the group sat interested listeners to the conversation between uncle and nephew. Peggy looked at the young fellow wonderingly. A captain's commission in the regular army was to be desired. She remembered how John Drayton had had to serve for years to obtain one. Such an office gave a rank that no militia could offer. Could any youth deliberately cast aside the distinction? A glance at Fairfax gave no clue to his mental attitude. It seemed a long time that he sat there meditating, but presently he looked up and met the questioning gaze of Thomas Ashley with a smile.

"The greatest need seems to be right here," he said. "I think I'd like to help clear out the Tories, and to get a whack at those pine robbers. I have a reckoning to settle with them on my own account. This field will suit me all right." [Pg 158]

"Good for you, nevvy," cried his uncle in a shout. "I thought you'd do it. You are a lad after my own heart. Still, it is only fair that you should know that your task will be fraught with danger. The Tories single out for vengeance any man who fights with unction against them. Let him proceed with too much ardor and he becomes a marked man."

"That is true in any part of the country, uncle, as well as in New Jersey," was the lad's rejoinder. "I am ready for whatever goes with the work."

But at this there came a cry from his mother:

"Tom Ashley, what are you getting my boy into?"

"Nothing that my own boys have not endured, Hannah. One fell in the great battle on yonder plain near the court-house, and lies now in Freehold burying-ground. The other, [Pg 159]

Charley, made the same choice as your boy, and is down at Tom's River helping to defend old Monmouth."

"But oh——" she began when Fairfax interrupted her:

"It's all right, mother. It means no more danger than I'd have to encounter with the regular army, or than I have already faced in the militia at home."

"It may be," she answered, but her eyes were troubled. "It may be."

"It waxes late," exclaimed Mrs. Ashley glancing at Sally whose eyelids were drooping in spite of herself. "These girls, at least, are ready for bed; and to bed they must go."

And without heeding their protests the good woman hurried them up to a little room under the eaves, nor would she depart until they were tucked warmly in the great feather-bed. Sally's drowsiness left her as soon as she found herself alone with Peggy.

"Peggy," she whispered, snuggling close to her friend, "what does thee think of it all?"

"'Tis like the Carolinas and Virginia were," returned Peggy soberly. "Oh, Sally! is it not awful that men should so hunt and hound each other? The poor people of the states have stood so much that 'tis marvelous that any are left for resistance. Nurse Johnson whispered to me that she should not feel easy until we were back in Philadelphia." [Pg 160]

"Would that we were," said Sally earnestly. "Peggy!"

"Yes, Sally."

"I was afraid this afternoon when the robbers attacked us. What if I were to be fearful all the time?"

"We must not be, Sally," spoke Peggy quickly. "'Twould wherrit these kind friends if we were to show fear. They will take excellent care of us, and take us home soon, I make no doubt."

"Isn't thee ever afraid, Peggy?"

"Why, yes; of course," answered Peggy. "Every one is, I think. But mother told me once never to anticipate trouble, and so I try not to think about what might happen. We must be bright and cheerful whatever occurs. It should be easy for thee, Sally. Thee is always happy in the hospital."

"That is because I have something to do," responded Sally sagely. "If one is so busy that one has no time to think one can't be afraid." [Pg 161]

"I make no doubt then thee will soon have plenty to occupy thee when Fairfax joins his company, Sally."

Sally laughed as Peggy had intended she should.

"I like Fairfax," she said with emphasis. "But didst notice, Peggy? He spoke not once to either of us after we entered the house. Truly, his diffidence doth envelop him like a mantle; yet, when those robbers were giving us chase, he had no difficulty in telling us just what to do. Indeed, he was then as much at ease in speaking to us as thy father or Robert would have been."

"Then he was doing 'man's duty,'" laughed Peggy. "'Tis marvelous how an emergency doth make him shed his shyness."

"I like him," repeated Sally. "In very truth, Peggy Owen, doth thee not consider him the very nicest lad that we know?"

"And yet," observed Peggy meditatively, addressing the darkness, "methinks there was a girl, not a hundred miles from this very bed, who told me that she agreed with my Cousin Harriet that Clifford excelled all other youths." [Pg 162]

"I am going to sleep," announced Sally, turning over hastily. "Does thee not think it time? We had a wearisome journey."

Peggy giggled appreciatively.

"That was a well directed shot," she remarked, "since it hath reduced the ranks to silence."

CHAPTER XII

“THEY MUST GO HOME”

“It wounds, indeed,
To bear affronts too great to be forgiven,
And not have power to punish.”

—*“Spanish Friar,” Dryden.*

“Let them sleep, Hannah. I make no doubt but that they are greatly fatigued.”

“Yet methinks they would not care to be left behind if we go to the meeting-house, Mary. Both maidens have regard for the Sabbath. First-day, they call it.”

Peggy sat up quickly as the foregoing words penetrated her drowsed consciousness, and parting the curtains of the bed looked out. The door leading into the adjoining chamber was ajar, and through it the voices of the two women sounded distinctly. A flood of bright sunshine filled the little room with dazzling light, and she uttered an exclamation of dismay at the lateness of the hour.

“Sally,” she called, bending over her still sleeping friend and shaking her gently, “’tis time to get up. I fear me that we have over-slept.” [Pg 164]

Sally stirred protestingly between the lavender-scented sheets, then opened her blue eyes sleepily.

“Did mother call?” she murmured. “Oh, dear! I don’t want to get up.”

“Thy wits are wool-gathering, Sally,” laughed Peggy slipping from the high bed without touching the small flight of steps generally used for descending. “Thee is not at home, but in Freehold. We must dress with speed, for the friends wish to go to the meeting-house.”

“Heigh-ho!” yawned Sally rubbing her eyes. “Methought I was in Philadelphia, and here we are in—— Is it East or West Jersey, Peggy?”

“Neither. ’Tis New Jersey, Sally.”

“But which would it be had they not gone together to make New Jersey?” persisted Sally.

“It seems to me, miss, that for so sleepy a damsel thee is consumed with a great thirst for geographical knowledge,” was Peggy’s comment as she dipped her face in the washing bowl. [Pg 165]

“Does thee really know, Peggy Owen?”

“I don’t, Sally. Is thee pleased?”

“Yes,” declared Sally. “I thought of course thee would be informed, as thee has traveled so much. Peggy!”

“Well?”

“Did thee name the bedposts to find who would be thy fate? And at which one did thee look? Betty and I always do it when we sleep in a strange bed.”

“Yes, Sally. And I looked at this one.” Peggy lightly touched the post nearest her.

“Why, that’s the very one I saw first,” cried Sally excitedly. “For whom did thee name it, Peggy? What if it should be the same as mine! I called it—Fairfax.”

“Fairfax,” came from Peggy at the same moment. A merry peal of laughter filled the chamber as they uttered the name in unison.

“And how shall it be decided?” cried Sally gaily. “I shall never be second, Peggy.”

“What if Betty were here?” queried Peggy mirthfully.

“We should both have to give up then, of course. I’ll tell thee what: Being of the sect of Friends we cannot fight a duel, as the world’s people do, so when we go down-stairs let’s note which one of us he addresses first. That one shall be The One,” she ended impressively. [Pg 166]

“Very well. Is thee ready, Sally?”

Arm in arm they descended the stairs. A chorus of “Good-mornings” greeted them as they entered the living-room. Mrs. Ashley, who was just putting breakfast on the table, glanced at them smilingly.

“You are both as bright as the morning,” she remarked approvingly. “’Tis no need to ask how ye slept. Truly your experience of yesterday doth not seem to have weighed upon you as I feared it would.”

“And how I did sleep!” exclaimed Sally. “The bed was so downy that Peggy had hard work to make me get up. What virtue does thee give thy feathers, Mistress Ashley, to make them bestow so sound a slumber?”

“Methinks any bed would have served the purpose when you were so fatigued, child,” answered the hostess, pleased nevertheless by the girl’s tribute to her feathers. “Nevvy, will you find places for the girls at the table?” [Pg 167]

“Certainly, Aunt Mary.” Fairfax placed the chairs around the table, then drawing out two of them, turned toward the maidens, his face flushing at the necessity of addressing them, his whole manner betokening the diffidence that beset him. With demure looks but twinkling eyes the girls awaited his next words eagerly. “Have these chairs,” he said.

An irrepressible giggle came from Sally. Peggy bit her lips to keep back her laughter, and cast down her eyes quickly. The youth had included both in his speech, and, during the meal that followed, his few remarks were characterized by a like impartiality. When at length all were in the sleigh bound for the meeting-house at Freehold both girls were bubbling over with mischief.

“What spirits you two are in this morning,” observed Nurse Johnson. “Do tell us the fun.”

“’Tis thy son,” explained Sally in a whisper. “We want to see which one of us he addresses singly, because we both named the same bedpost after him, and ’tis the only way to decide our fate. He won’t speak to either of us alone,” she ended plaintively. [Pg 168]

Nurse Johnson laughed heartily, well knowing that these girls liked her boy, and that such teasing as they indulged in was partly girlish fun, and partly a desire to cure him of his bashfulness.

“What a thing it is to be young,” she commented almost enviously. “Mary, did we ever do such things?”

“As naming bedposts, do you mean, Hannah? Truly. Many and many a post have we both named.”

“And how did it turn out?” asked Sally eagerly. Before the lady could reply Peggy spoke suddenly:

“Why do thy husband and Fairfax carry their muskets?” she inquired with surprise.

“’Tis not safe to go to meeting without them, child,” responded the matron gravely. “To such a state hath New Jersey come that ’tis impossible to go from one’s door without firelocks.”

“’Tis as it was when the country was first settled,” remarked Nurse Johnson. “Only then, ’twas fear of the savages, and now——” [Pg 169]

“’Tis of a foe no less savage, Hannah,” completed her sister. “The long years of warfare have rendered the enemy cruel and pitiless in the extreme.”

“’Tis as bad here as on the frontiers,” commented Peggy. “Before we came ’twas talked at Philadelphia that an uprising of the Indians was looked for along the borders. In truth, methinks there hath already been atrocities committed upon the settlers, but affairs seem no worse with them than they are here with you.”

When they finally drew up before the Freehold meeting-house it was obvious to the least heedful that something unusual was astir. Although the snow lay deep in front of the building and a keen nip was in the air, there were groups of men scattered over the green. Despite the chill, some sat upon the steps of the church, others clustered about the wagons in the wagon-shed, and still others stood about, stamping their feet or swinging their arms to keep warm. But whether sitting or standing each man held a musket in the hollow of his arm ready for instant use, while about the church two men patrolled as sentinels. All the light and laughter died out of the faces of the maidens at these warlike signs, and unconsciously they drew closer together. [Pg 170]

“I wonder what hath happened,” mused Farmer Ashley stopping before the horse-block.

“What’s to do, neighbor?” he called to a man in a near-by group.

“Sam Nathan’s farm was raided by the loyalists last night, Tom,” came the startling response. “His house and barns were burned, and Sam himself killed. His wife and daughter escaped into the woods, and reached Freehold this morning half dead from shock and exposure.”

“Sam Nathan!” ejaculated Mrs. Ashley becoming pale. “Why, that was only five miles from us, father. ’Twill be our turn next.”

“Now don’t go to looking for trouble, Mary,” chided her husband. “You women-folks go right into the meeting-house, and whatever you do, be cheerful. Nevvy and I will come in presently.”

The church was partly filled with sad-eyed, patient-faced women, whose quiet demeanor was more heartrending than tears would have been. Some gave them the welcome that those who are united in the bonds of affliction give each other; others only stared at them with stony, unseeing eyes. Whose turn would be the next? was the thought that filled every breast. Oppressed and saddened, Peggy thoughtfully took the seat assigned her, and, as Sally sank down beside her, she slipped her hand into her friend’s protectingly. Sally responded with a reassuring pressure, and so with clasped hands the two sat throughout the service. And a memorable service it was. While the minister preached, the men took turns in patrolling the building and watching the horses. Beside every pew stood a musket, ready for instant use. Even in the house of God these people were not secure from the attacks of their enemies. [Pg 171]

And without the sun shone brightly upon the hills and plains of Monmouth. Over the meadows lay the snow, and on the streams a thick coating of ice; but the pines were green in the woodlands, and the air—though sharp and nipping—still breathed of spring and hope. The land was fair to see in its winter garb. Man alone was the discordant note in Nature’s harmony. [Pg 172]

As Thomas Ashley had said, all New Jersey was roused to action. Harassed and harried as no other state had been, with the exception of South Carolina, at this time it seemed on the verge of extinction, and its condition was in truth deplorable. In the earlier years of the war it had been swept like a plague by the horde of hireling Hessians and the British army. In addition, the main army of the patriots had wintered for several years among its mountains, and drawn upon it for supplies until the state was all but beggared. But if liberty live the army must eat; so the farmers plowed, and sowed, and reaped, even though many dropped in the fields from the crack of an ambushed rifle.

As though suffering from the depredations of the pine robbers were not enough, there was added to the state’s afflictions the incursions of the freebooters of the sea, and, far more bitter to bear—for civil war is ever without mercy and compassion—were the heinous outrages of the Tories. It was no wonder, with foes without and foes within, that the temper of the people had risen to fever heat, and that they were making determined efforts to rid themselves of their enemies. [Pg 173]

The meeting was ended finally, and with saddened mien the family reëntered the sleigh. Farmer Ashley’s face wore a grave expression, while Fairfax’s countenance betokened a set determination. He turned toward his mother abruptly.

“Mother,” he said, “these girls must go home. New Jersey is no place for them.”

“You never spoke a truer word, nevvy,” chimed in his uncle. “They must go home; the sooner they start, the better ’twill be. So long as the snow lasts, the riding will be easy. Now, if you are willing to risk another encounter with the robbers, we will start with them Tuesday.”

“But would not Friend Nurse and thy wife be left unprotected while ye were away?” questioned Peggy in troubled accents.

“Now, Peggy, don’t wherrit over that,” spoke Nurse Johnson. “The first thing to attend to is getting you girls home. I should never have another minute’s peace if anything befell you. I ought never to have brought you into such danger, but I knew not that things were as they are here. Mary and I can take care of ourselves.” [Pg 174]

“It won’t do, Hannah,” said Thomas Ashley decidedly. “The girls must go of a truth, but you and Mary must have protection, too. Capable ye both are, but ’twould not do to leave ye alone. The journey to Philadelphia would take all of six days, there and back. That would mean fast going at that. Should there come a thaw there’s no telling when we’d get home.”

“Friend,” broke in Peggy eagerly, “if thee could get us to Trenton there would be no need

for thee to go on to Philadelphia. Both Sally and I have friends there who would see that we reached home safely. Beside, the stage runs thrice a week from that point to our city, and should other means fail, we could take that."

"Come! that's well thought of," he cried quickly. "'Twould be but a day's travel to Trenton, if the snow holds. Mary and Hannah could bide in Freehold until our return; so we'll call the matter settled. Nevvy, we will start Tuesday."

"Then on Tuesday ye will both be gone," said Fairfax with such a sigh of relief that Sally, [Pg 175] despite the gravity of the situation, could not forbear a little laugh.

"Oh, Peggy!" she cried, "why weren't we named Betty? Had we been Captain Johnson would not wish us gone as soon as we arrived."

"'Tis not as you think, Mistress Sally," he protested earnestly. "Indeed, in truth"—he faltered, then continued manfully—"did I regard your friend as your words imply I would not consent to wait until Tuesday to take her back."

A puzzled look spread over Sally's face.

"Doth he mean that he is indeed fond of Betty?" she whispered to Peggy under cover of Thomas Ashley's laughter which followed the youth's response.

"I fear to say," was Peggy's amused reply.

And so, in spite of the fact that ravage and pillage had come very near to them in the night, they returned to the farm in much better spirits than would have been deemed possible when they left the meeting-house.

CHAPTER XIII [Pg 176]

A WOMAN'S WIT

"Man is not born alone to act, or be
The sole asserter of man's liberty;
But so God shares the gifts of head and heart,
And crowns blest woman with a hero's part."

—Author Unknown.

"Surely thee is not unpacking, Peggy?" questioned Sally as she entered their little room for the night. Peggy had preceded her by a few moments, and was now bending over her portmanteau. "It hardly seems worth while when we return so soon."

"I am just getting my diary, Sally," answered Peggy, drawing forth the book after several attempts to locate it. "Methought the time was propitious to make an entry. And of a verity that encounter with those robbers ought to make exciting reading for the Social Select Circle."

"'Twas a wondrous adventure," cried Sally with a shiver of pure enjoyment. "Since none of [Pg 177] us received injury 'tis delightsome to have so stirring a thing to record for the girls. And oh, Peggy! is it not charming that I am with thee?"

"It is indeed, Sally. Anything is always more enjoyable when thee shares it with me; although I agree with Fairfax in wishing that we were at home."

"If we start Third-day we should be there soon, Peggy. Were it not for the danger I should like to stay a little longer."

"And so should I," responded Peggy. "There! that entry is finished, with a half page to spare. Wouldn't thee like to add something, Sally?"

"I'll wait until morning," decided Sally. "Although," she added, "perchance 'twould be best to do it now, as to-morrow will be the day before we leave, and consequently we are quite apt to be busy."

But Monday morning brought a clouded and softened sky; a brisk south wind arose, and the rain came driving. By Tuesday the wind had increased to a heavy gale, and the rain came with violence from the southwest. The snow-drifts that had been so white and fair became [Pg 178]

yellow, and smirched, and muddy, and lost their curves and lines. The roads were troughs of slush and water, impassable for any sort of vehicle. In spite of this condition of things Fairfax Johnson insisted that the maidens should be taken to Trenton.

“Why, son, ’twould be monstrous to send them forth in such weather,” remonstrated his mother. “They would get drenched.”

“Better that than to stay here,” he declared, but his uncle interposed:

“’Twould never do, nevvy. You couldn’t get as far as Freehold with the roads as they are. The rain won’t last more than a few days; and if it keeps us in it works the same with the raiders by keeping them out. They won’t venture into Monmouth County until the weather changes. They know too well the danger of the quagmires. We must bide our time, nevvy.”

And with this the lad was forced to content himself. For three days the rain continued, and with its ceasing every vestige of snow had disappeared, leaving conditions worse than ever. The roads were very soft and heavy, and most perilous where they crossed the marshes. [Pg 179] Even the youth acknowledged that travel with a wagon was utterly out of the question. But he himself managed to ride into Freehold daily that he might meet with his company, and begin preparations to take the field as soon as offensive operations by the raiders were resumed.

So the days went by, but they were pleasant and busy ones for Peggy and Sally. True to their resolve to accept with cheerfulness whatever befell, their gay spirits softened and enlivened the gloom which might otherwise have settled upon the family. The mornings were devoted to housework and cookery; the afternoons to quilting the homespun bed-quilt which Sally had noticed in the frames on the night of their arrival. In the evenings all gathered about the great fireplace and indulged in such recreations as the farmhouse afforded. The girls had each set a pair of stockings upon the needles which they declared were for Fairfax, and, much to his embarrassment, he was called upon every evening to note the progress of the work. After the fashion of the time the name, Fairfax, and the date, 1782, were knit in the threads.

Soon the raw winds of March gave place to softer ones which blew caressingly from the [Pg 180] south, dispelling all fear of frost. The soft wet of the ground disappeared under the balmy sunshine, and the air was a fount of freshness. The glad earth reveled under the warmth of the sun, and hill and valley, wood and meadow, blossomed under the touch of spring.

Along the Hudson, Washington gathered his forces for a final campaign, for not yet would England consent to terms of peace, and urged with entreaty upon the states the need of men and supplies. But with resources drained, and rendered apathetic by the long years of fighting, the country believed that the crisis had passed, and so responded slowly to the appeals of their leader. Each state had its own troubles that demanded attention, and the general welfare was lost sight of in the specific need. In New Jersey particularly, rent as it was by the internecine warfare, nothing was talked or thought but the putting down of its own individual enemies. As soon as the weather permitted the attacks of the loyalists were renewed with increased virulence. [Pg 181] It was as though these people realized that with the coming of peace nothing would remain for them but expatriation, and so were determined to leave behind them naught but desolation.

And to stay this lawlessness the young captain with his company rode hither and thither over the county, pursuing the raiders with so much zeal and intrepidity that their rancor was aroused toward him. There came a day when Fairfax did not return in the evening as was his custom. Far away from the south-eastern part of the county had come the alarm that the refugees, under the leadership of Frank Edwards—a notorious desperado loyalist—had come down from Sandy Hook, and were approaching the neighborhood of Cedar Creek. Upon receipt of the intelligence the young captain had immediately set forth to prevent their marauding progress into the interior. A sharp skirmish took place which resulted in victory for the Monmouth defenders, and when at length they reëntered Freehold, they bore with them the notorious Edwards, a prisoner, together with a majority of his Tory band. Thomas Ashley was jubilant when the youth arrived with the news. [Pg 182]

“Keep after ’em, nevvy,” he cried. “A few more such captures and old Monmouth may rest secure.”

“Report hath it that nothing short of hanging will be given Edwards,” Fairfax told him. “Few of the band will escape a sentence of some sort. Do you not think, Uncle Tom, that a few days could be taken now to get these maidens home? It preys upon my mind that they are still here.”

“And upon mine also, son,” said his mother gravely. “If these Tories are as vindictive as I hear they are there will be no safety for any of us since you have taken one of their

leaders."

"She speaks truth, nevvy. These girls have no part in this war. Pennsylvania hath woes of her own to endure. It is not just, or fitting that any of her citizens should be called upon to bear ours also. They shall go home."

So once again Peggy and Sally gathered their belongings together for an early start to Trenton. All the day before the maidens were in a pleasurable state of excitement. Each [Pg 183] realized that New Jersey was no longer a place for them, so they were glad to go; still, there were regrets at parting from these people who had been so kind, and whom the vicissitudes of fortune might preclude them from ever seeing again. Full of this feeling, Peggy found herself the victim of a pleasing melancholy the night before they were to leave, and it was long past midnight ere she was able to sleep. How long she slept she did not know, but it seemed to her that she had just fallen into slumber when something caused her to open her eyes. For a few moments she lay in that strange debatable region between sleeping and waking when the mind cannot distinguish between the real and the imaginary. All at once she sat up, fully awake, every sense strained and alert. Something was wrong. What was it? She listened intently, but such an intense stillness reigned throughout the house that Sally's soft breathing smote her with a sense of disturbance. Parting the curtains of the bed she glanced apprehensively about the little chamber. The wooden shutters were closed, but through their bow-shaped openings came such a brilliant light that every object in the little [Pg 184] room was plainly visible.

"How brightly the moon shines," was her thought, and completely reassured she was about to draw the curtains when again there came the mysterious sound that had awakened her.

It was a crackling, snapping sound such as seasoned wood makes when the flame catches it in the open air. Very much alarmed Peggy slipped from the bed and ran to one of the windows. Softly she raised the sash, then cautiously swung back one of the shutters. She gave a low cry at the sight that met her gaze, and leaned far out of the window. The barn was a mass of flames, and there were dark forms flitting about among the budding trees. The raiders! For a moment she stood stricken with terror. Then the necessity for action roused her. Fairfax! Thomas Ashley! They must not be caught asleep. What would be their portion should these men find them? Full of excitement, her heart beating hard and fast, she sped into the adjoining room where Nurse Johnson slept.

"Awake!" she cried shaking her violently, her whisper rendered sharp and penetrating by [Pg 185] fear. "The raiders are here. Thy son, Friend Nurse! There is danger. Oh, wake! wake!"

"What is it, Peggy?" Nurse Johnson was roused at last. "Are you ill?"

"The Tories," gasped the maiden. "They are here. The barn is burning."

In an instant Nurse Johnson was out of the bed, and had started for the door when the calm voice of her son spoke from the entrance:

"I hear. You women get in the middle room, and don't go near a window. Uncle Tom is getting the muskets ready for the assault."

Peggy ran back to close the shutter of the window she had opened, but could not forego a glance downward as she did so. The men, satisfied that nothing would be left of the barn, were now advancing stealthily toward the house, each bearing a lighted pine-knot. The girl's heart beat pitifully as she divined their intention, which was obviously to set fire to the dwelling. She closed the shutter tightly, and then awakened Sally.

"Can't we do something?" whispered Sally, after the women and the two girls had waited in [Pg 186] breathless suspense for a few moments. "This waiting in the dark is terrifying. I shall scream if I can't do something."

Before a reply could be made there came a snort of terror from the lean-to, and a shout of triumph broke from the raiders as the snorting discovered the whereabouts of the horses. A ripping, tearing sound betokening that the boards were being torn from the improvised stable to get at the animals followed. A roar of rage burst from Farmer Ashley.

"At 'em, nevvy," he cried. "They're after the horses. He who shoots first has the advantage of the enemy."

The young captain's reply was a shot from his musket. A howl of anger rose from the attackers as the report of Thomas Ashley's gun followed quickly. The two men then ran to other windows and began firing, endeavoring by quick shifting of position to give the impression that a large force was in the house. There were six muskets altogether, and one was placed by each window.

“This is work for us,” said Nurse Johnson calmly, as the women and girls in answer to Sally’s plea came down-stairs. “We can load while you two do the shooting. Peggy, do you stay with me while Mary and Sally take that side.” [Pg 187]

There ensued several minutes of brisk work from without as well as within, and bullets came spitefully through windows and doors. Presently Mary Ashley spoke shrilly:

“Father, where is the cartridge paper? There are no more cartridges made up.”

“I don’t know, mother,” shouted Mr. Ashley successfully dodging a bullet that came through a shutter. “Ask nevvy.”

But Fairfax turned a look of consternation on his aunt.

“If there are no more cartridges in the pouch we are done for,” he said. “There’s plenty of powder and ball, but I don’t know where to lay hand to wadding.”

“Any sort of paper will do, Mary,” interposed Nurse Johnson. “Get a book.”

Paper was a scarce commodity in those times, and few houses, especially country houses, kept it in quantity. Books were rarer still, so now Mrs. Ashley spoke with the calmness of despair:

“There isn’t a book on the place. I let——” [Pg 188]

“Wait a minute,” cried Peggy. “I have one.” She ran up the stairs as she finished speaking and soon returned, a book in her hand.

“Oh, Peggy,” wailed Sally, “’tis thy diary. And how will the girls ever know what hath befallen us without it?”

“They are apt to know naught if we do not use it, Sally,” said Peggy with some excitement, proceeding to tear the leaves into squares. Presently she paused, powder-horn in hand. “How much powder do I put in, Friend Nurse?” she asked.

While Nurse Johnson was showing the proper amount the enemy’s fire slackened suddenly. Farmer Ashley and Fairfax exchanged apprehensive glances. Were they weary, or was their stock of cartridges getting low? Then the fire ceased altogether, and as the smoke lifted Fairfax stole a look through the opening in a shutter. He turned a troubled face toward them after a moment’s survey.

“There’s nothing to be seen,” he said. “Surely they have not gone away?”

At this juncture a call came from outside: [Pg 189]

“Tom Ashley!”

“Well? What’s wanted?” cried the farmer.

“We want that nephew of yours, and we’re going to have him.”

“Come and get him, then,” growled Thomas Ashley.

“We’re going to, Tom. We’ve burned your barn, and taken your horses. Now unless you let us have that captain we’ll burn the house right over your head. Will you surrender Captain Johnson?”

“No,” came from the farmer in a roar. “What manner of man do you think I am that I’d let a pack of Tory scoundrels have my nephew?”

“The woods won’t be pleasant camping for your women-folks at this time of the year, Tom,” came in threatening accents.

“No,” shouted the farmer. “You can’t have him.”

“Uncle, I’d better go out to them,” said Fairfax. “If they will promise to let the rest of you alone, and not burn the house, I’ll——”

“You’ll do nothing of the sort, nevvy,” spoke Tom Ashley gruffly. “If they spare the house now ’twill be only that they may burn it later. You can’t depend upon the word of a Tory. We will stay here as long as we can, then make a dash for the woods. Thanks to Peggy we have plenty of cartridges now.” [Pg 190]

“Something is burning,” cried Sally suddenly, sniffing the air.

A peculiar odor came through the loopholes of the windows, and the wind whirled a puff of smoke into the room. The faces of the girls blanched, and they looked at each other

fearfully. The entire party seemed benumbed for the moment, then Fairfax sprang to the door of the lean-to.

“I’m going out to them,” he announced determinedly. “You shan’t burn here like rats in a trap.”

“Don’t go, son,” screamed his mother.

And, “Don’t go, Friend Fairfax,” came from the girls. “’Tis death out there.”

“And death to all within if I stay,” he answered, opening the door resolutely. A burst of flame from the lean-to forced him to recoil, and before he could recover himself his uncle had closed the door quickly. [Pg 191]

“You young idiot,” he growled, “stay where you are. ’Twould be a useless sacrifice. You’ll do more good by staying here, and helping to cover the retreat of the women should we have to take to the woods.”

Fairfax made no answer, but stood in a dejected attitude, his head sunk upon his breast. The stillness without was ominous. Presently jets of flame crept across the threshold of the door leading to the lean-to. The farmer uttered an exclamation almost of despair as he reached for the water bucket.

“We are all right as long as the water holds out,” he groaned, dashing the bucket’s contents on the blaze. “God help us when ’tis gone.”

“Uncle Tom,” spoke the youth imploringly, “they only want me. Let me at least make a dash for the woods. There would be a chance of escape, and ’twould draw them away from here.”

“Would they really take after Fairfax if they saw him taking to the woods?” queried Nurse Johnson abruptly.

“Of a truth, Hannah. You see they’d like to get him on account of capturing Edwards, but we won’t give him up. He’s too necessary to the country.” [Pg 192]

“Another place is on fire, friend,” screamed Sally at this moment.

Both the youth and his uncle sprang for the blaze, beating the flames with heavy wet cloths. Under cover of the excitement Nurse Johnson threw her son’s long cloak around her, caught up his three-cornered hat, and, before they realized what she was about, had opened the rear door of the kitchen and darted out.

A shout went up from the raiders, telling that she had been seen. A few scattering shots followed, then the clarion tones of the leader rang out:

“Don’t shoot, boys. Take him alive. We’ve got him now.”

“Mother!” cried Fairfax, springing toward the door. Tom Ashley caught him in an iron grip.

“Be quiet, nevvy,” he said sternly. “Hannah’s got too much wit to be taken, and she hath saved you; and all of us, for that matter. You are too valuable to the country to be given to such wretches. Even though all the rest of us perish, you must live. Now help me put out this fire. Peggy, do you run up-stairs, and see what’s happening.” [Pg 193]

Up the stairs darted Peggy, with Mrs. Ashley and Sally following after. Too eager to be cautious she flung back a shutter, and looked out. The night was now far spent, and in the dim gray light of early dawn Nurse Johnson’s tall figure was not unlike that of her son. The intrepid woman had cleared the open spaces of the yard, and was now under the great trees of the forest, with the raiders in full pursuit. A few moments, and hunted and hunters were swallowed up by the long dark shadows of the woods.

CHAPTER XIV [Pg 194]

MARCHING ORDERS

“Our bugles sound gayly. To horse and away!
And over the mountains breaks the day;
Then ho! brothers, ho! for the ride or the fight,

There are deeds to be done ere we slumber
to-night!
And whether we fight or whether we fall
By saber-stroke or rifle ball,
The hearts of the free will remember us yet,
And our Country, our Country will never forget."

—Rossiter Worthington Raymond.

It was not until morning that the farmer and his nephew succeeded in getting control of the fire. When at length it was extinguished only a few charred timbers remained of the lean-to, and the dwelling itself was badly damaged. A heap of ashes marked the spot where the barn had stood, and the scene was one of desolation. The day had come, but there was no glory in the sunshine. The dank smell of early morning rose from the dew-drenched earth, but its freshness and fragrance were marred by the overpowering odor of smoke, and wet, charred wood. In the countless trees of the forest the birds were singing, but their songs [Pg 195] fell upon unheeding ears. To the inmates of the farmhouse instead of melody the pines whispered a message of menace and despair.

"And now," spoke Fairfax Johnson, as Thomas Ashley declared that there was no further danger of fire, "now I am going to see what hath become of my mother."

"And I'll go with you, nevvy. You must not think me hard and unfeeling, boy, but just now, when men are so scarce, we cannot afford to lose one unnecessarily. To have gone out to those men would have been certain death for you, and your mother did the best thing that could have been done. To be a patriot demands a great deal of us. To die is a small matter, but how we die is much. Your work is not finished. Until it is, nevvy, your life is not yours to lose needlessly. It belongs to the country. Even though Hannah be captured, it would not follow that aught of harm would come to her. She is a woman. But come!"

"Peggy," whispered Sally, "Friend Ashley reminds me of Brutus."

"Yes," answered Peggy gazing after Fairfax with misty eyes. "Duty to country is first, of [Pg 196] course; but sometimes when the heart is torn with anguish over the sacrifice of a loved one it doth seem that duty asks too much of us. Oh, Sally! Sally! will peace ever come? Will the country ever be aught but torn and disrupted by warfare? I cannot bear it."

"Don't, Peggy," came from Sally sharply.

Mrs. Ashley, who was moving about the fire preparing breakfast, came to them quickly. She gave each girl a gentle kiss, and a soft pat, saying:

"Now, now, 'twill not do. After being such brave, helpful girls all night, are ye going to give way now? 'Twill never do, sweetings. For the boy's sake, ye must be brave. See! I have nice, hot coffee all ready. Run after them, and tell them that I want them to take a cup before going far."

"And we were going to be so brave," reminded Sally wiping her eyes.

"'Tis all my fault," said Peggy, "but 'twas the thought of——"

"Now be quick, or they will be gone too far," interrupted Mistress Ashley.

The two men were entering the confines of the forest when Peggy called to them: [Pg 197]

"Mistress Ashley wishes that ye would take a cup of coffee before going, friends. She hath it already prepared."

Fairfax shook his head.

"Mother first," he said. "I could not take anything."

The tears came again to Peggy's eyes.

"Yes, yes," she said chokingly. "Make sure of Friend Nurse's whereabouts first. How brave she was! How——"

"Did I hear something said anent coffee, Peggy?" came Nurse Johnson's voice, and from among the trees she came toward them. She was smiling, but her appearance was anything but cheerful. Her face was very pale, her hair was unbound and hung upon her shoulders in a tangled mass; her garments were dew drenched, and she limped painfully. With a bound

her son reached her side.

“Mother! mother!” was all he could say.

“I thought ye’d get through, Hannah,” cried Thomas Ashley. “I was just telling the boy so. Mary, Mary! Hannah’s come.”

With cries and exclamations of wonder and joy they gathered about her, heaping caresses upon her until the good woman begged for mercy, declaring that she was hungry, and would have no breath left wherewith to partake of food. Then they bore her into the house, and while Sally and Peggy dressed the sprained ankle, Mrs. Ashley brought coffee, and Mr. Ashley cut great slices of ham, insisting that the occasion warranted a feast. But the son remained by her side as though he feared to leave her. They grew calm finally, and then Nurse Johnson told of her escape. [Pg 198]

“’Tis naught to make such a pother about,” she said settling back comfortably in her chair, a cup of coffee in hand. “I knew that Tom wouldn’t be able to hold Fairfax much longer, and I wasn’t going to have those rascals get him if I could help it. Providence was on my side, for I seemed to have wings given me. I didn’t know that I could run so fast, but fear, aided by a few bullets, would develop speed in the most of us, I reckon.

“I had a little start of the Tories, though I knew that I could not keep it, when my foot caught in a vine, or root, and I fell. I tried to get up, but my ankle was sprained so I could not rise. Instead, in my efforts, I began to roll down the declivity, for the ground was slightly rolling where I had fallen, and over and over I went until presently the bottom was reached, and I came to a stop in a little hollow. Something stirred as I rolled into the thicket, and an animal, ’twas too dark to see what it was, though it seemed like a doe, or a fawn, leaped up and bounded away through the forest. I heard the men go crashing after it, and it came to me that if I did not move they might pass on, thinking that the deer was their prey. That is all there is to it. So you see I did naught after all. Save for the mishap of a sprained ankle, and a little chill, I am no worse off than ye are.” [Pg 199]

“Oh! but the risk, Friend Nurse,” cried Peggy.

“Was no greater than to stay here. We did not know of a certainty that the men would leave the house in pursuit. It was just a chance, but it happened to work all right. Now, Tom, what shall be done? Do you think the raiders will return?”

“’Tis hard telling, Hannah. Sooner or later they will try to get the boy again. If Edwards is hanged they will stop at nothing to effect his capture. But, Hannah, every man in the company runs the same risk. The thing to do is to have the men make headquarters here. ’Twill be of mutual benefit, for ’twill throw a safeguard about each member of the company.” [Pg 200]

“Yes,” she agreed thoughtfully.

“And the girls?” uttered Fairfax. “What of them?”

“Until we have horses we can do naught, nevvy.”

“Then horses we are going to have,” he said with determination. “I shall start for Freehold now to see what can be done. There may be other news of the raiders, too.”

“Go with him, Tom,” cried his mother quickly. “There may be skulkers in the woods.”

But Fairfax would not hear of this.

“Nay, mother,” he said. “Uncle Tom’s place is here. You are in more danger than I am, for the raiders may come back. You had your way last night; this morning ’tis my turn.”

With this he was gone. Some hours later when he returned, astride a bay mare of great beauty, he headed quite a cavalcade. Behind him rode the little company of twelvemonth men and militia of which he was captain; back of these came two large wagons. [Pg 201]

“What think you?” he cried waving a folded document excitedly in greeting. “The Council of Safety hath confirmed my commission as captain, and hath ordered me to take the company to Tom’s River to garrison the fort there. The salt works are threatened, and there is some contraband trade to be checked. We came to take you with us.”

“To do what, nevvy?” gasped the farmer, bewildered by the suddenness of the matter.

“To take all of you with us,” repeated the youth, dismounting. “Think you that I could go, and leave you here unprotected? You will be safe there. At least,” he corrected himself, “as safe as ’tis possible to be in Monmouth County. The garrison will afford more security than you would have here. I brought these wagons for the very purpose of taking you. There

must be haste, Uncle Tom. We must be off in an hour."

"But——" began Thomas Ashley protestingly, when his wife interrupted him. [Pg 202]

"Why, father! that's where Charley is. 'Tis the very thing."

So the youth had his way, and there ensued a busy hour. The wagons were shore wagons, owned by oystermen of Tom's River who were returning to that village after bringing fish and oysters to the interior, he told them in explanation of the odor that clung to the vehicles. It was great good fortune that they could be had just at this time. Presently, here they were, with Nurse Johnson, comfortably installed upon a feather-bed, Mrs. Ashley and the two girls in one wagon, while the farmer rode in the other to look after such household effects as they were taking.

Both because of Nurse Johnson and the sandy nature of the soil they were obliged to proceed in a leisurely manner, but the family, rejoicing in the sense of security afforded by the presence of an armed escort, minded neither the manner nor the mode of travel. With the buoyancy of youth, Peggy and Sally soon regained their accustomed spirits, and chatted gaily.

Above was the blue and white woof of the spring sky. The plaint of the meadow-lark and the note of the robin sounded sweetly against the stillness of the air. A trio of crows sailed athwart the blue, their great wings beating the air to slow, solemn measure. The pine woodland added shelter and picturesqueness to the road, and to the light breeze its sweet resinous odor. And Fairfax was here, there, everywhere, looking after things with all the zeal of a young officer. [Pg 203]

"You are merry," he said after a time, accommodating the speed of his horse to that of the wagon in which the girls rode. His manner had brightened perceptibly since the beginning of the journey, and he spoke lightly. "Yet I feared that you might be annoyed by the smell of fish. They are oyster wagons, you know."

"Is it fish that we smell?" cried Sally, laughing for very joyousness, and forgetting to wonder at the unusualness of his addressing them. "Methought it was the pines."

"Nay; 'tis fish," he declared. "At what are you looking, Mistress Peggy?"

"I am admiring thy horse," she replied. "'Tis a beauty. Almost as pretty as my own little mare." [Pg 204]

"Nay," he protested. "Few animals are that. Star hath not many equals."

Peggy flushed with pleasure. Praise of her little mare always delighted her.

"Thee can afford to be unstinted in thy praise when thine own mount hath so much of beauty," she remarked.

"And what has thee named her?" questioned Sally. "It should be something charming."

"A name hath just occurred to me that is both charming and uncommon," he responded, meeting her glance without blushing. It was the first time that she had seen him so much at ease in ordinary intercourse, Peggy reflected marveling. "I think," continued the youth, "that no other horse ever bore it."

"Then it must be unusual," declared Sally. "Thee makes me very curious, Friend Fairfax. What is it?"

"Marsal," he answered. A twinkle came into his eyes as he added: "After Margaret and Sally: Marsal!" Saluting, he passed on to the head of the column.

There was a gasp of surprise from the maidens, then a peal of laughter followed, so mirthful that Nurse Johnson and her sister joined it. [Pg 205]

"He hath the best of us, Peggy," cried Sally. "But who would have dreamed that he had it in him?"

"Of a truth he hath improved markedly," agreed Peggy. "I fear me that we shall have to change our tactics, Sally."

"'Tis not that he hath lost his diffidence, girls, but the reaction from fear of danger to us hath rendered him light-hearted," declared the lad's mother. "He is so relieved that 'tis easy to jest."

And this was the case with them all. So merrily the journey proceeded. The incubus of fear was lifted from them for the time, and a certain joyousness of expression was the natural

result. It was twenty-five miles from Monmouth Court House to Tom's River, and so slowly did they travel that it was not until the next evening that they emerged from the forest into a long stretch of cleared road at the end of which lay the thriving little town.

About a hundred yards to the east of the road, on a slight eminence in the center of cleared ground, stood the blockhouse. It was a rude structure, unfinished, about six or seven feet high, built of logs with loopholes between them, and a number of brass swivels on the top, which was entirely open. Indeed there was no way of entering save by climbing. A short distance beyond the fort a bridge spanned the river, for the village was situated on both banks of the stream. Four miles away the tides of Barnegat Bay swelled and ebbed through Cranberry Inlet into the ocean. It was the nearness of this inlet that gave the little place its importance. It was at this time perhaps the best inlet on the coast except Little Egg Harbor, and was a favorite base of operations for American privateers on the outlook for British vessels carrying supplies to New York. [Pg 206]

In the near vicinity of the village a gristmill, a sawmill, and salt works gave evidence of the occupations of the inhabitants; while on the river, which at this point broadened into a bay, floated the barges and boats of the fishermen, and the rafts and scows from the sawmills. The town proper consisted of about a dozen houses beside an inn, around which the dark forest seemed to crowd and press. The place had been subjected to attack several times by the British, owing chiefly to the desirability of the inlet, and the possession of the salt works. An unusual characteristic of the town was the fact that not a Tory, nor Tory sympathizer was allowed to dwell in it; which was an exceedingly uncommon feature of any place in Monmouth County. [Pg 207]

As the company drew near the blockhouse there came a sharp command from within, and over its walls scrambled a few men who drew up at attention, while drum and fife sounded a welcome to the new captain. A dazzling light of pleased surprise came into the young man's eyes, and he squared his shoulders with an involuntary movement. From the village came the people to give welcome also; for the intrepidity with which the young man fulfilled his duties, his recent exploit in capturing the noted Edwards had given him a reputation, and the town rejoiced that he had been sent to take command of the post.

With blushing modesty the lad made a stammering response to the welcome, while Thomas Ashley beamed with gratification, and his mother could scarce conceal her pride. The ceremony was ended presently, and the company took formal possession of the blockhouse. The family passed on into the village. [Pg 208]

"'Tis so interesting to be with the military," sighed Sally ecstatically as she and Peggy were preparing for bed. They had found quarters with the family of Justice Green, old friends of Mrs. Ashley. "Just think, Peggy Owen! Thee had a whole winter of it at Middlebrook. And with the main army at that. I should think thee could never find contentment in our quiet city again."

"Were we there, Sally, I'd never wish to leave it," spoke Peggy so earnestly that her friend looked up in surprise.

"What is it?" she asked quickly. "Has thee the migraine, Peggy?"

"No, Sally." Peggy was thoughtful for a moment before she explained: "These people are so grateful because the company hath come. Were there not great cause for fear they would not have so much appreciation. It looks as though they lived in dread of attack."

"And I have been feeling so secure because the blockhouse was here," exclaimed Sally. "Hasn't thee?" [Pg 209]

"I did for a time, but I am not so sure that I do now," was Peggy's response.

"Is not Fairfax a fine fellow?" queried Sally after a moment's silence.

"I wonder if thee knows how often thee says that, Sally?" Peggy turned, and gazed searchingly into Sally's face.

"I don't say it any oftener than he deserves it, miss," retorted Sally, brushing her hair composedly. "He is all that valor and modesty can make him. I heard Friend Pendleton say once that humility was the sweetest flower that grew in the human breast. Fairfax thinks so little of himself; yet he is so brave, and modest, and kind; and his uncle declares that he fights like a tiger."

"Yes?" gasped Peggy, regarding her friend with amazement. "He is all that. And what then, Sally?"

Sally laughed.

“I was just thinking, Peggy mine, that some time—oh, years and years from now, after the war is over, thee knows—we girls might want to make some additions to the Social Select Circle in the form of—— Well, partners for life,” she ended, blushing adorably. [Pg 210]

“And was thee thinking of annexing Fairfax?” cried Peggy in a paroxysm of merriment. “Oh, Sally, Sally! that I should live to hear thee say such things!”

“I? Oh, no! I was thinking of Betty. Thee knows that he would require some management, he is so bashful, and Betty——”

“I am not so sure, Sally.” Peggy was laughing so that she could scarcely talk, but she continued mirthfully: “Has thee not noticed that he is always equal to an emergency, and that he is cool and collected in danger? Sally, Sally! thee’d best give o’er such match-making plans.”

“Well, I do think ’twould be monstrously nice,” said Sally. “So there!”

“For Sally?” teased Peggy.

“Nonsense!” ejaculated Sally, reddening.

Many things contributed to dispel whatever of misgiving Peggy might have had. The people resumed their daily vocations, and while on every hand could be heard encomiums upon the ardor with which the young captain discharged his duties, the presence of the company seemed no longer to be regarded as a strict essential to safety. So the maiden’s fears were lulled to rest, and she gave herself up to the enjoyment of the seaside life. [Pg 211]

The bay daily beheld the arrival and departure of privateers, which sometimes brought prizes with them. There were boats from the different mills, and teams always loading at the wharves with lumber, salt, oysters and fish for the interior. Whenever there were prizes with the privateers, the town became a busy and lively place from the influx of visitors who were mostly business men from various parts of the state come to purchase captured vessels, or their cargoes.

Sometimes Fairfax joined them in their walks along the bay, for this was the favorite with the girls, and they could not but comment upon his increased manliness of bearing. He had found his position no sinecure. There were many farmers along the river who, while undeniably patriotic, saw no reason why they should not take the hard money of the British in New York in exchange for supplies, and this contraband trade had to be kept in check. [Pg 212] An unceasing watch was in consequence kept on the river and coasts to prevent such persons from running the blockade; the salt works had to be guarded, and a strict patrol maintained to report any advance of English or refugees.

“Thee is getting thin, Friend Fairfax,” commented Peggy one evening as the two maidens and the youth stood watching the boats on the bay. “Thee takes thy duties too seriously. Does he not, Sally?”

“Indeed he does,” agreed Sally, her blue eyes scanning the young man’s countenance with solicitude. “What hath gone amiss, friend? Something is troubling thee.”

“There is activity on Sandy Hook that denotes action of some sort by the enemy,” he answered gravely. “It hath been impossible so far to find just what the movement portends, but I fear that an attack of some kind is intended. Would that ye were at home, though I know not how to get you there.”

“And does thee fear that this is the place to be attacked?” queried Sally. “Is it the salt works?”

“Yes,” he replied. “That is one of the things that would invite assault. The works have always been a bone of contention between the two armies, and the British need of the article is pressing just at this time. Were it not that the highway from Freehold to Trenton is infested by those miscreants of the pines, I should say go with one of the shore wagons to Trenton. As it is there is naught for you to do but to stay here.” [Pg 213]

“Where there is a garrison for protection,” spoke Peggy with more lightness than she felt.

“It is small,” he said with hesitation. “Small, and the fort unfinished. I fear me that ’twill not withstand attack, even though it should be defended with stubbornness. But I must not make you uneasy. There may be no ground for apprehension after all.”

So he spoke, and knew not that at that very moment some British and loyalists from Sandy Hook were landing at Coates’ Point, a few miles to the north of Tom’s River. Here their number was augmented by the addition of a band of refugees under the Tory, Davenport. A vidette dashed into the village with the news at midnight. Almost instantly came the order: [Pg 214]

“Every man to the blockhouse! The British and refugees are approaching!”

CHAPTER XV

[Pg 215]

THE ATTACK ON THE BLOCKHOUSE

> “Last noon beheld them full of lusty life,
> Last eve in beauty’s circle, proudly gay,
> The midnight brought the signal-sound of strife,
> The morn the marshaling in arms,—the day,
> Battle’s magnificently-stern array!”
>
> —*Byron.*

The cry echoed and reëchoed through the streets of Tom’s River:

“Every man to the blockhouse! The British and refugees are approaching!”

It seemed but an instant until the village was aroused. Candles flashed in the windows, and lanthorns gleamed in the streets as the people prepared for the foe. Every man and boy capable of bearing a musket hurried to the fort, while white-faced women snatched their little ones from their cots, and huddled together for mutual comfort and consolation.

[Pg 216]

Peggy and Sally had awakened at the first alarm. Often the former had been thankful for the Quaker teaching which enabled her to retain her self-control. She felt doubly grateful for it now in the midst of a confusion that was terrifying. Men shouted hoarsely as they ran through the town: sometimes repeating the orders of their captain, sometimes calling reassuringly to the women. The wailing and crying of the children, added to the screaming of the mothers, made a commotion that was frightful. The girls were pale, but they managed to retain composure.

“Is thee afraid, Peggy?” whispered Sally.

“Yes,” admitted Peggy squeezing her friend’s hand. “I am, Sally, but ’twill not help matters to give way to it.”

“Ye are brave girls,” commented Mrs. Ashley joining them. “Let us go down-stairs. ’Tis planned to have all of the women and children come here, as this is the largest house, and ’twill give comfort to be together. If some of us remain calm it will help to quiet the others. You can aid greatly in this.”

[Pg 217]

So the Quakeresses went down among the assembled women, and, by assisting to quiet the children, helped Mrs. Ashley, Nurse Johnson, and others to bring a sort of order out of the tumult. An hour went by; then another, yet there was no sign of the enemy, and the tension relaxed among the waiting, frightened women. A few whispered that it was a false alarm, and smiled hopefully. Some slept; others sat quietly by their slumbering children, or stood about the rooms in listening attitudes. All wore the tense expression of those who face a fearful danger. Slowly the time passed, until another hour had gone by. All at once the sound of hurrying feet was heard without, and Peggy and Sally ran out on the verandah to find the meaning of it. It proved to be a scouting party sent down the river road by Captain Johnson to intercept the foe should it approach from that direction.

“I feel better out here in the air; doesn’t thee, Sally?” asked Peggy after the men had passed.

“Yes; let’s stay for a while. There is naught more that can be done inside.”

[Pg 218]

For answer Peggy slipped her arm about Sally’s waist, and the two sat down on the steps of the porch. The house was near the bay, and the restless lapping of the waves smote their ears with rhythmic dismalness. A brisk southwest wind was singing through the pines, but after the tumult engendered by the alarm, the stillness seemed abnormal. The streets were deserted now, and the only sign of life came from the dim lanthorns of the blockhouse. Nothing was stirring save the waves, the wind, and the leaves of the forest. Slowly the gray dawn crept into the sky, and still the maidens sat on the steps, silently waiting and watching.

Then, so suddenly that it drew an involuntary scream from both of them, a rifle went bang among the trees in the direction of the fort. Another report rang out, followed almost instantly by twenty or more in a volley. In the imperfect light of the dawn a number of dark forms could be seen running toward the blockhouse.

"'Tis from the Court House Road," exclaimed Sally rising quickly. "And oh, Peggy! Fairfax thought they would come the river way."

"Yes," said Peggy with despair in her voice. There seemed to be a great many of the attacking party, and she recalled Fairfax's misgivings concerning the fewness of the garrison. "And he hath sent part of his force to meet them there. I fear! I fear!" [Pg 219]

Had Peggy been aware of the full force of the attacking party she would have known that there were grounds for grave apprehension. This is what had happened: Forty loyalists, under command of Captain Evan Thomas, had embarked from New York on whaleboats manned by Lieutenant Blanchard, of the British navy, and eighty armed seamen. Landing at Coates' Point, a place near the mouth of Tom's River, they were there joined by a detachment of Monmouth County refugees under Richard Davenport. Securing a guide, the party had made a wide détour through the woods, coming upon the blockhouse from the Court House Road instead of the river road, which was the logical one to use. The small force of the garrison was outnumbered several times over by their assailants, but of this fact both sides were ignorant for the time being. All these particulars Peggy, of course, did not know. She only knew that the fort was being stormed; that the numbers of the enemy seemed multitudinous, and that the noise was deafening.

By this time the women were up; either out on the verandah, or at the windows of the upper floors of the dwelling straining their eyes eagerly toward the blockhouse. Firelocks and muskets were banging, and the surrounding woods swam in smoke. Volley after volley swept the pines, then came the thundering report of the cannon. The smoke came driving toward the town into their faces, blinding and choking them. Again and again the cannon flashed and thundered. Again and again came the dense black pall of smoke. But so long as the fort stood the village was safe, and breathlessly the anxious women waited the issue, striving, when the smoke lifted, to catch glimpses of what was occurring. [Pg 220]

A CRY OF ANGUISH WENT UP.

For a considerable time the report of musketry and the cannonading was incessant. The assault on the part of the enemy was furious, and was met by the defenders with great firmness and gallantry. Suddenly the sound of the cannon ceased. The women gazed at each other in alarm. What did it mean? Had the garrison repulsed the foe, or was the ammunition exhausted? For a little longer the volleys from the muskets continued unabated, then these became fewer, until presently only a few scattering reports sounded. Soon the firing stopped altogether. The countenances of the women blanched. What was taking place behind those clouds of smoke? [Pg 221]

As if in answer to the question, the smoke cleared. Through the whirling rifts they caught glimpses of the sky, the tree tops, and finally of the blockhouse itself. An awful cry arose from the women. The walls were partly down, and a terrific hand-to-hand struggle was taking place between friend and foe. There followed a few moments in which attackers and attacked were indistinguishable. Then, high above the clash of pike and bayonet, sounded the terrible command:

“No quarter! No quarter! No quarter!”

A dreadful moment succeeded when the air resounded with the screams of wounded and dying men, the agony of the conquered. The blockhouse had fallen.

A cry of anguish went up from the women. A cry so terrible, so heart-breaking in its bereavement that Peggy and Sally covered their ears to shut out the awfulness of its desolation. This was war in its most fearful aspect. War, civil war, that knows neither mercy [Pg 222] nor compassion. War, the Juggernaut that rides to victory on a highway of women’s hearts, watered by women’s tears. O Liberty! thou art as the breath of life to man. Without thee he were a base, ignoble thing! We cannot set thy metes and bounds, for thou art thine own eternal law. Thou art the light by which man claims kinship with his Maker. And yet, at what price art thou bought? At what price! At what price!

The tragedy darkened.

A tiny tongue of flame darted up from one corner of the doomed fort. At a little distance another showed luridly. Presently the whole structure was a mass of flames. Trussed like fowls, the prisoners were taken to the oyster boats on the river, and thrown in unceremoniously. The barges and scows not wanted by the conquerors were scuttled and sunk, or fired and burned to the water. Then, with shouts of triumph, the yelling horde of British and refugees came toward the ill-fated village.

As though paralyzed with fear the terrified women waited their approach. Of what use to flee? All that made life dear was about them. That gone, what was left? And so they looked [Pg 223] on in the numbness of despair while their houses were stripped and the torch applied. House after house burst into flame, and pitchy clouds of vapor obscured everything. Suddenly the women were galvanized into action as the enemy approached the house near which they stood. It was the only one remaining. As though animated by one impulse they turned and fled into the forest.

Peggy found herself running with the others. In all her short life she had never been so possessed by blind, unreasoning terror as she was at that moment. When at length tree and sky, and objects resumed their normal relation, she found that she and Sally were clinging to each other, and sobbing convulsively. And Sally was saying something. Peggy could not comprehend at first, but presently the words came to her clearly:

“We must go back, Peggy. We must go back.”

“Why?” whispered Peggy, her voice filled with the horror of the scenes she had witnessed.

“Because, because,” sobbed Sally, “there must be wounded. Oh, the poor, poor fellows!” [Pg 224]

Peggy made a violent effort to collect herself.

“Yes,” she said. “Thee is right, Sally. We must go back.”

Soon they regained a degree of composure, and then they turned back. When again they came into the village, or rather the place where the village had been, the enemy had gone, but the destruction was complete. Not a dwelling stood, the salt works, the grist-mills, the lumber mills, even the little boats of the fishermen had been destroyed. Of that busy, lively, little town not a vestige remained. Shudderingly but with the resolution to be of service, if service should be necessary, the two girls made their way to the spot where the blockhouse had stood. As they drew near they saw the form of a woman moving among the bodies of the dead. She limped slightly, and they knew it was Nurse Johnson.

“Friend Nurse! Oh, Friend Nurse!” cried the girls running to her.

“He is not here,” said Nurse Johnson apathetically. “They carried away some prisoners; he [Pg 225] must be among them.”

“Then he can be exchanged,” cried Peggy, a gleam of joy irradiating her countenance. “Oh, I’m glad, glad!”

Nurse Johnson smiled wanly.

“I shall know no peace until I find where he is,” she said. “I am glad that you are safe. Why

came ye back from the woods? The British have just gone."

"The wounded," cried the maidens together. "We must care for them."

"Only the dead lie here," she told them with terrible composure. "Did ye not hear the order to spare none? There was no quarter given after the surrender. 'Tis that which makes me fearful for my son."

With that she sat down upon the bank of the river, and bowed her head upon her hands. One by one the women stole back from the forest. Each went first to those still forms lying so quietly, searching for father, husband, son or brother among them; then silently sat down among the ashes, and bowed her head. The little children stifled the sobs that rose in their throats, awed by this voiceless grief, and crept softly to the sides of their mothers, [Pg 226] hiding their faces against them. More than a hundred women and children were stripped of everything, and rendered homeless, widowed and orphaned by the attack.

As though unable to bear the sight of such sorrow, the sun hid his face behind a cloud, and the forest lay in shadow. The waters of the bay sobbed in their ebb and flow upon the sands, and the wind that sighed through the pines echoed the wail of the grief-stricken women:

"Desolate! Desolate! Desolate!"

CHAPTER XVI [Pg 227]

"OF WHAT WAS HE GUILTY?"

"Close his eyes; his work is done!
What to him is friend or foeman,
Rise of moon, or set of sun,
Hand of man, or kiss of woman?

"Fold him in his country's stars,
Roll the drum and fire the volley!
What to him are all our wars,
What but death bemocking folly?"

—*George H. Boker*.

There is no time when man so realizes his helplessness as in the presence of great affliction. So now Peggy and Sally, wishing to give comfort but at a loss how to do so, withdrew a short distance from the stricken ones, then they too sat down. The girls were in sore need of consolation themselves, for they were faint and weary after the trying ordeal through which they had passed. It was therefore no wonder that through utter exhaustion they fell into slumber; for youth and weariness will assert themselves against the tyranny of [Pg 228] nerve-racking stress. A slumber that was of short duration.

A drop of rain splashed suddenly upon Peggy's hand causing her to start up in alarm. She looked about her quickly. The sky was covered by dark, lowering clouds which hung above them like a pall. The wind had veered to the east and a fiercer note had crept into its moaning. Instead of the soft lapping of the tide there was an angry menace in the waves breaking turbulently upon the shore. A storm was coming, and they were without shelter. The girl ran to Nurse Johnson and touched her gently.

"'Tis going to rain," she cried, her clear young voice ringing out with startling suddenness. "Does thee not think that we should try to get somewhere, Friend Nurse?"

Nurse Johnson glanced at her dully, then at sight of the overcast sky she rose hurriedly.

"You are right, Peggy," she said. "'Tis time for action now. We must give way to grief no longer. Help me to rouse these women."

A patter of rain which fell as she finished speaking, brought a realizing sense of the

situation to the women, and bravely they rose to meet it. For one short hour they had [Pg 229] indulged their sorrow. In the greatness of the calamity that had overwhelmed them there had seemed to come an end of everything. That Freedom might live they had been bereft of all, but life with its responsibilities still remained, so resolutely they put aside their woe to take up again the burden of living. Though loth to leave the bodies of the brave dead there was no alternative, so presently a sad procession wended its way into the Court House Road. As the forest was neared there issued from its confines a small body of armed men followed by several wagons. A cry of gladness burst from Sally at sight of the leader.

"'Tis Friend Ashley," she cried. "Does thee not see, Peggy? 'Tis Friend Ashley!"

It was indeed Thomas Ashley. Full of amazed incredulity, for they had believed him to be among the prisoners taken by the enemy, his wife, Nurse Johnson and the girls ran to greet him.

"And Charley, father?" cried Mrs. Ashley. "Where is Charley?"

"With Hannah's boy, in the hands of the British," he answered. "Now, now, mother! don't [Pg 230] give way. Prisoners can be exchanged, so he is not lost to us. Others did not fare so well."

But underneath his assumed cheerfulness Peggy detected anxiety. He did not linger talking, but bustled about helping the women into the wagons. The rain was falling heavily now, and there was need for haste. A small party of men was detached from the main body to go on into the village to bury the dead of both sides. The British had left their fallen ones to be cared for by the Americans, and generously the duty was performed. At length all was in readiness, and the journey toward shelter was resumed.

"And thou, friend? How did thee escape?" questioned Peggy as Thomas Ashley rode up beside the wagon in which the family sat.

"I was one of the scouting party that nevvy sent down the river road to intercept the enemy," he answered. "We were to take their fire while falling back on the blockhouse, but we did not see any signs of them. Alarmed at this, we scoured the woods to find where they [Pg 231] were, when suddenly we were set upon by a party of refugees. A lively skirmish ensued, but the enemy was in superior force, and soon had the victory. In the disorder and confusion following the surrender a few of us made our escape. Meantime we heard the cannonading and knew that the blockhouse was attacked, but by the time we could make our way back to the village, the fort had fallen, and the British were burning the town.

"There was no sign of the women and children, but as the foe put off down the river with the prisoners, a friend crawled out of the bushes to tell me that the women had fled to the forest. It seemed best under the circumstances to go for aid for them, so we scattered to get it. Of course I am glad to be with you," he ended huskily, "but 'tis pity that it could not be either Charley or nevvy."

"They are young, friend, and perhaps can stand imprisonment better than thee could," consoled Peggy. "And, as thee hath said, they can be exchanged, so after a short time all of us will be together again."

"Yes, father," spoke his wife. "Peggy is right. It hath all happened for the best, I dare say. [Pg 232] They might have been killed, and you also. So we won't grieve, but try to bear the lads' captivity as best we may. I do wish though that we could go home."

"We are going to, Mary; just as soon as I can find some one to take us there. There will be many to care for who have no place to go, and 'tis the right thing to make the charge as light as possible."

"And we shall be as safe there as anywhere," she said eagerly. "I shall be glad to get home."

Peggy's glance met Sally's, and her own wistfulness was reflected in Sally's eyes. They too would like to be home out of this turbulence of warfare, but knowing that these friends would take them were it possible they gave no voice to their longings.

As the journey proceeded parties of men swung into the road from all directions bound for the devastated town, bearing food, clothing, and medical necessities for the stricken inhabitants. The news of the attack had flown over the county like wild-fire, and the people rallied to the aid of the victims of this latest outrage, vying with each other in a generous [Pg 233] contest as to the care of the villagers. It was found best to apportion a certain number to each party, and Farmer Ashley's family being in better condition than many of the others were among the last to find an abode. Tarrying only long enough to rest and refresh themselves, for they were anxious to return to the farmhouse, they were soon on their way thither.

“How glad we were to leave here,” exclaimed Sally when at length they drove into the familiar yard. “And now how good it seems to get back!”

“Yes,” sighed Nurse Johnson. “Would that we had never left the place. Then the boys would not be in the hands of the British.”

“You never can tell, Hannah,” remarked the farmer. “Had we stayed here there would have been another attempt to capture nevvy, and we might not have got off so well as we did before. It’s about as broad as ’tis long. Then too, nevvy had to obey orders from the Council of Safety, so he would have had to go to Tom’s River. Edwards, I hear, is sentenced to be hanged; naturally the Tories would have been after the boy hot-foot.” [Pg 234]

After the total annihilation of the village of Tom’s River, the damage to the farmhouse seemed inconsiderable, and it was with a sense of rest that the girls entered the pleasant and homey kitchen. And now for a time there was peace from molestation of any sort, and the short period of repose brought healing to their bruised spirits.

In some manner Thomas Ashley contrived to learn that Fairfax had been carried to New York, and subsequently to Sandy Hook, where he was confined in the hold of a guard-ship. Simultaneously with this information came the news that Edwards, the refugee leader whom the young captain had captured, had been shot while attempting to escape, and the county exulted that at last it was rid of such a desperado.

So the soft days of April passed until ten had elapsed since the return from Tom’s River. It seemed to Peggy that never before had there been so beautiful a spring, and she spent much time among the sweet scented things of the garden. There came a morning when all the earth was kissed with scent, and all the air caressed by song. The two maidens were out [Pg 235] under the blossoming trees, and their talk turned, as it frequently did, upon the absent Fairfax.

“’Tis such a lovely day, but poor Fairfax cannot enjoy it,” uttered Sally pensively. “How long doth it take for an exchange, Peggy?”

“I believe ’tis done in order of capture, Sally. Those who are taken first are first to be liberated. And rank also hath much to do with it. A captain would not be exchanged until a captain of equal rank could be given for him. As to militia officers I know not how ’tis managed. But whatever can be done, Friend Ashley will do. He hath influence with the principal men of the county, and will no doubt use it for Fairfax’s release. He is proud of his nephew. Methinks he grieves over the lad’s imprisonment as much as his mother does.”

“I think he does, Peggy. Then too, he hath the welfare of Monmouth County so much at heart, and Fairfax was especially vigilant in suppressing the incendiary acts of the Tories [Pg 236] and refugees, that he is missed. I hope he is well treated. ’Tis dreadful to be confined in such weather!”

“I like not to think of it,” remarked Peggy with a sigh. “I wish we had not teased him so; yet what sport it was to see him mantle.”

“There were times when I thought he liked it as well as we did, Peggy. And he was beginning to hold his own with us. There was wit in the conceit of naming his horse after both of us.”

“I wonder what became of that horse,” exclaimed Peggy. “Would that Friend Ashley had it! He hath need of it for his trips into Freehold.”

“The enemy must have taken it. They destroyed everything that they did not take, and horses are valuable plunder. I saw naught of any animal after the town was burned.”

Both maidens became silent at the mention of that dreadful time. Neither willingly spoke of it, and any reference to the affair was casual. Peggy stooped and picked a sprig of tender grass, and began to bite it meditatively.

“Friend Ashley comes back early,” she remarked glancing over the fence into the road. [Pg 237] “Methought he was not to return until nightfall.”

“Why, that was the intention,” answered Sally. “I heard him tell his wife that ’twould be late ere he came back. I wonder why he did not stay?” She went to the fence and leaned upon it, gazing with some curiosity at Thomas Ashley’s approaching form. “Peggy,” she called quickly, “something is wrong. Does thee not see?”

“He is ill,” cried Peggy as the farmer stopped suddenly in his onward way and leaned against a tree. “Let us go to him, Sally.”

There was no gate near where they were standing so the girls climbed to the top of the

fence, then jumping lightly down on the other side, they ran hastily to Farmer Ashley.

“Is thee ill, friend?” queried Peggy. “Thee seems sick.”

“Sick? Ay! sick at heart, child.” Thomas Ashley turned to them such a woebegone countenance that the maidens uttered cries of dismay. His face was lined and drawn, and into his kindly eyes had come an expression of care. He seemed no longer a robust, middle- [Pg 238] aged man, but somehow old and feeble.

“Lean on me,” cried Peggy slipping her strong young arm about him. “Sally and I will help thee into the house.”

“Not yet,” he said. “Not yet. Let me collect myself before I face Hannah.”

“There is bad news of Fairfax,” cried Sally. “What is it, friend?”

“The worst,” he answered brokenly. “The lad is no more.”

“What does thee mean, friend?” gasped Peggy. “Is he—— No; thee can’t mean that he is—dead?” Her voice sank to a whisper as she uttered the word.

Thomas Ashley let his face fall into his hands with a groan.

“Peggy! Sally! Where are you?” Clearly, Nurse Johnson’s voice came to them. A moment later she herself came down the road. “Are you in hiding that you do not answer?” she asked. As there was no response from any of them she glanced from one to the other anxiously. “Something hath happened,” she said. “What is it, Tom?”

But the farmer cowered before her. [Pg 239]

“How shall I tell you, Hannah?” he cried piteously. “How shall I tell you?”

“It is about my son,” she said quickly. “Tell me instantly.” As Thomas Ashley continued unable to speak she added with passion: “Don’t keep me waiting. Am I not his mother? Who hath a better right to know if aught hath befallen him?”

“No one,” he answered her. “No one, Hannah. I would rather die than tell you, yet I must. Hannah! Hannah!” Sobs burst from him that racked his body. “They hanged him this morning.”

A cry of horror broke from Sally and Peggy, but Nurse Johnson stood as though turned to stone.

“Hanged?” she said. “My boy! What are you saying, Tom Ashley?”

“The truth,” he cried with bitter grief. “The truth, God help us, Hannah. The loyalists took him from prison, and brought him to Gravelly Point, where they hanged him this morning. ’Twas because of Edwards, they said. An express brought the news into Freehold. That boy, that noble, gallant boy hath been hanged like a criminal!” [Pg 240]

“But of what was he guilty? What crime did he commit?” Her calm was terrible to see, and Peggy involuntarily took a step toward her, but Sally stayed her quickly.

“Of what was he guilty, Hannah? Why, of repelling the invader. Of trying to stay the ravages of the enemy. He committed the crime of which Washington, and Jefferson, and Franklin, and John Adams are guilty: the crime of patriotism.”

“But he was a prisoner? A prisoner taken in open warfare. How could such an one be hanged?”

“By all the code of civilized warfare he could not,” broke from the farmer passionately. “They have done it in defiance of the code. But there shall be retaliation, Hannah. Eye for eye,” he cried lifting his clenched hands and shaking them fiercely above his head. “Tooth for tooth, life for life. There shall be retaliation.”

A sudden, wild cry burst from her:

“Will that give me back my son? Oh, my boy! My boy!” And she broke into a passion of [Pg 241] weeping.

The farmer motioned the girls away when they would have gone to her.

“Let her weep,” he said, controlling his own emotion with difficulty. “’Tis Nature’s way toward helping her to bear it. Come! leave her for a time.”

So the maidens crept to their own little room to give vent to the sorrow that filled them. The shy fellow had endeared himself to them, and his untimely end affected them deeply.

The days that followed were sorrowful ones. Nurse Johnson was completely prostrated, and Mrs. Ashley added to her woe a great anxiety for her own son. It fell to the lot of Peggy and Sally to look after the household affairs, and they were thankful for the occupation.

The last sad rites were performed at Freehold. Wrapped in his country's flag, Fairfax Johnson was buried with all the honors of war. But with the firing of the last volley the indignation of Monmouth County blazed forth. A single deed of violence and cruelty affects the nerves more than when these are exercised upon a more extended scale, and this act [Pg 242] was peculiarly atrocious. The cry of Thomas Ashley sounded upon every lip: Retaliation! The cry grew as all the details of the inhuman murder became known.

The young man had been charged with being privy to the killing of Edwards, even though he pointed out to his captors that the refugee's death had occurred after his capture. The opportunity to rid themselves of so active an adversary, however, was not one to be neglected; so, without listening to a defense, or even going through the form of a trial, he was hurried to Gravelly Point by a band of sixteen loyalists under Captain Lippencott, a former Jerseyman and an officer in a refugee regiment, The King's Rangers, and there hanged. It was said that he met death with great firmness and composure. Upon his breast was affixed the label:

"Up goes Johnson for Frank Edwards."

The country, a little later England and the entire civilized world, stood aghast at the atrocity of the incident. A prisoner taken in open warfare hanged! Such a thing was unheard of. Such execution should be dealt a spy, an informer, a deserter. But a prisoner of [Pg 243] war—— Even barbarians deal not so with an honorable foe. It was therefore no wonder that the cry of Monmouth County reached into every part of New Jersey, growing deeper and fiercer. Retaliation! It passed on, and spread into every state. Everywhere the cry was taken up by the press and the people: Retaliation! What had happened to a prisoner from New Jersey might very well happen to a prisoner from any state. The matter must be stopped before it proceeded any further. The grievance of one was the grievance of all. The issue was no longer local, but national. The cry rose and swelled into a volume. As with one voice the entire people of the new nation demanded retaliation.

And the cry was heard in the halls of Congress. And it was heard on the banks of the Hudson by Washington. Heard and answered. A stern demand went to Sir Henry Clinton for Lippencott, the leader under whose command the dastardly deed had been committed. For Lippencott, else the act should be retaliated upon by the death of one of the British prisoners of war.

CHAPTER XVII

[Pg 244]

A GLIMPSE OF HOME

"And as the shell upon the mountain height
Sings of the sea,
So do I ever, leagues and leagues away,
So do I ever, wandering where I may,
Sing, O my home! sing, O my home, of thee."

—*Eugene Field.*

"Peggy, does thee know that Fifth Month is upon us, and that we have been here nearly two months?" Sally turned from the open window by which she was standing, and looked at Peggy with eyes full of longing. "Shall we ever go home, I wonder!"

"I hope so, Sally." Peggy was making the bed in their little room, and she smoothed the wrinkles out of the coverlid as she continued: "Friend Ashley hath no horses, and he hath been busy, as thee knows. I make no doubt but that a way will soon be opened for us. I think both he and Friend Nurse would be glad to find one for us."

"So long as we could be of use I did not mind it so much," went on Sally. "But matters are [Pg 245] beginning to move in their accustomed groove, and I cannot but wherrit anent what thy mother and mine are thinking."

“Yes, I know. I hardly dare think of it, but I am hoping as I said, Sally, that a way will soon be opened. Thee must not dwell too much upon it, but be as brave as thee can be.”

“Friend Nurse hath another visitor,” announced Sally, turning again to the window. “This seems to be some one of great importance, for he hath a fine coach. I wonder who it is?”

Peggy came to Sally’s side, and leaned out of the window.

“That is Governor Livingston,” she cried. “Does thee not remember I told thee how the enemy tried to capture him when I was at Middlebrook? I knew him quite well there. He and father are friends.”

“Friend Nurse would wish thee to see him if she knew that, Peggy. Does thee not think thee should go down?”

“I’ll wait a little,” said Peggy. “No doubt he wishes to see her about something concerning [Pg 246] Fairfax, and therefore he would rather speak alone with her. Thee knows that Sir Henry Clinton refused to give up the leader, Lippencott, but ordered a court-martial. ’Tis reported that His Excellency just waits the finding of the investigation before he acts.”

It was two weeks after the burial of Fairfax, and the farmhouse had become a veritable Mecca to travelers. From all over the state they came to learn the full particulars of the affair, and to offer sympathy to the bereaved mother. The storm of protest which the lad’s death raised had so startled the British general that the Honorable Board of Associated Loyalists had been dissolved, and there were no more incursions into New Jersey from that source. Even the pine robbers, as though appalled by the deed, ceased their depredations for the time being, and the highways were comparatively safe. As visitors reported this improved condition of things, Peggy and Sally grew anxious to take advantage of it to return home, but no good opportunity had as yet presented itself.

“Peggy,” called Nurse Johnson a half hour later, “come down-stairs a moment. There is [Pg 247] some one here who knows you. Bring Sally too.”

Peggy sprang up quickly.

“Come, Sally,” she cried. “I have a feeling that——”

“So have I,” exclaimed Sally breathlessly. “Let’s run, Peggy.”

“Bless my soul, Miss Peggy,” ejaculated the doughty governor, as the girls entered the kitchen. “Who would have thought to find you here? And this is your friend, Miss Sally, eh?”

“I am glad to see thee, sir,” said Peggy warmly. “And how are thy wife and daughters?”

“Well, I thank you. They are with me at Trenton. By the way, Mistress Johnson here hath been telling me what a time you’ve had trying to get home. Knowing what a care girls can be, I have three of my own, you remember, I have consented to take you off her hands.”

“Nay,” protested Nurse Johnson, “they have been no care, sir. I really do not know what we should have done without them during the past few weeks. ’Tis only that we do not know [Pg 248] when strife will break out again, and I shall be uneasy while they are here. I do not wish their mothers to mourn as I am doing.”

“Well, have it your own way, madam,” he answered. “If the young ladies do not mind an old man for a cavalier I shall be pleased to take them with me to Trenton. The journey to Philadelphia can be easily arranged from that place.”

“We are glad to accept, Friend Livingston,” spoke Peggy gratefully while Sally was so delighted that she could only look her thanks. “And when does thee wish to start?”

“I must get to Trenton to-day, Miss Peggy. It will mean a long, hard ride, and I hope you can be ready, say in an hour, though the time might be stretched a little, if it were absolutely necessary.”

“An hour will be more than sufficient, sir,” she replied. “We will surprise thee by being ready before that.”

“I know that you are able to do many things, Miss Peggy,” he said smiling, “but if you and your friend are able to get ready for a journey in that length of time you will give me a new [Pg 249] estimate of girlhood.”

“We will show thee,” she cried eagerly as they left the room.

But their very anxiety threatened to defeat their purpose. Had not both Nurse Johnson and Mrs. Ashley helped them the governor must have had the best of it. As it was they were

ready a quarter of an hour before the time set. Then came the farewells. In spite of their desire to go the maidens found it very hard to say good-bye. There is a bond between those who have endured much together, and the girls had become almost a part of the family. Both Nurse Johnson and Mrs. Ashley could not control their tears, and Farmer Ashley wrung their hands again and again. The maidens' own eyes were soft with weeping, and they silently took their places in the coach.

Nurse Johnson had told Governor Livingston the trials which the girls had undergone, so now as the coach rolled away, he spoke cheerily:

"When my girls start on a journey I give them three mile-stones to get over weeping. Susannah usually sniffs for two more before she begins to laugh. I am wondering how many will do for you girls?" [Pg 250]

"We are going to cheer up right now, aren't we, Peggy?" spoke Sally wiping her eyes.

"We are indeed," answered Peggy resolutely.

"Now that's sensible," he commended warmly. "See that orchard over there. How beautiful it is! So full of bloom. There is nothing to my mind prettier than blossoming trees. Indeed, I am fond of trees of all kinds."

And so he talked, kindly directing their attention to anything of interest by the wayside, until soon both girls were chatting with more animation than they had known for weeks. They reached Trenton that evening, and stayed with the governor's family that night. A stage-coach and wagon ran between Princeton and Philadelphia by way of Trenton and Bristol three times a week. It happened that the next morning was one for the tri-weekly trip, and the girls insisted upon taking the coach. It would mean another day of hard riding, but they were anxious to get home.

"And we will have all the rest of our lives to rest up in," declared Sally. "For I don't believe that anything will ever tempt me to leave Philadelphia again. Peggy, did thee feel like this when coming back from thy other flittings?" [Pg 251]

"Yes, Sally. It hath always proved hard to get back because of the enemy. I think it always will until we have peace. I don't want to leave home again either."

"If ever we get there," said Sally looking fearfully out of the coach window. "Peggy, when the governor's family insisted that it would make too hard a journey to take the stage to-day, I just felt that if we didn't come something would happen to the coach so that we couldn't."

"I am glad we didn't wait, though it does seem as though the stage goes very slowly. It fairly crawls."

Sally laughed.

"I dare say any vehicle would seem to crawl to us, Peggy. But we are going home, home. Oh, I could just shout, I am so glad."

It was late that evening when the stage drew up before the Indian Queen in Fourth Street. Leaving their portmanteaus to be called for, the girls fairly ran down the street, turning presently into Chestnut Street. [Pg 252]

"Is thee afraid, Sally?" asked Peggy pausing before her home. "If thee is, mother and I will see thee home."

"Afraid in Philadelphia?" cried Sally. "Why, there are neither raiders nor pine robbers here. No; go right in, Peggy. I'm going on to mother. I will see thee to-morrow."

She was off as she spoke, and Peggy mounted the steps, and sounded the knocker. Her mother gave a faint cry as she opened the door.

"My daughter!" she cried. "Oh, Peggy, Peggy! I have feared for thee."

And Peggy crept into her arms, feeling that no harm could come to her in such loving shelter. It was long before she was calm enough to tell all that had happened, but at length sitting by her mother's side with her head on her lap, she related what had occurred.

"The poor boy!" sighed Mrs. Owen. "It is too dreadful to think about it. And his mother! I read of it, Peggy, in the paper. Thee can imagine my feelings knowing that thou wert in the midst of such occurrences. And Sally's mother hath been well-nigh crazed. Ah, my daughter! I am thankful to hold thee in my arms again, but my heart bleeds for that other mother who will nevermore clasp her son." [Pg 253]

“And he was such a dear fellow,” said Peggy brokenly. “And so brave! Thee should have seen how he fought the pine robbers. In just the short time that he was in Monmouth County he had made a reputation. And he was as modest as he was brave, mother.”

Mrs. Owen stooped suddenly so that she could look into her daughter’s eyes.

“Was thee very fond of him, Peggy?” she asked softly.

“So fond, mother.” Peggy met her mother’s look frankly. “Sally and I both were. Thee would have been too had thee been with him long.”

The anxious gleam which had shone for a second in Mrs. Owen’s eyes faded at Peggy’s answer, and she said quietly:

“I liked him very much as it was, my daughter. The matter hath created quite a stir in the city. Nothing but retaliation is talked of. Report hath it that General Washington expects a speedy adjustment of the matter when the new British commander comes. They expect him in a few days. It is a sad affair. But oh, Peggy! I am glad thee is home!” [Pg 254]

“And I never want to leave Philadelphia again,” cried Peggy. “It seems so hard to get back when I do go away. No; I never want to leave it again.”

“That is unfortunate, Peggy.” Her mother stroked her hair gently. “David hath writ that he is to be stationed at Lancaster all summer, and that, as ’twas possible to get a comfortable house there, he would like for us to come to him. We might then all be together once more. But thy experiences have been most trying, my daughter. Father would understand if thee feels that thee would rather stay here.”

“Why, mother, if I am with thee and father I won’t mind,” spoke Peggy quickly. “Of course I love Philadelphia, for it is my own city. No other place seems quite like it to me; but, after all, home is where our loved ones are. If I can be with thee and father, I will not mind where I am.” [Pg 255]

Mrs. Owen kissed her fondly.

“I am glad that thou hast so decided, Peggy. It would have been a great disappointment to David had it been thought best not to come. His visits home have been infrequent, and we have not been together much since the winter at Middlebrook.”

“And when do we go, mother?”

“In about a week. Robert Dale hath some business with General Washington, and is at Newburgh now. He will act as our escort on his way back to Lancaster.”

“Is Robert to be there all summer?”

“I believe so. He thinks we shall like Lancaster. The Congress met there while the British held this city, thee remembers?”

“Yes, mother. Oh, ’tis so good to be with thee!” Peggy laid her head down in her mother’s lap with a sigh of content. “I don’t believe that any other girl ever had so dear a mother as thou art.”

Mrs. Owen laughed softly.

“I wonder what Sally is thinking,” she said.

CHAPTER XVIII [Pg 256]

HEROD OUT HERODED

“But what is life?
’Tis not to stalk about, and draw fresh air,
From time to time, or gaze upon the sun;
’Tis to be Free. When Liberty is gone,
Life grows insipid and has lost its relish.”

—Addison’s “Cato.”

“Is thee nearly ready, Peggy? Robert should be here soon with the wagons.”

“Yes, mother.” Peggy ran to the head of the broad staircase to answer Mrs. Owen’s call. “There are but few more things to pack. Sally is helping me.”

“That is well, my daughter. Only——”

“Only let our fingers work while our tongues fly?” completed the girl merrily. “We will, mother dear. Does thee hear, Sally?”

“I hear,” laughed Sally as Peggy reëntered the chamber. “I think thee is the one to heed, miss. I am as busy as can be.” She worked industriously on the portmanteau for a few moments, and then looked up to say, “I am glad that thee is going to ride Star, Peggy.” [Pg 257]

“So am I,” answered Peggy as she donned her riding habit. “Father wrote that there are some excellent roads about Lancaster, and that, as he had a good mount, we might have some fine rides together. It will be quite like old times. I wish thee was going, Sally.”

“Well,” hesitated Sally, “I would like to be with thee, Peggy, but I should not like to leave mother again. I am glad to be home, and quite content to stay here for a time. But I shall miss thee, Peggy. Particularly as Betty is to leave so soon.”

“Betty to leave? Why, where is she going? I had not heard. She was here yesterday, and she said not a word anent going away.” Peggy paused in her dressing, and regarded Sally inquiringly.

“She told me to tell thee, because she could not bear to,” replied Sally, her tears beginning to fall. “Oh, Peggy, our Social Select Circle will soon be no more. Betty is going to marry her Frenchman, and go to France. She said that she would write thee all the particulars.”

“Oh, Sally, Sally! How we shall miss her! Why, how can we get along without her?” [Pg 258]

“We can’t.” Sally closed the portmanteau with a vicious snap. “I never did care much for the French alliance, and I think less of it than ever now.”

“Sally, thee won’t do anything of the kind, will thee?” asked Peggy tearfully. “I could not bear for thee to go away.”

“I? Oh, I shall never leave Philadelphia, Peggy. I shall always stay right here, and be a nurse.”

“Dear me! there’s mother calling again,” cried Peggy in dismay. “We have been talking in very truth instead of working. There is so much that I should like to hear about Betty. I think she might have told me. What a belle she hath become, and how pretty she is! So all thy plans for her and Fairfax would have gone awry, had the poor fellow lived!”

“Peggy, does thee think that he really cared for her?”

Peggy’s brows contracted into a thoughtful look.

“I don’t know,” she responded. “He was of a truth much interested when he saw her. She was very sweet that day. It was when Clifford was here, thee remembers?” [Pg 259]

“I remember, Peggy. If thee sees thy cousin will thee tell him all about how I came to show Sheriff Will the closet?”

“Yes, Sally. I will.”

“And if thee gets into trouble, and can’t get home, if thee will let me know I’ll come for thee,” said Sally impressively.

Peggy laughed.

“There won’t be any trouble about it this time, Sally. Father and mother are with me, and they will arrange everything.”

“Thy mother is calling again, Peggy. We will have to go down. Be sure to write, and I will keep a journal for thee of Betty’s doings. She is to have so many things from France. Would thee were to be here!”

“I should like to be,” answered Peggy opening the door. “We are coming at last, mother.”

Quite a caravan awaited Peggy’s coming. There were a number of wagons, some containing Continental stores for the military at Lancaster; others filled with private property belonging to citizens, and still others which contained household articles which Mrs. Owen [Pg 260]

was taking for her use. All were under a strong guard. A roomy and comfortable calash had been provided for the lady, in which Peggy was to ride also when she should become tired of the saddle. Robert Dale, with the reins of his own horse thrown over his arm, stood waiting by Star's side to help Peggy mount.

"We were thinking that we should have to become brigands and carry you off, Peggy," he remarked as the girls joined them.

"Thee will not wonder that I was delayed when I tell thee the news, Robert," answered Peggy as, with the youth's assistance, she vaulted lightly into the saddle. "Oh, Sally, I do wish thee was going!"

"And so do I, Sally," spoke Robert.

"I should like to be with both of you, but I am glad to be in Philadelphia for a time," replied Sally. "Tell him about Betty, Peggy."

They were off at length, going by way of High Street across the Middle Ferry into the Great Lancaster Road. The distance was something more than sixty-five miles, and it was the [Pg 261] intention to make it by brief stages. The road had formerly been known as the King's Highway, and was famed for the number of its taverns, which were jestingly said to be as many as its mile-stones. There was, therefore, no difficulty in making each day's journey as long or short as might be desired.

Peggy felt her spirits rise under the influence of the sunshine, the refreshing fragrance of the morning air, and the ride among scenes of romance and beauty. It was a country of rolling hills and gently sloping vales through which they passed, with occasional rocky dells and low cascades. A country of orchards, meadows, and woodlands; a country of flowing water, salubrious, fertile and wealthy; dotted with a few villages and many fine farms. The road ran incessantly up and down hill through dense woods of oak, hickory, and chestnut. The face of the country seemed like a great rolling sea, and it was no wonder that the girl's heart grew light as the ride unfolded the pleasing and picturesque landscape to view.

On the afternoon of the third day Peggy and Robert cantered ahead of the party for a short [Pg 262] dash, but the road becoming hilly and steep they were obliged to slow their horses down to a walk. The road ascended the North Mountain here rising by three ridges, each steeper than the former. Below them lay the valley, enclosed on the left by the Valley Mountain with all its garland of woods; and by the Welsh mountains on the right. Hills and rocks, waving with the forests of oak and chestnut, bordered the road and, as their leaves rustled to the wind and twinkled in the sun, gave to the depth of solitude a sort of life and vivacity. Peggy had been telling Robert Dale about the attack on Tom's River, and all the sad details of Fairfax's death. Following the narrative a silence had fallen between them which was broken abruptly by Peggy.

"Look yonder, Robert! Something hath befallen a wagon, and there seems to be no one near it. To thy right. Does thee not see?"

Major Dale uttered an exclamation as his glance followed Peggy's index finger.

"You are right, Peggy," he cried. "Something is amiss there. The wheel hath been broken, [Pg 263] and the wagon abandoned, yet 'tis full of merchandise. This must be looked into."

He gave spur to his horse, and dashed forward followed closely by Peggy. A wagon, one of the Conestoga sort, was drawn to one side of the road, and left under a tree. One of the wheels was broken, but there was no sign of horse or driver to be seen, though in truth the vehicle was filled with goods.

"Well, this is a strange proceeding," mused the young man. "Here we must needs have an armed guard for the safe arrival of our goods, yet this wagon stands on the broad highway unmolested. I'll take a look at these goods. It may be——"

"Good-morrow, friends," spoke a soft voice, and from behind some bushes a feminine form arose, whether maid or matron could not be determined at once, so voluminous were her wrappings. Her whole exterior, as well as her speech, showed that she belonged to the Society of Friends.

A long cloak of dark-gray superfine cloth enveloped her form completely. A small bonnet of gray taffeta silk was tied primly with a demure bow under her chin. It left not a wisp of hair [Pg 264] visible. A riding mask covered her face so that only a finely turned chin was to be seen. So suddenly did she appear that both Robert and Peggy were guilty of staring. The youth was the first to recover himself.

"I cry you pardon, mistress," he said springing from the saddle, and approaching the

newcomer. “If this be your wagon, you are in trouble. Are you all alone?”

“And if I am, friend, what is it to thee?” The words as well as the manner of the questioner caused the young man to flush, but he answered promptly:

“A great deal. You are in trouble, and alone upon the highway. I repeat, ’tis a great deal to me, as it would be to any man to find a woman so situated.”

“Thee must give me thy pardon, friend. Methought the query was prompted by idle curiosity. By a great oversight my driver forgot to put his box of tools in the wagon, so that when the accident occurred he was obliged to ride on to the next tavern for help. I doubt not but that he will return soon.”

“But the distance to the next tavern is six miles. It was unwise to leave you here alone upon the road. Do you not know that these highways are not safe?” [Pg 265]

“I have seen no one; nor hath any spoke with me before this. I fear naught.”

“But it should not be,” he said with decision. “Peggy, do you think that your mother——”

“Mother would be pleased to offer the friend a seat in the calash, Robert.” Peggy unfastened her riding mask as she spoke, and turned toward the Quakeress warmly. “I am Margaret Owen,” she said. “And this is Major Dale, of the army. My mother is just beyond yon bend of the road in her coach. She will be charmed to have thy company to the next inn, and farther if thee wishes.”

“And I am Truelove Davis,” returned the other, acknowledging the introductions with the briefest of bows. She did not remove her mask, Peggy noted with surprise, but she was conscious that the girl was regarding her intently. “Perchance,” continued the newcomer, “perchance it would not be agreeable to thy mother to do this charity.”

“Nay, it is thou, friend, that dost lack charity, to suppose any one unwilling to do so simple a kindness.” Peggy’s voice reflected her pained amazement. Friends usually accepted such favors with the same simplicity of spirit in which they were offered. [Pg 266]

“Nay, I meant no offense, Margaret, I think thee called thyself so. I make no doubt but that thy mother is most gracious.”

“Indeed she is,” said Robert Dale warmly. “I will ride back and explain the matter to her. The wagons should be hurried up a bit, also. I will see to the mending of this wheel, mistress, and send the wagon along with ours. It is most unwise to leave it here with its contents unprotected. Will you come, Peggy?”

“Nay, let the damsel abide with me until thy return,” spoke Truelove Davis quickly.

Robert glanced at Peggy questioningly.

“I will stay, Robert, if the friend wishes it,” said Peggy.

He saluted and remounting his horse sped back down the road. The Quakeress turned toward Peggy mildly.

“Did not the son of Belial call thee Peggy?” she asked. [Pg 267]

Peggy felt the slight irritation that had assailed her but a moment since return at this remark, so she answered with dignity:

“Major Dale so called me. All my friends speak of me as Peggy.”

“’Tis pity to spoil so fine a name as Margaret by substituting Peggy for it. I much mislike the practice.”

“I do not,” responded Peggy briefly.

“I fear thee is frivolous, Margaret,” chided the other serenely.

All in a moment Peggy was amused. She reflected that this Friend must come from one of the country districts where observances as to demeanor and dress were much stricter than in the cities. She was, no doubt, conducting herself according to the light that was in her, and with this view of the situation Peggy’s ruffled feelings were soothed.

“I fear so too, Truelove,” she said laughingly. “Quite frivolous. Now thine own name: Did none ever term thee True, or Love? Either would be sweet.”

“Thee must not utter such things,” reproved the other in a shocked voice. “’Tis indelicate for maidens to even speak the word love. Where is thee going?” [Pg 268]

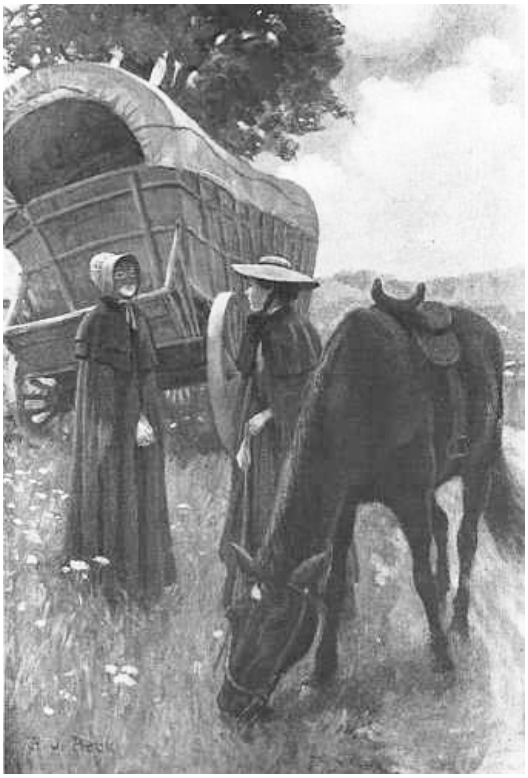
“To Lancaster, to be with my father, who is stationed there.”

“Stationed there? Is not thy father of the sect of Friends? Thou art using the speech.”

“Yes; but he is in the patriot army, Truelove.”

“Defying those who are set to rule over us? Hath he not been taught to bear meekly that which Providence hath called us to suffer? Where did he learn of Fox to retort violence for violence, or that shedding of blood was justifiable? And does thee hold with these misguided Whigs, Margaret?”

“I do,” answered Peggy shortly. She had dismounted, and was letting her pony graze while she awaited Robert’s return. A slight regret that she had offered to let this Quakeress be her mother’s companion assailed her.



“WHERE IS THEE GOING?”

“And was thee not punished for it?” Truelove Davis was regarding her with a curious steadiness of gaze that Peggy found extremely irksome. If she would but remove that riding mask, she thought, she could talk to her better. “Did the friends bear in silence that thee and thine should depart from their peaceful practices?” [Pg 269]

“They read us out of meeting,” replied Peggy controlling herself with difficulty. “Father, nor any of us, did not embrace the Cause of Liberty without due thought. It did seem to us that life was not of worth unless it were accompanied by Freedom. To be free to worship God in our own fashion was the reason that the Great Founder built our city on the Delaware. England would have taken religious freedom from us also had not her oppression with regard to political rights been checked. It was not without the guidance of the inward light that we arrayed ourselves with Liberty, Truelove.”

“Sometimes what one thinks is the leading of the inward light is but the old Adam that is within us tempting to strife,” remarked Truelove provokingly. “I greatly fear ’tis so in thy case, Margaret. ’Tis easily seen that thou art of a froward and perverse nature. Come! sit by me, Margaret, while I read thy duty to thee. Thou art in need of a lesson.”

“Not from thee.” Peggy’s eyes were sparkling now, and she spoke with some heat. “Who art thou that ’tis thy duty to read me a lesson? Thou art a stranger, met but a moment since. I listen to no lesson from thee, Truelove Davis.” [Pg 270]

“And there spoke the Owen temper,” came from the other severely.

Peggy turned toward her quickly.

“What know thee of the Owen temper?” she asked in amazement.

“Everything, Margaret. How hot and unruly it is. I well know how it doth refuse advice, howsoever well meant. Thee should be sweet and amiable, like me.”

“Like thee?” Puzzled, perplexed, and withal indignant, Peggy could not help retorting. “Will thee pardon me, Truelove, if I say that thy amiability lacks somewhat of sweetness?”

“Nay; I will not pardon thee. Lack somewhat of sweetness indeed, Mistress Margaret Owen! Does thee think thee has all the sweetness in the family? Obstinate, perverse Peggy!”

With a cry Peggy sprang toward her.

“Thy face!” she cried. “Let me see thy face. ’Tis Harriet’s voice, but Harriet——” [Pg 271]

“Is before you.” The girl unclasped the mask and revealed the laughing, beautiful face of Harriet Owen. “Oh, Peggy! Peggy! for a Quakeress you did not show much meekness. So you would not take a lesson from a stranger, eh? You should have seen your face when I proposed it.”

“But how did thee come here, Harriet? And why did thee assume this dress?”

“Come sit down, and I’ll tell you all about it,” said Harriet, giving her cousin a squeeze. “Don’t be afraid, Peggy. I promise not to teach any lesson. I should not dare to. But oh!” she laughed gleefully. “I shall never forget how you looked. You’ll be the death of me yet, little cousin.”

CHAPTER XIX [Pg 272]

THE TURN OF THE WHEEL

“From every valley and hill there come
The clamoring voices of fife and drum;
And out in the fresh, cool morning air
The soldiers are swarming everywhere.”

—“Reveille,” Michael O’Connor.

“But first, Harriet, do take off that bonnet, and let me see thee as thou art really; with thy hair about thy face. So.” Peggy reached over and untied the bow as she spoke, then removed the prim little bonnet from her cousin’s head. “How beautiful thee is,” she commented gazing at the maiden with admiring eyes. “I think thee grows more so every time I see thee. That bonnet doth not become thee.”

Harriet shook back her chestnut ringlets, and laughed gaily. Her wonderful eyes, dancing with mirth, were starry in their radiance.

“One would think that I did not make a good Quakeress, Peggy, to hear you talk. Now confess,” pinching Peggy’s cheek playfully, “you did not dream that I was aught other than Truelove Davis; did you?” [Pg 273]

“N-no; and yet thee puzzled me,” said Peggy. “Oh, Harriet, thee should turn play actress.”

“Well, there are times when I think of it, cousin mine. ’Tis rare sport to make others believe that I am that which I am not.”

“But why did thee do it, Harriet? And to be here alone on the highway!”

“I wanted to see Clifford, Peggy. Neither father nor I had heard aught from him since the misfortune at Yorktown, save that he was at Lancaster. We knew not whether he was ill or in health, or whether he was meeting with kindness or not. As your Congress permits supplies to be sent to the captured British it occurred to me that I might come along with them and find out about my brother. Of course, as the Most Honorable Council of Pennsylvania had banished me from the state, I dared not come openly, so I slipped in by the back door, as it were.

“Father would not hear of my coming at first. Then I dressed up in this garb, and went in to where he sat talking with the new commander, Sir Guy Carleton, who hath come to take Sir Henry Clinton’s place, and neither one of them knew me. Sir Guy declared that there would be no danger, as a Quakeress would meet with respectful treatment anywhere. He gave me [Pg 274]

a pass which would further insure my well being, and so, when a boat load of stores was shipped to Head of Elk the first of this week, I came with it. Everything hath gone off well until this breakdown, and I do not regret that, since it hath brought us together. So you see, Peggy, the matter is very simple after all."

"Yes," said Peggy. "Harriet, thy brother was at our house in Third Month."

"He was?" exclaimed Harriet. "Tell me about it, Peggy."

And Peggy told her all that had happened on that memorable first of March, with its consequences.

"So the Council hauled you and Sally up before it, did it?" cried Harriet. "Oh, dear, Peggy! you are always getting into trouble over us, aren't you? And Sally, and Robert, and Fairfax, [Pg 275] all helped you in the affair. That makes me feel sorry about Fairfax Johnson. Do you know, Peggy, that matter hath created quite a stir in New York? There were many who wanted Sir Henry to turn over Captain Lippencott to the rebel general, but the court-martial found that he was acting under verbal orders from the Honorable Board of Associated Loyalists, and so should not be punished for obedience. Sir Guy is not altogether satisfied with the finding."

"It was very sad, Harriet," said Peggy, the tears coming to her eyes. "Fairfax was only doing his duty in defending the state from invasion, and 'twas most inhuman to execute him in such a lawless manner. Our people are not satisfied to let the matter rest, because 'twas a crime committed in open defiance of the laws of war."

"Oh, well," spoke Harriet lightly. "Don't let's talk about it, Peggy. I dare say Sir Guy Carleton and your General Washington will arrive at some understanding regarding the affair. Is that your mother's coach coming?"

"Yes. She will be glad to see thee, Harriet. She is fond of thee. And Robert Dale is beside [Pg 276] her. Thee will like him, Harriet. Indeed, I know not how one could help it."

"Indeed, my cousin?" Harriet's brows went up quizzically. "I thought you were all for Captain Drayton? I rather prefer this Major Dale myself. He hath more manners than John Drayton ever had."

Peggy's face flushed, but she observed quietly:

"They are both dear lads, Harriet. Thee will see John also at Lancaster. Father said that he had been sent there."

"Then it will be quite like old times, Peggy. At Middlebrook there were John Drayton and your father to take us about. If we have Robert Dale, in addition to Clifford, we should have a gay time."

"Perhaps," was Peggy's answer.

A look of intense amazement appeared upon Robert Dale's face as he rode up. He had left a demure Quakeress with Peggy, and returned to find this beautiful, radiant girl. Both girls laughed at his bewildered expression.

"'Tis my Cousin Harriet Owen, Robert," explained Peggy. "She hath assumed this dress that [Pg 277] she might go through to Lancaster with safety to see her brother, Clifford."

"But—but Truelove Davis?" The youth was plainly nonplused.

"He wants Truelove, Peggy," cried Harriet her eyes dancing with mischief. "Where is that bonnet?" She caught it up as she spoke, tying it again under her chin. "Does that please thee better, friend youth?" she asked turning toward the young man roguishly.

"Would that I were a limner to paint you," burst from the young fellow impulsively.

Harriet smiled charmingly as she swept him an elaborate courtesy.

"In that thee does not agree with my cousin, friend. She doth not consider the bonnet becoming. In truth, I fear me that I did give her rather a bad quarter of an hour when I wore it."

"Harriet?" exclaimed Mrs. Owen looking out of the calash which by this time had come up to where they were. "Why, child, how came thee here? Robert thought——"

"Yes, I know," cried Harriet. "I know what Robert thought, but 'tis as you see, madam my [Pg 278] cousin. If I may ride with you I will explain all." Into her voice there crept the supplicating quaver that Peggy remembered so well. Her mother responded instantly to the plea.

“Why, Harriet, thou art doubly welcome. Once for the stranger whom we thought thee, and again for thyself. Get right in with me, child, and tell me all that hath befallen thee. Why, ’tis long since I have seen thee.”

“How beautiful she is,” spoke Robert Dale as he and Peggy rode on after Harriet had climbed into the coach beside Mrs. Owen. “How beautiful she is!”

“Is she not?” asked Peggy eagerly. “Methinks she grows more so every time I see her. Does thee not think so too, Robert?”

“I do not know, Peggy. This is the first time I have ever seen her. When you were at Middlebrook I was with General Arnold in Philadelphia. When you were in Philadelphia I was with the army, and so you see, Peggy, this is my first glimpse of your cousin.”

“Why, so it is, Robert. No wonder thee thinks her beautiful when ’tis the first time thee has [Pg 279] seen her. Every one does. Are not her eyes dazzling?”

“They are, Peggy. Now tell me why she appeared in this garb here.”

“It was to see how Clifford fared,” answered Peggy. “She hath not heard from him since Yorktown, and she wished to see for herself how he was.” And forthwith she related all that Harriet had told her of the matter.

“That is very brave, Peggy,” he declared with admiration. “Brave and daring! What love she must bear him to risk so much to see him! I should like to know her better.”

“Thee shall, Robert,” she cried, warmly pleased with this whole-hearted commendation of her beautiful cousin. “Harriet rides well, and she shall ride with thee part of the way.”

And so with Harriet alternating with Peggy in riding Star the rest of the journey was passed. They came into Lancaster the next day, the tall spire of the court-house with the two faces of its clock being the first thing to be spied. The town swarmed with soldiers. It seemed to Peggy that there was one on every corner. In truth Lancaster was in fair way [Pg 280] toward being a military camp. The Americans found much difficulty in disposing of their prisoners. They had no military posts regularly fitted for the purpose, and could suggest no better means for securing them than to place them under guard in a thickly settled part of the country, where the inhabitants were most decidedly hostile to the English. So Reading, Carlisle, and Lancaster were chosen in Pennsylvania, together with other points in Virginia and Maryland remote from the coast. In addition to the prisoners from the surrender of Saratoga, who had been hurried into Lancaster at the first invasion of Virginia, many prisoners of Lord Cornwallis’s army were confined there. This required a large number of American soldiers for guards, and it was no wonder that the town seemed overrun with troops.

The streets of Lancaster were regular, and paved with brick like those of Philadelphia. It was the most important of the interior cities, and was noted for the manufacture of guns, stage-coaches, stockings, and the peculiar vehicles known as Conestoga wagons.

Peggy, who was on Star when they entered the town, was gazing about with the interested [Pg 281] pleasure that a new place always excites, when she gave an exclamation of joy. They were passing the Black Bear Tavern at the time, and at the entrance of the inn stood a well-known form.

“John!” she called. “John Drayton!”

Captain Drayton turned at the call, and an expression of delight swept over his face at sight of the girl. With the jaunty gesture she knew so well he took off his cocked beaver, and came to them quickly.

“Peggy,” he cried, his gladness at seeing her plain to be seen. “You are come at last. Your father told me that you were coming, and I have watched every day for a week for you. Major Dale hath all the luck, to bring you. I should like to have gone, but I could not get leave.”

“And how does thee do, John?”

“Well, Peggy. Well indeed. By the way! you know, I dare say, that your Cousin Clifford is here. I am barracks’ master, and the prisoners are confined in the barracks. Is it not a strange turn of the Wheel of Fortune that he should be in my charge, when a little less than [Pg 282] a year ago I was a prisoner under him? He doth not relish it much, either. Is your mother in the coach, Peggy?”

“Yes; with Harriet,” answered Peggy.

“Harriet!” he ejaculated amazed. “Now what doth Harriet want? I thought we had those cousins where they would not trouble you again.”

“Have you seen the lady of whom you speak, Drayton?” asked Robert Dale abruptly.

“Often, major.” Drayton laughed merrily. “There is not much love lost betwixt us, either, although I owe much to her for rescuing me from an exceedingly embarrassing position. She would not let me thank her because, she informed me, that what she did was for Peggy. Now what doth she want, Peggy?”

“She wants to see how Clifford fares, John. Thee is kind to him, I know.”

“I do all that I can, Peggy, because he is your cousin. I’d do much more if he would allow me. You know he never liked me, and he would actually deprive himself of necessities if he had to receive them at my hands.”

“Will thee let us see him, John?”

“Certainly. We are not very rigid. We keep a strict guard to prevent escape, but otherwise we give the prisoners many privileges. I will speak to your mother now, and Harriet.” [Pg 283]

A cloud came to Robert Dale’s brow as he heard Mrs. Owen say:

“John, dear lad, if thee can get away from duty why not get inside with us, and go on to the house? Then we shall all be together once more.”

“Thank you, madam,” answered Drayton with alacrity. “I was hoping that you would ask me. I shall be pleased.”

“I did not know that Captain Drayton was so well known to your family, Peggy,” remarked Robert with some stiffness.

“Why, we have known him for years, Robert,” replied Peggy. “Doesn’t thee like him?”

“He is one of the most daring, dashing, reckless officers in the service, Peggy. Whenever there is anything of an especially dangerous nature to be done, John Drayton is the first fellow to be named in connection with its performance. I have always had a high regard for him. At least until——” He paused in some confusion. [Pg 284]

Peggy laughed out suddenly, and a sparkle of mischief came into her eye.

“At least until thee found that we knew him well. Is that it? What unworthy people we must be that the mere knowing us would render him unfit for thy regard.”

“Now, Peggy,” he began protestingly, then he too laughed. “I am the unworthy one,” he acknowledged humbly. “I did feel a pang that you people should know him so well, and I not know it.”

“Fie, Robert! As though we had not room in our hearts for many friends. Each hath his own peculiar nook, and thou hast thine.”

CHAPTER XX [Pg 285]

A SLIGHT EMPHASIS ON “THAT”

“Of all the numerous ills that hurt our peace,
That press the soul, or wring the mind with anguish,
Beyond comparison, the worst are those
Which to our folly or our guilt we owe.”

—John Strange Winter.

“And you will take Peggy and me to see Clifford this morning, won’t you, Cousin David?” Harriet smiled brightly over the breakfast table at David Owen as she spoke. Despite the long journey the girls had awakened betimes, and appeared looking so radiant and so thoroughly wholesome that Mr. Owen had declared that they surpassed the morning itself in brightness.

“Thou wilt have to wait until about noon, Harriet,” he answered smiling at her kindly. “I have some work which must be attended to first. When that is done I shall be at thy

service.”

“And when thee does go, Harriet, try to persuade thy brother to give his parole, that he may visit us,” exclaimed Mrs. Owen. “I quite long to see the lad, and John said that there was no reason why he should not be at large, if he would but give his word not to go beyond the limits of the town.” [Pg 286]

“I’ll make Clifford see reason,” said Harriet confidently. “He doesn’t like John Drayton, and therefore does not wish to accept any favor from him.”

“But why should he dislike him, lass? Drayton hath been kindness itself to him.”

“You see, Cousin David,” explained Harriet with a charming blush, “Clifford cannot rid himself of the idea that Captain Drayton may have been in favor with me. Once I made a shirt which I gave to the captain in sport. It seems that he twitted Clifford about it, and Clifford tore the garment up. I believe they came to blows over the matter, and there hath been bad feeling between them ever since.”

“That would explain many things,” spoke Mr. Owen musingly. “There is certainly strong dislike on Clifford’s part. Thou art sure that thou hast given no cause for the feeling, lass?”

“Why, I dislike John Drayton extremely, Cousin David. He wears his beaver in what he supposes is a jaunty fashion over his right eye, and he swaggers when he walks. How could one show him favor?” [Pg 287]

Mr. Owen laughed.

“The lad does swagger a bit, Harriet, but ’tis not an offensive swagger. As to his hat: ’tis a standing joke of the army as to how he keeps it on in battle. The hotter the fight the further on the side it gets. I saw a letter that General Greene writ to His Excellency in which he declared that Drayton fought with it on his right ear all through the battle of Hobkirk’s Hill. John was made a captain for valor shown during that engagement. General Greene says that if it ever gets an inch further down he will be a general, sure. Thee is pleased over that, Peggy?”

“Oh, Peggy is hopeless where Captain Drayton is concerned,” cried Harriet. “I have never known her to do aught but stand up for him, except when she thought him a deserter at Yorktown. Even then she would not talk against him.”

“Well, he is very deserving, lass. All his mannerisms are those of youth. Underneath them I agree with Peggy that thee will find John Drayton of sterling worth.” [Pg 288]

“To my mind he does not compare with Major Dale,” said Harriet. “He hath obtained the rank of major, and hath not found it necessary to bring his ear into service as a resting place for his hat, either.”

Even Peggy joined in the laugh which this remark caused.

“Well, I must to work, to work,” ejaculated Mr. Owen rising. “I would much prefer to stay with you, but I must get to work. Be ready at noon, girls.”

“What is his work?” questioned Harriet as the door closed behind him.

“’Tis in regard to thy people, Harriet,” Mrs. Owen told her. “I make no doubt but that thee knows already that there is a great deal of illicit trade carried on betwixt thy people in New York and some of our citizens. ’Tis David’s duty to examine all goods that are brought into the town to see that none are contraband.”

“Then would he have to examine the wagon load of stores which I came with before it could be given to our soldiers?” asked Harriet. [Pg 289]

“Of course, child. If there is naught contraband in it thee need have no uneasiness. As soon as they are passed upon they are turned over to Major Gordon, a paroled British officer who hath charge of the prisoners here. He distributes them according to the need of the prisoners. The table stores are divided equally.”

“Oh!” uttered Harriet thoughtfully. After a moment she turned to Peggy. “And how shall we amuse ourselves, Peggy, until ’tis time to go to Clifford?”

“Let’s go through the house and grounds,” suggested Peggy. “Thee would like to see them, would thee not?”

“Yes,” answered the girl. “Shall we go now, Peggy?”

The house was roomy enough to house the family comfortably without too much care in its

ordering, having a wide piazza in front, with a kitchen, bakehouse and oven in the rear. There were large grounds,—part orchard, part garden, and part meadow-land. But the maidens were most pleased with the great number of flowering shrubs about the grounds. [Pg 290]

“There are going to be heaps and heaps of roses, Harriet,” cried Peggy delightedly. “Just see the buds! The color is already beginning to show through the green.”

“I see,” replied her cousin, pausing beside a lilac bush to break off a fragrant cluster of blossoms. “I do wish I had brought my horse, Fleetwood. Your father spoke of rides, Peggy, but I see not how I can go with you.”

“Father will, no doubt, get thee a mount, Harriet. Of course ’twill not be Fleetwood, but thee won’t mind that, will thee?”

“No, Peggy.”

It was just noon when David Owen came for them. The prisoners confined at Lancaster were for the most part kept in barracks, but many were permitted at large on parole so that the streets swarmed with them. The house was but a half mile from the barracks, and this distance was soon traversed.

A strong stockade with four blockhouses, one on each corner, enclosed the barracks. Captain Drayton met them just as they passed through the stockade gates.

“This way,” he said, leading them across the parade-ground where a company was drilling. [Pg 291] “I sent for Captain Williams to be in the anteroom. He should be there waiting for you. I did not tell him who wished to see him.”

Major Dale was standing at the entrance of the barracks, and the party stopped for a moment’s chat with him. Presently Peggy passed on into the anteroom. Clifford was sitting disconsolately by a table with his head resting on his hand. He was pale, and thinner than she had ever seen him, but his resemblance to her father was more marked than ever. He cried out at sight of her.

“Peggy,” he cried springing to his feet, “is this what that Yankee captain meant by sending for me? Cousin David said that he expected you, but he did not tell me that you had come.”

“I just came last night, my cousin,” she answered scanning his face with deep concern. “And how is thee?”

“Oh, I’m all right,” he answered carelessly. “That is,” he added hastily, “as right as one well can be who is a prisoner.”

“Mother is here too, Clifford. She wishes to see thee so much. We want thee to be with us, [Pg 292] my cousin, while we are here, and Captain Drayton hath said that thee might come and go at thy pleasure if thee would give thy word not to try to escape.”

“Drayton is very kind,” he remarked, his lip curling. “I give no word to him of any sort. Why, Harriet!” he broke off abruptly. “How did you get here?”

“Hasn’t Peggy told you all about it?” cried Harriet running to him. “Oh, Cliff, ’twas such a good joke that I played on her. I made a stricter Quakeress than she does. You see we had not heard from you for so long that ’twas quite time that some of us looked you up. Sit down, and I’ll tell you about it.”

“Father ought not to have permitted it,” he observed, when she had finished the recital. “I don’t see why he did. I like it not, my sister.”

“Nonsense, Cliff! there was no danger. Peggy can tell you that there was no risk of my being thought other than I seemed.”

“I like it not,” he repeated. “And now, Harriet, what will you do? It doth not seem wise to [Pg 293] me, or right for you to return to New York.”

“I shall stay with Peggy for a time,” she told him easily.

“We shall be pleased to have her with us, my cousin,” spoke Peggy instantly, noting his troubled glance.

“But she may have to remain until peace, which may be long in coming, Peggy.”

“I think not, Clifford,” spoke Harriet, before Peggy could make any response. “If we enforce the new policy which Sir Guy Carleton hath inaugurated, America will be glad to have peace on any terms.”

“I have heard of no new policy,” he said somewhat curtly. “What is it?”

“You have scarcely been in the way of hearing new things, my brother. Know then that the colonies are to be so harassed from all sides that they will sue for peace. On the frontiers,” she exulted, seemingly unmindful of Peggy’s presence, “and on the coasts.”

“There hath been too much of that already,” he said grimly. “It hath brought us into [Pg 294] disfavor with the entire world. Take the death of Fairfax Johnson, for instance, which was the direct result of such a policy. ’Twas a base and ignoble act to murder him; for it was murder.”

“Englishmen did not do that, Clifford. ’Twas the loyalists.”

“Englishmen sanction the act while they retain Lippencott, the murderer,” he answered. “Have they given him up yet?”

“No, of course not,” she responded. “The court-martial exonerated him. You would not feel about the matter as you do, Cliff, if you had not known Fairfax. Sir Guy hath also another plan of which I am not at liberty to speak. And, Cliff, I wish you would have Major Gordon come in here. I have something to say to him.”

“Why, Harriet, you do not know him,” exclaimed Clifford, turning a startled glance upon her. “What could you possibly have to say to him?”

“I want to tell him about the goods that I brought, my brother,” she made answer.

“I did not understand that you brought them,” he said. “I thought you merely took advantage of the fact that they were being sent to come with them.” [Pg 295]

“Why, so I did, Cliff.”

“Then there is no need to send for the major,” he said firmly. “The goods pass through Cousin David’s hands, and are then turned over to Major Gordon for distribution among us. He will get them without you troubling about them.”

“Very well,” she said. “Then let us talk about ourselves. Madam our cousin wishes you to take dinner with her to-day. Cousin David was called away by some matter pertaining to his work just as we were coming in, but he said that he would join us presently to insist upon your going. You must not refuse, Clifford. ’Twould be churlish.”

“Clifford, do come,” pleaded Peggy. “There is so much to talk about that we cannot begin to say half of it here. And Sally. I have somewhat to tell thee of Sally.”

“I do not care to hear anything concerning Mistress Sally,” he said loftily. “Naught that you can say anent the lady interests me.”

“Thee is unjust, my cousin,” began Peggy, when Harriet interrupted her.

“That is simply pig-headedness, Cliff. If Sally Evans said that she did not betray you, then [Pg 296] she didn’t. That’s all there is to it. When you come to know these Quakers as I do you will find that they always speak truth.”

“Thank thee, Harriet,” said Peggy gratefully, not a little delighted that her cousin should speak so warmly. “But I won’t say anything more to thy brother anent Sally if he does not wish to hear it. Sally would not like it.”

“’Tis close in these barracks,” cried Harriet rising. “Let’s call John Drayton, so that you can give him your parole, Clifford. We are to have dinner at two. It will be ready by the time we are there.”

Clifford Owen’s lips set in a straight line of determination, but before he could speak the door opened to admit David Owen, Robert Dale, and John Drayton. The countenances of all three were very serious, and Peggy felt her heart begin to throb with anticipation of approaching disaster. Something had gone amiss. What could it be? Harriet noticed nothing unusual in their appearance, and flashed a brilliant smile at them.

“You are just in time, Cousin David,” she cried, “to help us persuade this obstinate brother [Pg 297] of mine to give his parole to Captain Drayton.”

“A moment first, lass.” David Owen’s voice was very grave. “Tell me what was in the wagon in which thee came?”

“There were supplies for our soldiers, sir,” she answered. “Table stores and clothing. Why do you ask? Your Congress permits them to be sent.”

“True, lass,” he said. “True. Does thee know what my work here is?”

“I did not know until this morning,” she told him gazing at him fearfully. “Then I learned

that it was to check the contraband trade which is held betwixt your people and mine."

"That is it exactly," Mr. Owen made answer. "Harriet, it gives me much pain, but I must ask thee if thee——"

But at this point Clifford Owen went quickly to his sister's side, and faced Mr. Owen boldly.

"Of what do you accuse my sister, sir?" he asked. "Hath she not just said the wagon contained stores for our soldiers?"

"Yes, lad; but it also contains many pounds of goods which are illegal to bring to thy soldiers." [Pg 298]

"And if it does contain such articles she knows naught of how they came there," spoke the youth wrathfully, his face white with anger. "We are not traders, sir. Harriet would not stoop to smuggle goods here. Why do you not ask the driver concerning the matter?"

"He hath disappeared, Clifford. I pray thee to permit thy sister to answer for herself." Mr. Owen spoke with great mildness but none the less firmly.

Harriet's face became pale as he turned toward her. Her gaze clung to his as though fascinated.

"What did you find, Cousin David?" she half whispered.

"A false bottom in the wagon, together with false sides, which gave the vehicle capacity for five hundred pounds of contraband goods," he told her.

"Truly?" she cried, sitting bolt upright. Her wonder and amaze were such that none could doubt her sincerity. "Why, they did not tell me about that. Truly, truly, Cousin David, I knew naught about that." [Pg 299]

Was there the slightest emphasis on the "that"? Peggy asked the question of herself almost unconsciously. She glanced at the others. The faces of her father and Robert Dale were glowing with relief and satisfaction. Clifford's belligerent attitude had relaxed slightly at his sister's declaration. John Drayton's glance alone met hers with understanding.

"I believe thee, lass," cried Mr. Owen heartily. "Robert here would have it that thee knew naught of the matter. Thee understands that 'twas my duty to probe the affair."

"Why, it's all right, Cousin David," she returned sweetly. "You had to do your duty, of course, and there's no harm done. And I thank you, Major Dale, for your belief in me. I shall never forget it." The tears came into her lovely eyes as she spoke, making them lovelier than ever.

"I knew that you would not be guilty of such a thing," exclaimed Robert Dale fervently.

"And now let's go home for dinner, and forget all about this little unpleasantness," exclaimed Mr. Owen. "Clifford, lad, we can't leave thee here. My wife will not forgive us if we do so." [Pg 300]

Again Clifford's lips set in an obstinate line, but Drayton spoke quickly:

"Captain Williams, I know how it irks you to be obliged to give me your parole; so, if you will go with Mr. Owen, or the major here, to General Hazen, he will receive your parole."

For a moment Clifford struggled with himself. Then he said, and the effort it cost him was plainly visible:

"I can be as generous as you, sir. I give you my word of honor that I will make no attempt to escape while I am at large."

"Thank you," said Drayton simply. "You are at liberty to go with your relatives, sir."

Peggy lingered for a second behind the others.

"Isn't thee coming too, John?" she asked.

"Not to-day, Peggy. Clifford will enjoy it more if I am not there. Odds life! he did well to give that parole. He deserves to have one day free of me. But, Peggy, I'll come out to-night, if I may. And don't worry about that wagon. I'll take it in hand while your father is not here." [Pg 301]

"Was there anything else contraband in the wagon, John?" she queried anxiously that evening when the two found themselves alone on the piazza.

"Yes. The quartermaster was about to turn it over to Major Gordon when I told him I would

take another look through the contents. Peggy, in a barrel of vinegar was a water tight cask just filled with goods. That slight emphasis on 'that' lost the British a pretty penny. I was alone when 'twas found, Peggy, so that no one knows about it but us two. We won't let your father, her brother, or Dale know about it. They all believe in her so, and I owe her something for what she did for me at Yorktown."

"Perchance she really does not know any more about this than she did about the false bottom to the wagon, John."

"It may be, Peggy. We will give her the benefit of the doubt, but it does look suspicious. She is not so high minded as her brother is."

"John!" Peggy hesitated and then spoke quickly: "Thee knows how proud I am of her, and [Pg 302] that I am fond of her. She is so beautiful and brilliant that I cannot help but be glad when she is with us. But there is always an uneasy feeling too. Is there any mischief to the cause that could be done here?"

"No," he answered emphatically. "Aside from bringing in goods for the illicit trade there is but one thing that could be done now, Peggy, and that thing Harriet will never do. 'Twould be to peddle those illegal goods to the country folk about here. Harriet won't do that, Peggy."

"No, she would not do that," agreed Peggy.

"Then set your mind at rest concerning her. We have the goods which she was sent to bring. She will never know that all have been found; so there is mutual satisfaction on both sides. If you can get any enjoyment out of her presence, Peggy, do so."

"Thank thee, John. Thee has set my mind completely at rest," said Peggy.

CHAPTER XXI

[Pg 303]

CHOSEN BY LOT

"Sound to arms! Call in the captains,—
I would speak with them!
Now, Hope! away,—and welcome gallant Death!"

—"*Cataline*," *Croly*.

Enjoy Harriet's presence Peggy did. Never had the English maiden been more charming. Her vivacity, her endless sallies of wit and humor, and her unfailing store of anecdotes rendered her irresistible. Peggy had always been her mother's assistant in the household but now, quite to the amazement of both mother and daughter, Harriet insisted upon helping.

"I have been a guest long enough," she laughingly protested in answer to Mrs. Owen's remonstrance. "Father declares that you are an excellent housewife, madam my cousin. He would be pleased indeed to have me learn of you. Beside," she added with a most charming blush, "I dare say that I shall have a house of my own to look after some day; so 'tis quite [Pg 304] time that I knew something of housewifery."

And marveling greatly at this change in the once indolent Harriet, Mrs. Owen took the girl forthwith under her wing, and spent long hours instructing her in the mysteries of housekeeping. But the time was not all devoted to labor. There were lighter hours in which the maidens took daily rides. There was also much dining about among the officers, their families, and the neighboring gentry of the town and neighborhood. As the weather became warmer picnics followed in the near-by woods, so that there was no lack of diversion. In these pastimes Clifford was an almost constant attendant. Mr. and Mrs. Owen had pressed him to become an inmate of their home, which, being on parole, he was at liberty to do, and he had accepted. The young people made a lively household, and it seemed to Peggy that it was the happiest time that she had enjoyed since the long, grim, weary years of fighting had begun. So the days sped pleasantly and May passed, and June with all its riotousness of roses was upon them.

One warm June morning the family gathered in the pleasant, low-ceiled dining-room for [Pg 305] breakfast. Harriet, attired in a wash dress well covered by a vast apron, flushed and rosy, stood at the head of the table.

“I have cooked every bit of the breakfast myself,” she declared proudly. “Cousin David, if you and Clifford don’t do justice to it I shall take it as a personal affront.”

“No wonder the breakfast is an hour late,” murmured Clifford to Peggy as they sat down. “I do think she might have invited Major Dale, or that Yankee captain, instead of making us her victims.”

“Clifford!” pouted his sister. “You are really trying. Madam my cousin hath said that I can bake and brew almost equal to Peggy, so you will have no need of simples after eating. Now does not that strawberry tart look tempting?”

“It does indeed, lass,” observed Mr. Owen. “Peggy will have to look to her laurels if you can get up such a meal as this. Come, come, Clifford! the proof of the pudding lies in the eating. Fall to, lad!”

“My death will be upon your head, Harriet,” observed her brother with such a sigh of resignation that Peggy could not help but laugh. “I do wish John Drayton were here.” [Pg 306]

So with jest and laughter the family lingered over the meal, as if loath to make further exertion in the growing heat. In the midst of the cheer the knocker sounded, and, as though in answer to Clifford’s wish, the door swung back quietly, and John Drayton entered. Peggy sprang up at sight of him.

“Thee is just in time, John,” she cried gaily. “Clifford was just wishing for thee. I’ll lay a plate for thee.”

“Clifford?” Drayton’s tones were filled with astonishment.

There had been a sort of tacit truce established between the young fellows, but the feeling between them was such that for either to express desire for the other’s company was cause for wonderment.

“Strange, is’t not?” queried Clifford dryly. The insolence which he could not keep out of his voice whenever he addressed Drayton crept into it now. “You see, sir, my sister hath cooked this meal, and I was wishing for other victims than Cousin David and myself.”

“Knowing to whom Miss Harriet is indebted for her knowledge of cookery I have no fears regarding results,” remarked Drayton, with a slight bow in Mrs. Owen’s direction. “Miss Harriet, that strawberry tart looks enticing. I should be obliged for a liberal helping.” [Pg 307]

Clifford flushed angrily at Drayton’s words, but he had the grace to refrain from further remark. After all Captain Drayton ate but little. He trifled with the food, and was distrait and plainly ill at ease. Usually he enjoyed a tilt of words with Clifford, but after the first crossing of lances he said but little.

The meal was over at length, and Drayton faced them as he rose from the table.

“I have a most painful duty to perform,” he said unsteadily. “I feel like a thief in the night sitting here listening to your innocent mirth, knowing what I must do.”

“What is it, John?” asked Mr. Owen, as they all turned wonderingly toward the captain startled by his seriousness. “We know,” he continued kindly, “that thou wouldst do naught that would be disagreeable for any of us were it not in the line of duty. Speak out, lad.”

“I am come to take Clifford back to the barracks,” spoke Drayton, unconsciously using Clifford’s given name. [Pg 308]

“But why?” asked Clifford quickly. “I have passed my word not to try to escape. And I am ‘Clifford,’ sir, only to my friends.”

“I beg your pardon, Captain Williams,” spoke Drayton courteously. “I spoke without thinking.” He passed his hand across his brow as though in doubt how to proceed, then he began to speak rapidly: “All of you know how poor Fairfax Johnson met his death at the hands of the loyalists in New Jersey. Well, we have been able to obtain no satisfaction from the enemy for the outrage which they acknowledge was unjustifiable; so Congress hath determined to select an officer from among the English prisoners who shall be executed in retaliation for Johnson’s death.

“Therefore, thirteen officers from among the prisoners of war have been ordered to report at the Black Bear Tavern this morning in order that a victim may be chosen for retaliation. Captain Williams is among those so ordered to report.”

A long moment of silence followed this announcement. Drayton’s distress was plainly visible. The stillness was broken by Harriet. [Pg 309]

“And why, sir,” she said sharply, “should my brother be among those who are bidden to report?”

“On account of his rank, Miss Harriet,” he returned. “Johnson was a captain, so eight captains and five lieutenants make up the thirteen officers. The victim should be as near the rank of Captain Johnson as possible.”

“It is according to the rules of war,” spoke Clifford Owen clearly. “The Americans but act according to their rights. We should do the same. I am ready to accompany you at any time, Captain Drayton.”

“You shall not, Clifford,” shrieked Harriet, throwing her arms about him. “John Drayton is but one. We can overpower him, and you can escape.”

“Break my parole!” he ejaculated, horrified. “My sister, you know not what you say.”

“And after all, he may not be the unfortunate one, Miss Harriet,” spoke Drayton with an attempt at consolation. “There are thirteen from among whom the choice is to be made.” [Pg 310]

David Owen roused himself.

“True, there are thirteen,” he murmured. “Would it be permitted, John, that I go with the lad?”

“Yes, Mr. Owen.” John Drayton’s eyes were full of compassion. “No undue rigor is to be used in carrying out orders, though of course few spectators will be allowed.”

“And a place must be found for me,” cried Harriet. “Do you think I can stay here and not know whether my brother is to be killed, or not?”

“We can’t do it, Miss Harriet.” Drayton’s voice was inflexible. “It would upset all arrangements to have a woman present. It cannot be done. Come, Captain Williams.”

Clifford was the calmest among them as he bade them farewell. Harriet was too agitated to do more than wring her hands continually.

“It will be he, I know it will,” she cried as Mr. Owen and John Drayton disappeared from view, Clifford walking between them.

“We must hope for the best, my child,” said Mrs. Owen trying to comfort her. But Harriet could only say over and over: [Pg 311]

“I know that it will be Clifford.” She was walking up and down the floor as she uttered the words again and again. Suddenly she paused, and held out her hand to Peggy: “Come!” she said. “I am going to that tavern.”

At a sign from her mother Peggy went to her. Harriet clasped Peggy’s hand tightly in her own, and all through the trying scene that followed never once did she let it go. Without thought that they were still in their morning dresses, and without stopping for hats the girls hastened into the street.

A hush seemed to have fallen upon the town. There were groups of people clustered about everywhere talking in subdued tones of the act of reprisal that was about to follow. Retaliation had been the demand of every patriot since the inhuman and lawless murder of Fairfax Johnson. No American prisoner was safe so long as the act was unrequited. At length Congress had taken measures whereby a victim should expiate the outrage upon the Jersey captain. So the citizens stood on the corners talking to each other almost in whispers of what was going on at the tavern. Peggy and her cousin passed them unheedingly. [Pg 312]

In the yard of the inn twenty dragoons stood waiting the result, ready to take the unfortunate victim off to New Jersey for immediate execution. There were many others standing about; some on the piazza, others in the corridors, all awaiting the result of the meeting which was taking place in a room of the tavern.

Once only some one tried to bar their entrance, but Harriet turned such a look upon the man that he slunk away abashed, and they proceeded unmolested. Through the corridor they passed to the stairs. Here they met the wife of the landlord.

“Ye can go no further, young ladies,” she said, her ample form blocking their progress. “There is an important meeting up-stairs, and no one is allowed up there.”

“Madam, you must let me go,” burst from Harriet. “My brother is one of the men from whom the victim is to be chosen. Do, do let me be where I can at least hear what is going on.”

[Pg 313]

The girl was so lovely in her distress that only for a moment did the woman hesitate, then she turned abruptly. “Follow me,” she said, “Bless your pretty face, I could not refuse such a request as that. But you must make no noise. You must just listen.”

“Yes, yes,” spoke Harriet feverishly. “That is all we ask.”

“The meeting is in there,” said the woman pausing before a door. “Ye are to go in here, where there is a door between the rooms. Ye can hear very well there. Now, remember: no noise.”

“Yes, yes,” spoke Harriet again. “Come, Peggy.” And into the room they hurried.

At first they heard nothing but distant echoes, as of closing doors and people hurrying in and out of rooms. These noises resounded through the passages, and gave a note of unusual commotion down-stairs. Presently the distant sounds ceased, and out-of-doors all was quiet too. All at once the hum of voices in the adjoining room came to them. Harriet went swiftly toward the closed door, and before Peggy realized what she was about to do, the girl had opened it.

So intent were the men in that other room that they did not notice the opening of the door, [Pg 314] nor did they turn their heads as the faces of the girls appeared in the entry way. Brigadier-General Hazen, who had charge of the post at Lancaster, was speaking, and all eyes were fixed upon him.

On one side of a long table which stood in the center of the room sat the thirteen young officers from whom the victim was to be selected. Back of them stood the British Major Gordon. A little apart stood Mr. Owen and Robert Dale with the officer of the dragoons. On the side of the table opposite the unfortunate thirteen were John Drayton and the commissary, with two little drummer boys. The scarlet coats of the British made a pleasing note of color against the buff and blue of the Continentals.

“That this drawing may be as fair as possible,” General Hazen was saying, “it has been deemed best that the names of the thirteen officers shall be placed in one hat; in another hat shall be placed thirteen slips of paper of the same size, all of them blank save one on which is written the word, ‘unfortunate.’ These drummer boys are to draw out the slips [Pg 315] simultaneously from the hats. The name drawn at the same time that the word unfortunate is drawn will be the victim selected. Gentlemen, I have only to say that no one can regret more deeply than I the course events have taken. Captain Drayton, will you and the commissary take the hats?”

Amid a silence so profound that a pin could have been heard to fall the two officers took the hats, and stood holding them on the table while the drummer boys began the drawing. Into Peggy’s mind darted Thomas Ashley’s words:

“‘There shall be retaliation, Hannah. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life.’”

She started as though some one had spoken. Retaliation! Was this what it meant? That another innocent life should be taken? How horrible and bloody a thing is war! Because some one else hath committed a crime must another pay the penalty? One, two, three, four, five. Five names drawn. And Clifford’s name not yet. Not yet. Her breath came gaspingly but strangely quiet as that other room was no one noticed it. Harriet was clutching her [Pg 316] hand so tightly that it ached for hours afterward, but at the time neither girl knew it.

Six, seven, eight, nine! And still Clifford’s name had not been called. Harriet bent forward as the boy drew the next slip:

“Captain Williams,” he read clearly.

And from the other, hitherto so silent, sounded at the same time a word that fell upon the ear like a knell of doom:

“Unfortunate!”

And then from every American as well as every Englishman present there broke a sob. That is, from every man except Clifford Owen. He was very quiet, very composed, but his gaze was turned upon John Drayton as though he expected triumph at the result. But tears were running down Drayton’s face, and Clifford’s own countenance softened as he saw it. Once before Peggy had heard strong men weep. Then it had been over the defection of a brilliant soldier; now they wept that a fresh young life must be given in reprisal. Once, twice, General Hazen had tried to speak. At last he laid his hand upon Clifford’s shoulder, and [Pg 317] turning to the officer of the dragoons, said huskily:

“This gentleman, sir, is your prisoner.”

But at that Harriet, who had stood as though stunned, gave a great cry, and ran to Clifford:

“My brother! My brother! My brother!”

CHAPTER XXII

[Pg 318]

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

“Here we have war for war, blood
for blood,
Controlment for controlment.”

—*King John.*

Exclamations of pity and compassion came from the men as Harriet threw her arms about her brother. On General Hazen’s countenance consternation showed as well as commiseration. The scene was sufficiently trying as it was. The feminine note added to the complexity of the situation.

Over Clifford Owen’s face there swept a swift, indescribable change. He drew his sister to him and held her close, bending his head to hers with a gesture that was full of yearning. There was not a dry eye in the room. Both Americans and English felt it no shame to their manhood that tears streamed unrestrainedly down their cheeks.

[Pg 319]

The brother and sister were so young. The youth, noble and handsome, was striving to bear the tragic fate trust upon him with fortitude yet was torn by his love for his sister. The maiden, so surpassingly lovely that even the violence of her grief could not mar her beauty, was filled with anguish over the impending doom of her brother. That the boy had all he could do to maintain his composure was manifest to every one. For a time it seemed that affection would submerge all other emotions; then came a quick stiffening of his body as though he were preparing himself to resist any further appeal to his tenderness. When he spoke it was clearly and composedly:

“My sister, what do you here? This is no place for you.”

“I had to come,” she cried passionately. “Think you I could stay away when I knew not what would be done to you?”

“’Tis known now, Harriet. The lot hath been taken. I must accept my fate. Help me to do it bravely, my sister. You are a soldier’s daughter, a soldier’s sister. Let us show Americans how English men and English women meet untoward events.”

[Pg 320]

“Oh,” she uttered piteously, “you are to die. What is pride of race when you are to die? And father? What will father say?”

“He is a soldier, Harriet. He knows that war hath its vicissitudes which to-day may bring victory; to-morrow, death. He knows this, and we, his children, should know it also. He would like us to meet this with courage and calmness.”

“I cannot,” she cried sobbing convulsively. “I cannot, Clifford. They mean to hang you, my brother; just as Fairfax Johnson was hanged. I cannot bear it.”

“Cousin David!” The boy turned appealingly toward Mr. Owen. His lips were white. His brow was wet with perspiration. He was fast approaching the limit of his endurance. “Will you take her? I—I cannot——” He compressed his lips tightly, unable to proceed.

“Yes, my lad,” answered Mr. Owen brokenly. He beckoned to Peggy, and they both endeavored to unclasp Harriet’s clinging arms from her brother.

[Pg 321]

“No, no,” she shrieked. “I cannot let you go, Clifford. Is there no way to prevent this awful thing? Major Gordon,” turning toward that officer suddenly, “can’t you do something? Can’t you do something?”

“There is naught that can be done,” replied Major Gordon pityingly. As the principal British officer in Lancaster he had been present that he might be satisfied that everything was conducted with fairness. Beyond that he was helpless, being himself on parole.

General Hazen spoke at this moment, to the relief of all:

“My dear young lady,” he said gruffly, to hide his emotion, “your brother need not start for New Jersey to-day. He may remain in Lancaster for two days longer, which will give a slight

respite. He must be held a close prisoner during that time, well guarded to prevent escape; but you may see him once each day. It is not in my power to do more than that, but it is something."

"It is much, sir," she cried seizing his hand, and impulsively kissing it.

"I thank you, sir," said Clifford courteously, quick to seize the advantage such diversion created. "I shall see you then to-morrow, my sister. Captain, I am ready."

With firm step he placed himself by the side of the dragoon, who took him by the arm. On [Pg 322] the other side of him walked the British Major Gordon, and thus they passed out of the room. The youth's departure was the signal for this most tragic meeting to break up. Quietly, showing no elation that they had been spared and another taken, their faces expressive only of sorrow, the twelve British officers, each saluting Harriet as he left, filed out of the apartment. The drummer boys tiptoed after them. General Hazen was the last to go, pausing only to say:

"You shall see him twice more, my dear. I think I would go home now, if I were you. This hath been most trying. Odds life, most trying!"

"You are very kind, sir," she said miserably. "I appreciate it. But—but after two days; then what?"

"Child," he said gravely, with great compassion, "I cannot delude you with false hopes. After two days your brother must go to meet his fate in New Jersey. I can do naught to prevent it." He took a pinch of snuff hastily, then hurried from the room.

"Peggy!" Harriet stretched out her arms to her cousin with a cry of bitterness. "What shall I [Pg 323] do? What shall I do?"

But Peggy shook her head sorrowfully as she drew the girl into her arms. What could be done? She knew of nothing. That the safety of American prisoners might be assured Congress had decreed the death of a British officer to retaliate upon a lawless act of the enemy. That the officer chosen chanced to be her cousin did not change the justice of the act. Fairfax Johnson's death had been too recent, too near to Peggy for her not to see the fairness of retribution. And yet, and yet! that it should prove to be Clifford. It seemed so hopeless, so dark, Peggy could only shake her head while her tears fell fast.

"We must go home, lass," spoke David Owen. There were tears in his eyes, and he patted Harriet's shoulder with infinite tenderness. He was deeply moved by what had taken place, for Clifford had become dear to him; yet the boy's conduct under the trying circumstances filled him with pride. Now he patted the girl's shoulder, saying, "'Twill be far better for us to be at home than here. Come, Harriet! Perchance something will occur to us now that we [Pg 324] have time to think."

"Yes, Cousin David." The girl wiped her eyes and rose obediently as though where she was made no difference. As she did so her glance fell upon Captain Drayton and Major Dale. The two young men had lingered, loth to leave them in their trouble. "Are you not coming too?" she asked.

"We do not wish to intrude, Miss Harriet," answered Robert Dale, speaking for both.

"But you will not," she replied. "I want you to come. Both of you. You are of the army, and may be able to suggest something. Come, and let us talk it over."

So, accompanied by the two youths, they went slowly back to the house. The news had spread throughout the town, and the people, knowing that the unfortunate victim was a relative, respectfully made way for them. The young English captain had become a well-known figure during the time he was on parole, and his youth, manliness, and unfailing courtesy caused every one to deplore the fact that such a doom should have fallen upon one who so little deserved it. Mrs. Owen met them at the door, and her manner told them that [Pg 325] she had heard what had resulted from the meeting. She took Harriet at once in her motherly arms.

"I shall take thee right up-stairs to bed, my child," she said. "This hath been very trying for thee."

"Nay, madam my cousin," said the girl, smiling wanly. "'Tis no time for coddling. I shall have all the rest of life to lie in bed; now I must try to find some way to save my brother."

"Mistress Harriet!" Drayton, who had been unusually thoughtful, now spoke abruptly. "What I am about to suggest may not be of worth, but it can be tried. Why not go to General Washington and plead for your brother? If that fails, and fail it may because retaliation is demanded as the only safeguard Americans have for their countrymen who are prisoners,

then go on to your own commander. He may be able to arrange matters with our general."

Harriet listened dazedly at first, as though unable to grasp what he was saying. All at once, as she comprehended the full import of his words, a magical transformation took place. The color returned to her cheeks, and the light to her eyes. She seemed infused with new life. [Pg 326]

"John Drayton," she cried eagerly, "I do believe that you have hit upon the very thing. How strange that no one else thought of it! General Washington might postpone the carrying out of this dreadful measure. And Sir Guy! Why, if the rebel general will only wait until I can see my own commander all will be well. He is indebted to me for service in behalf of the new campaign, and will be glad to requite it. I shall go to General Washington. Thank you, Captain Drayton, for the suggestion. I'll never forget that 'twas you who offered it. I haven't always been very nice to you, but if——"

"I am your debtor, Miss Harriet, for what you did for me last year at Yorktown," interrupted Drayton quietly. "Mind! it may come to naught, but 'tis the only thing that can be done."

"And I shall do it," she said with determination. "I shall start for Philadelphia when they leave with my brother."

"To add to what Captain Drayton hath suggested," spoke Major Dale, "carry the matter to Congress while you are in Philadelphia. If you can get the execution postponed, and have influence with Sir Guy Carleton, get him to turn Lippencott over to us. He is the man who should be punished." [Pg 327]

"He shall do it," she cried. "Captain Lippencott is but a refugee, and Clifford is an English officer. An officer who hath given good and honorable service to his king. 'Tis not meet nor fitting that such an one should be punished for the crime of a refugee. Sir Guy shall be made to see it properly. He shall! He shall!"

"But now thee must go to bed," exclaimed Mrs. Owen alarmed by the girl's excitement. "Thee can talk again with the lads, but now to bed."

Despite her protests the good lady hurried her off to bed, nor would she consent that Harriet should leave it until the next morning. By that time the maiden had entirely regained her composure, and was eager to go to Clifford with the news of her intention to go to Philadelphia. Accordingly, as soon as it was permissible to see her brother, she set [Pg 328] forth with Peggy for the guard-house at the barracks where he was confined. There were two troopers in the room with him whose duty it was to keep an unfailing watch upon him. Clifford was slightly pale, but seemed to have himself well in hand. He dissented strongly from Harriet's proposal to see the Congress and General Washington.

"'Twill be useless," he said. "The Congress seek reprisal. If I am not the victim 'twill be another. There is no reason why I should seek to evade that which must be the fate of some English officer."

"Clifford, don't you care?" she wailed.

"Yes; I do, Harriet," he answered gravely. "I care very much. I don't want to die at all, particularly by hanging. I don't suppose that Fairfax Johnson did either, but his wishes weren't consulted in the matter. And they will remember that fact. It hath been said that he met death with great firmness and composure. I want to do as well."

"I must do something," she cried. "I cannot bear it unless I try to do something to save you."

"Then, Harriet, you shall make any effort that you wish," he said tenderly. "But do not ask for my life, my sister. Plead for a postponement, an you will; then go to Sir Guy. If you must humble yourself, let it be to your own commander. You are English, remember." [Pg 329]

"And Peggy shall go with me, Clifford," she said.

"You will, will you not, my cousin?" he asked turning to her.

"If thee wishes it, Clifford," answered Peggy gently.

"I do wish it. She should have some one with her who would prevent rashness. I cannot imagine where she got the idea——"

"It was John Drayton's suggestion," interrupted his sister. "He was the only one who seemed to have any idea what to do."

"Drayton?" exclaimed Clifford, surprised out of his composure. "Why, that is strange!"

"They are coming for us, Harriet," spoke Peggy. "We shall have to go."

“But I have not yet begun to talk,” cried Harriet protestingly. “Why do they make the interview so short?”

“It is pleasant to have one at all, my sister. ’Tis an indulgence that is not often granted in such cases. Beside, you have leave to come again to-morrow, and if you go to Philadelphia there will, no doubt, be opportunity for conversation upon the road.” [Pg 330]

But as Harriet passed through the door Clifford laid a detaining hand upon Peggy’s arm.

“My cousin,” he said speaking rapidly, “you have always spoken truth to me, and I want you to do so now. Does Cousin David think there is aught of use in Harriet’s seeing the Congress, or General Washington?”

Peggy’s lips quivered, and her eyes filled.

“Father said last night, my cousin, that there was but one hope,” she said mournfully. “’Tis the talk of the barracks that Captain Lippencott should be given up to us. If he hath an atom of honor, rather than have an innocent person suffer for his deed, he will give himself up as soon as he hears of this. Every one says this, Clifford.”

“And that is the only hope, Peggy?”

“I—I fear so, Clifford. If Lippencott——”

“He won’t,” said Clifford with a sigh. “Thank you, little cousin. It was better that I should know the truth. I am glad that you will go with Harriet, and when she hath finished with General Washington, get her to go right on to father, Peggy.” [Pg 331]

“I will,” she promised.

“Good-bye, then, until to-morrow,” he said. “Is Cousin David coming?”

“Yes, Clifford.”

“Peggy,” called Harriet, and Peggy went out to join her.

Mr. Owen, after his visit to Clifford, announced that if leave could be obtained he would accompany them also to Philadelphia.

“There may be trouble for thee in entering Philadelphia again, Harriet,” he said. “Thou hast been banished, remember.”

“True, but they would not hold it against me now,” she cried in dismay.

“I think naught will be said anent the subject,” he replied. “But in case there might be ’twould be well to have me with thee. For this and other reasons I shall go.”

“I am so glad, Cousin David,” she cried. And Peggy too felt greatly relieved when she was told.

So it came about that when the dragoons set forth with their prisoner two days later they were accompanied by Major Gordon, Mr. Owen, and the two girls, Peggy and Harriet. Clifford was closely guarded, but there was no undue severity shown. He was permitted to converse with his cousins and his sister whenever he wished. Frequently he rode long stretches of the road with them, the troopers in front and behind. [Pg 332]

And everywhere, at the inns, and the towns through which they passed, the people flocked to see this victim of retaliation. And the extreme youth and manly bearing of the unfortunate young man won him much compassion. The people had been greatly stirred by the death of Fairfax Johnson. He too was young, and his death had been such a lawless proceeding that it had roused the whole country to the necessity of reprisal lest other Americans be subjected to a like fate. But there was a dignity in the warm passions of these people that the instant it was in their power to punish they felt a disposition to forgive. And so there was pity and compassion freely expressed for the young captain and his untoward fate.

It was a sorrowful journey. The troopers rode hard and fast, so that the afternoon of the third day after leaving Lancaster brought them to the Middle Ferry. The sun was just sinking behind the hills of the Schuylkill as they crossed the ferry, and rode down High Street into Philadelphia. Mr. Owen and the two maidens left the party at Fifth Street, bound for the Owens’ residence in Chestnut Street. The troopers continued down High Street to Third; for they were to stop at the Bunch of Grapes Tavern. [Pg 333]

CHAPTER XXIII

[Pg 334]

A LITTLE HUMOR DESPITE A GRIM SITUATION

"Alas! regardless of their doom,
The little victims play!
No sense have they of ills to come,
No care beyond to-day."

—*Gray.*

The great clock of the State House was striking ten, the next morning, as Peggy emerged from the west entrance of the dwelling, and, basket in hand, went down the steps of the terrace into the gardens.

It was a lovely day. The sky was blue with June's own cerulean hue, and across its depths floated the softest of fleecy white clouds. The air was fresh and balmy, and tinged with the honeyed sweetness of red roses. With basket and shears the girl wandered from bush to bush, cutting the choicest blossoms. That her mind was not on her task was manifest by the fact that ever and anon she paused, shears in hand, and became absorbed in thought. In [Pg 335] this manner she sauntered through the grassy paths and graveled alleys until she came at length to the fence which separated the garden from Fifth Street. Peggy stopped here, and gazed thoughtfully across at the State House, as she was wont to do in the early years of the war.

"What will the Congress do?" she mused. "Would that I could see into that east room! Will they listen to Harriet, I wonder? And the people! how many there are in the square. What makes them cluster about the grounds so?"

The State House Square was in truth filled with groups of men who stood about talking earnestly. It was the custom of the citizens of Philadelphia to do this when any exciting event occurred, or when any stirring measure was before the Congress. Peggy's curiosity as to the cause was therefore natural, but there was no one near who could gratify it, so she turned reluctantly from the fence, and resumed her task of cutting the roses. Abstractedly she worked, oblivious to her surroundings, when all at once the sound of flying feet brought her back to reality. Startled she turned to see Sally Evans running toward her [Pg 336] from under the trees.

"I have just heard about Clifford, Peggy," cried Sally, flinging herself upon her friend. "Mr. Deering told me. I thought that I should find thee here, or some of thy people. Oh, Peggy! Peggy! that it should be Clifford."

"Yes," replied Peggy sorrowfully, as she returned the embrace. "'Tis dreadful."

"And what is thee going to do anent it? Why, Peggy Owen! surely thee hasn't been coolly picking flowers?"

"I had to do something, Sally, to while away the time until they come back," apologized Peggy meekly. "Waiting is trying when so much depends upon the issue."

"Whatever is thee talking about?" demanded Sally bewildered. "Sit down here under this tree, Peggy, and tell me all about everything. Whom does thee mean by they?"

"Father and Harriet, Sally. They have gone over to see the Congress to see if aught can be done for Clifford."

"Harriet?" ejaculated Sally. "I thought that Harriet was in New York City with her father. [Pg 337] How did she come here?"

"I'll tell thee all about it," answered Peggy, sinking down beside Sally under a tree. Forthwith she told her friend everything that had happened since leaving Philadelphia, beginning with the meeting with Harriet on the road to Lancaster, and ending with the journey back to the city after Clifford had been chosen as the unfortunate victim. Sally listened attentively.

"Oh!" she breathed when Peggy had concluded her narrative. "And does thee think the Congress will do anything for him, Peggy?"

"I fear not," answered Peggy sadly. "Father hath little hope of it, but Harriet will leave naught undone that promises the least relief. If Congress does nothing, we are to go on to General Washington. In any event Harriet will go to New York to see the British general."

“Well, General Washington ought to do something,” cried Sally. “He hath a kind heart, and it does seem awful to hang Clifford when he had naught to do with Fairfax’s death. Doesn’t thee think he will?”

“Sally,” spoke Peggy earnestly, “there is but one thing that can save Clifford Owen: that is for the English commander to give up Captain Lippencott. That he hath heretofore refused to do.” [Pg 338]

“Oh, Peggy! then thee believes that he must die?” came from Sally in a sob.

“I am afraid so, Sally. Clifford himself thinks there is no hope.”

For a time Sally sat very still, then she spoke softly:

“Peggy!”

“Yes, Sally.”

“Did thee tell Clifford about me? How I did not betray him to Sheriff Will?”

“I tried to, but he would not listen. Harriet took him to task for it, Sally. She told him that if thee said thee did not betray him, thee didn’t.” And Peggy related all that had passed regarding the matter.

“Then he will die believing that I was a false friend to thee, and that I betrayed him who was a guest of my hospitality,” remarked the girl mournfully. “Oh, ’tis bitter to be misjudged! ’Tis bitter!” And to Peggy’s astonishment she burst into tears.

“Why, Sally! I did not know thee cared so much,” cried Peggy. [Pg 339]

“I—I don’t,” flashed Sally. “At least, not much. ’Tis only—only that I do not like to be misjudged. And I’ve never been given so much as a chance to defend myself. Oh, dear!” dabbing her eyes viciously with her kerchief as she spoke, “I don’t suppose they can help it, but of all stubborn, unreasonable creatures on this earth I do think Englishmen are the worst! I’d just like one chance to tell Clifford Owen so.”

“Well, why doesn’t thee?” asked Peggy suddenly.

“Peggy!” Sally sat up very straight and stared at her. “Just what does thee mean?”

“Just what I say, Sally. He is at the Bunch of Grapes. If thee wishes to see him I will take thee there. Then thee can have thy chance.”

“But—but——” The color flooded Sally’s face from brow to chin. Presently she laughed. “Well, he couldn’t run away from me, could he? He would have to listen. I’ll do it. ’Twill be the last opportunity I shall ever have of clearing myself. I would not dare do it only, being bound, he cannot help but listen. Come, Peggy!” [Pg 340]

“Bound?” exclaimed Peggy amazed. “What put such a notion in thy head, Sally? He was not when we came from Lancaster.”

“That was because he was riding. ’Tis only since he entered the city. Did thee not know that the Minister of War hath charge of him now? ’Tis he who hath insisted upon extra precautions being taken on account of the Tories. ’Tis talked everywhere on the streets, Peggy, that he is bound.”

Peggy instantly became troubled.

“That would be severe treatment,” she said. “Methought ’twas understood that he was to be granted every indulgence consistent with his safe-keeping. I like not to think of him being bound. Let’s go, Sally.”

Quickly they made themselves ready, and then proceeded to the Bunch of Grapes Tavern in Third Street. Sally alternated between timidity and assurance.

“With the shadow of death upon him he ought to wish to right every injustice that he hath done,” she remarked as they reached the inn.

Peggy caught sight of Major Gordon just then, and did not reply. Instead she called to the British officer. He came to them instantly. [Pg 341]

“May we see Captain Williams for a few moments, sir?” she asked.

“I’ll see, Miss Peggy,” he answered. “You know, of course, that he is guarded more stringently here than he was on the road, but I think there can be no objection to his friends seeing him.”

“Tell him ’tis his cousin, Margaret, and——”

“Don’t thee tell him who is with thee, Peggy.” Sally’s whispered admonition was plainly audible. She had all at once become fearful. “If he were not bound I would not dare venture in.”

A puzzled look crossed Major Gordon’s face. He turned to her quickly. “May I ask why you would not venture in unless he were bound?” he asked.

“Because,” uttered Sally blushing, “if he isn’t bound he will not listen to what I have to say. I want to explain something that he ought to know. He would never listen before; now he cannot help himself.”

A violent fit of coughing seized the officer, preventing him from replying. Presently recovering he cleared his throat, and left them precipitantly. He was gone but a few moments. [Pg 342]

“You may see him for a short time, ladies,” he reported. “This way.”

They followed him into a large room situated at the end of a long hall. The first thing the girls saw was Clifford, who was half sitting, half reclining in a chair. And his feet and hands were wound about with cords. Peggy felt a catch in her throat as she saw it, while Sally turned white to the lips. The room was scantily furnished, and several dragoons lounged about, but for all their apparent negligence they never for one moment ceased to regard their prisoner. The youth himself looked wan and haggard. He greeted Peggy with marked pleasure.

“And where is Harriet, my cousin?” he asked.

“She hath gone with father to see the Congress,” replied Peggy. “And here is Sally, Clifford. ’Tis for her sake that we have come. She wishes to speak with thee.”

“You wish speech with me, Mistress Sally?” questioned he coldly. “Wherefore?” [Pg 343]

“Thee is to die,” burst from Sally with emotion. “I could not bear for thee to die believing that I had betrayed thee.”

“I am to die, yes,” he said with settled calm. “What have such things to do with me?”

“Everything,” she answered shrilly. “If I had to die, Clifford Owen, I should want to right whatever of injustice I had done, were it possible to do so. And thee has been unjust to me. I have come hoping that now thee will listen to my explanation. Thee wouldn’t hear Peggy, thee wouldn’t hear Mr. Owen, but now thee will listen to me, won’t thee?”

“I don’t see how I can help myself, mistress,” he responded grimly. “Seeing that my hands are bound, I cannot stop my ears.”

And at this Peggy marveled anew. Closely guarded the youth had been all the way into Philadelphia. Major Gordon had spoken of an increase in vigilance since entering the city, but to bind him! Americans were not usually so unkind. The change in treatment puzzled her.

“Why should they bind thee?” ejaculated Sally in reply to Clifford. “’Tis cruel!” [Pg 344]

“I thought that you wished me bound, Miss Sally,” he observed gravely.

“We-ell! I don’t wish thee bound, Friend Clifford, but thee would not listen to me unless thee were. Do—do the thongs hurt thee very much?”

Now when an exceedingly pretty girl pities a man for any discomfort he is undergoing it would be an abnormal being who did not get out of it all that he could. And Sally, with her hair escaping from under her cap in soft little tendrils, her blue eyes wet with tears of compassion like violets drenched with dew, made a bewitching picture. So Clifford pulled a long face, and said lugubriously:

“It’s pretty bad, mistress.”

“Oh!” she cried. “I wish I could help thee. ’Tis monstrously cruel to use thee so! Yet thee would not listen to me if thee were not bound; would thee?”

“Perchance ’twould be best to take advantage of the fact, and tell me what you have come to say,” he suggested with the hint of a smile.

And rapidly Sally told him how the wretched mistake had occurred which led him to disbelieve her truthfulness. She told also of the Council and what had happened before it. All this part he had heard from Mr. Owen, though he did not tell her. [Pg 345]

“And now,” she ended with a deep sigh of relief, “thee knows at last just how the matter was.”

“Well? And what then?” Clifford was smiling now. “Now you wish me to acknowledge how wrong I was, I suppose?”

“Nay,” spoke Sally rising. “I did not want anything except for thee to hear the facts. ’Twould be too much to ask of an Englishman to admit that he was wrong. ’Tis a national characteristic to persist in wrong-doing, and wrong believing even when the right is made plain. Had this not been the case we should not have had to go through all these weary years of fighting.”

“’Fore George, Mistress Sally, but you hit from the shoulder! Now here is one Englishman who is going to prove that you are mistaken. It was unjust of me to believe that you could be capable of treachery. I crave your pardon most humbly. I believe that you did your best [Pg 346] to help me last spring. These past few days, since I have known that death is so close, have made me look differently at many things. If you think of me at all in future, Miss Sally, let it be as gently as you can.”

He rose as he finished speaking, lightly throwing aside the cords that confined his wrists and ankles, and held out his hand to her with his most winning smile. Much moved Sally placed her hand within his; then, with an exclamation, she withdrew it suddenly.

“Why!” she cried. “Why, thee isn’t bound at all!”

“No? Well, you see I understood that you would not dare to come in unless I was bound. Of course, rather than cause you annoyance I had to pretend to be so.”

The youth was laughing now, and Peggy, mightily relieved to find that such harsh treatment was not to be accorded him, laughed also. Not so Sally. She stood regarding him with eyes in which slowly grew an expression of pain and scorn.

“Now you aren’t going to hold it against me, are you, Miss Sally?” he pleaded. [Pg 347]

“When I asked thee if the bonds hurt, thee said, ‘Pretty bad,’” stated Sally, her manner full of accusation.

“I did,” he admitted.

“It was not true,” she cried. “And thee is to die! To die, and yet thee could stoop to trickery! Oh, how could thee do it? Thou art under the shadow of death. I would rather a thousand times that thee would have remained the obstinate Englishman that I deemed thee than to know that thee could do this.”

With that she flung up her head, and without another glance in his direction went swiftly out of the room.

CHAPTER XXIV [Pg 348]

“THEE MAY TELL HIM AT THE LAST”

> “A hopeless darkness settles o’er my fate;
> I’ve seen the last look of her heavenly eyes,—
> I’ve heard the last sound of her blessed voice,—
> I’ve seen her fair form from my sight depart!
> My doom is closed.”
>
> —*Count Basil.*

Clifford started as Sally uttered the word, “trickery,” and a deep flush dyed his face. He threw out his hands in a protesting gesture, and opened his lips to speak, but she was gone before he could say a word. He turned toward Peggy appealingly.

“Will you listen, my cousin?” he queried. “Or are you also shocked?”

“Nay, Clifford; I believe that thee intended naught but to have a little sport,” she replied.

“That’s just it,” he cried eagerly. “Everything hath been so depressing the last few days that a little diversion was welcome. When Major Gordon came in, saying that you wished to see [Pg 349] me, and that a friend was with you who feared to come in unless I was bound, I knew at once it was Miss Sally. When the major suggested that ’twould never do for the young lady to find me unbound, the idea appealed to me immediately. It promised some brightness, a little fun which is all my excuse, Peggy. I intended naught else. I thought you both would regard it as a great joke. I see now that I should not have done it. It was caddish.”

“I think Sally felt the worst anent thy saying that the cords hurt pretty bad,” Peggy told him. “It seemed like an untruth to her.”

“’Fore George, Peggy!” cried the youth earnestly, “if she could but know the trouble I had in keeping still so that those ropes would not fall off she would think it was pretty bad.”

He laughed at the remembrance, and then became grave.

“I seem to be unfortunate in more respects than one,” he said with a sigh. “First, I misjudge you, Peggy. I can only explain that fact by saying that never before had I met any one of like [Pg 350] truthfulness and so straightforward. Then, not knowing that your friends had the same attributes, I am guilty of injustice toward Sally. Now she misconstrues what was meant for a jest into a contemptible trick. Oh, it was! I see it now. I’ faith! the sooner that execution comes off the better,” he ended bitterly.

“Don’t speak like that, Clifford,” chided Peggy gently. “I’m going to Sally and explain the matter to her. ’Twas all a miserable misapprehension. She will laugh most heartily when she understands it.”

“I don’t believe she will, Peggy,” he answered gloomily. “She feels tricked. She will never forgive me. You Quakers are queer people. I did not dream that words spoken in jest would be taken so seriously.”

“Well, my cousin, we have been taught that for every idle word we shall give account. Perchance we do not speak with so much lightness as the world’s people.”

“’Fore George, you do not,” he ejaculated. “But, Peggy, to a soldier the thought of death becomes familiar. So familiar in fact that even when we are under its dark shadow if there [Pg 351] comes a chance for amusement of any sort we seize it. I would not for the world offend her, Peggy. Will you try to make peace for me? Tell her,” he smiled involuntarily, “that she is the unreasonable one now; that if she will not listen she lays herself open to the charge of being English which would be a most dreadful downfall from the high estate of being an American.”

“I’ll tell her everything, my cousin. I am sure that all will be well as soon as she understands. And Harriet will come to thee this afternoon. Thee must not let this, or aught else make thee down-hearted, Clifford. I am hoping that something will come up to avert this terrible fate from falling upon thee.”

But the youth shook his head.

“I have no hope,” he said. “’Tis only to please my sister that I have consented that she should try to get your general to postpone the execution until she can see Sir Guy. It seems but a useless prolongation of anxiety. Now as to this other matter: you will go at once to Sally, will you not, my cousin? Tell her that I am sorry that I lent myself to such deception, and that I wish she would not think hardly of me. I shall never see her again, Peggy, but I [Pg 352] like not to think that she thinks ill of me.”

“I’ll tell her all, my cousin,” promised Peggy as she took her leave. “Oh, dear!” she sighed as she wended her way toward Little Dock Street, where Sally lived. “Oh, dear! will naught ever go right again? Now just as Clifford gets so that he will listen to Sally this had to happen! But Sally ought not to hold it against him. She must not.”

Sally was up-stairs, her mother told Peggy, and slowly she went up to her friend’s room. A crumpled heap on the bed told where Sally was, but it did not turn as Peggy entered. She went over and put her hand on the head that was buried between two pillows.

“Thee is taking this too seriously, Sally,” spoke Peggy. “Don’t be too hard on him. After all thee knows that Clifford is just a boy.”

Sally turned a reddened, tear-stained face toward her.

“He is to die,” she murmured in shocked tones, “yet he jested. He jested, Peggy.”

“Sally, ’tis naught to make such a pother about. Men, especially soldiers, regard death [Pg 353] differently from the way we look at it. Let me tell thee about the matter.”

“I don’t care to hear any explanation,” answered Sally shortly.

“Sally, Sally, is thee going to be unreasonable and obstinate now? ’Tis as Clifford said: ‘Thee should say naught against the English for perverseness. Thee isn’t much better.’”

“Did Clifford Owen say that?” demanded Sally, sitting up with flaming cheeks.

“Nay; but something like it. How can I tell thee what he said if thee will not listen? Or has thee made up thy mind not to listen to Clifford’s explanation in revenge for the time that he was in listening to thine?” concluded Peggy artfully.

“Peggy! thee knows better than that. Of course, if there is an explanation I will hear it. It did not occur to me that there could be one.”

“Now that is my own Sally,” cried Peggy kissing her. She sat down on the side of the bed, and began earnestly: “Sally, we must not forget that my cousin belongs to the world’s people. Many things which to us are of gravity are not so to them, and our belief is as [Pg 354] naught if it doth not make us regard their feelings with charity. Clifford feels sorrow now for the joke, and grieves because thee is inclined to think hardly of him.” Forthwith she told Sally how the jest had come about, ending with:

“So thee sees, Sally, that thou art somewhat in fault thyself, insomuch as thee said that thee would not venture in unless he were bound.”

“I see,” remarked Sally thoughtfully. “I see, Peggy. Well, ’tis all right, of course; but oh, Peggy! If—if he had not made me feel so sorry for him. If I had not cried because I thought those ropes hurt him I would not mind so much; though it was in truth ill to jest when he is to die.”

“But I cried too,” soothed Peggy. “Any one would who had the least bit of sensibility.”

“Does thee really think so, Peggy?”

“Yes, I do,” answered Peggy. “’Twas all in fun, and done on the impulse of the moment. But he says now that he sees ’twas wrong, and that he is sorry. Thee must forgive him, Sally.”

“Of course if he is sorry it makes a difference,” said Sally. “Somehow, Peggy, I am [Pg 355] disappointed in him. Harriet always spoke so highly of him, and I liked him so much when he was with us, that it pains me to find him lacking in any respect. Well, if he is sorry, ’tis all right.”

“And I may tell him so?” asked Peggy eagerly. “I don’t want the poor fellow to have aught to wherrit him. He hath enough as it is.”

“Yes; thee may tell him, Peggy.” Sally slipped from the bed as she spoke and buried her face in the washing bowl. “After all, as thee said, ’tis naught to make such a pother about.”

“Will thee come home with me to see Harriet, Sally?”

“Not to-day, Peggy.” Sally began to brush her hair vigorously. “I will come in the morning. I want to think things over. Thee doesn’t mind?”

“No,” Peggy answered more troubled than she cared to admit over Sally. “Well, I shall see thee to-morrow then.”

Harriet and her father were awaiting her when she returned home. Harriet looked weary [Pg 356] and a little pale.

“We could not see the Congress, Peggy,” said she in answer to Peggy’s eager queries. “Cousin David could not obtain an audience for me; but the Minister of War, in whose charge Clifford now is, consented that we should accompany him to the New Jersey cantonment. He said that ’twas General Washington’s desire that Clifford should be given every indulgence suitable to his rank and condition that would be consistent with the security of his person. He said too that the execution would take place pursuant to the general’s orders, and therefore ’twas proper that all pleas should be made to him. We start with the dragoons and officers who guard my brother to-morrow.”

It was early the next morning when the start for New Jersey was made. Early as it was, however, Sally was down to see them off. She hovered around Peggy, finally saying, with a fine air of carelessness:

“I had a short letter from thy Cousin Clifford, Peggy. If he should speak of the matter, I dare say he will not, thee may say that ’tis all right. That I have no hard feelings toward [Pg 357] him.”

Peggy caught her suddenly, and held her fast.

“Is that all I am to say, Sally? Is there naught else? Couldn’t thee give me one little kind word for him? He is to die, Sally.”

Sally struggled to free herself, then unexpectedly hid her face on Peggy’s shoulder, and burst into tears.

“Tell him,” she sobbed, then looked up at Peggy wrathfully: “If thee tells him anything until the very last, Peggy Owen, I will never forgive thee. Never!”

“I understand, Sally,” encouraged Peggy. “Tell me.”

“Thee may tell him, at the very last, at the very last, Peggy.”

“Yes, Sally.”

“Thee may tell him that I think him the finest gentleman I ever knew. There! Of course, being thy kinsman, and because we are such friends, for thy sake, thee knows——”

“Yes, I know.” Peggy kissed Sally gently, then held her close. “I have not told Harriet a word,” she whispered. “Oh, Sally! Sally!” [Pg 358]

They joined Clifford and his guards on the Bristol road. Peggy could not but reflect with what joyousness she and Sally had passed over this very road a few short months before. How much had happened since that time! Fairfax foully murdered, Clifford, her cousin, on his way to pay the penalty of the deed. Truly strange things were wrought in the warp and woof of time. So musing, for little conversation was held, the long hours of the day glided into the shadows of evening, and found them at Trenton where they were to bide for the night. Peggy suggested seeing Governor Livingston, but Harriet demurred at once.

“He would do naught for us, Peggy,” she declared. “Have you forgot that ’twas I who tried to effect his captivation at Middlebrook? ’Tis that very thing that makes me fearful of meeting General Washington. Were not my brother’s life at stake I would not chance it.”

The roads were in good condition, the business in hand most urgent, and so they journeyed from early morning until nightfall of each day with but short stops to refresh man and beast. Through Princeton, and along the banks of the Millstone to Kingston they rode. Here the road left the valley and began to ascend the heights, then along the banks of the Raritan River until Somerset Court House was reached. Peggy turned to Harriet. [Pg 359]

“Does thee know where we are, my cousin?” she asked smiling.

“We are coming into Middlebrook,” answered Harriet gazing about her. “Does it cause you painful thoughts, Peggy? ’Twas here that first you knew me. ’Twas here that I played the spy. Ah! the huts where the soldiers dwelt are still standing. ’Tis most familiar, Peggy.”

“Nay, I am not pained at the recollection, Harriet. Thou art changed in many ways since then. I do not believe that thee would play the spy now.”

“You know not, Peggy. I do not know myself. If aught would result of benefit to England’s cause, I might. I have done other things. I do not know.”

“Are you two talking about those huts yonder?” questioned Clifford, who had been riding with Mr. Owen. “Cousin David says the American army camped here in the winter of ’79.” [Pg 360]

“We know it, my cousin,” answered Peggy. “This is where we first met. Harriet and I passed that winter here.”

“Tell me about it,” he said. “There are many things concerning that winter I would know.”

So with each girl supplementing the other the story of Middlebrook was told. Harriet did not spare herself in the recital. With amazing frankness she related how she had tried to capture both General Washington and Governor Livingston. Her brother listened in wide-eyed astonishment.

“And father let you engage in such emprises?” he queried with pained surprise.

Harriet smiled.

“I liked the danger, Cliff,” she said. “’Tis risk that gives the zest to all undertakings. Life is like food: insipid without some spice. Beside, here was Peggy to rescue me from paying the penalty of my acts. Poor Peggy! she thought she had fallen upon evil days when I carried her off to New York.”

“Poor Peggy indeed!” he agreed briefly; then relapsed into thought. [Pg 361]

The road beyond Middlebrook was new to both maidens, and had they not been saddened by the knowledge that each mile traversed brought them nearer to the place where Clifford must be left they would have been delighted with the romantic scenery. Soon the heights of Morristown came into view. A few miles to the eastward of Morristown lay the little town of Chatham. Between the heights and the village lay the cantonment of the Jersey line, Clifford's destination.

Chatham was a pleasant little place. There were many hills in the vicinity, and a fine view of the valley of the Passaic River, which stream ran through the village. But none of the party noticed hills or river as they went through the town toward the encampment. Harriet grew pale at sight of the tents.

"You must be brave, my sister," pleaded Clifford, observing her pallor. "I must meet the colonel, you know. Help me to do so with composure. Besides, you will come back here after you have seen Sir Guy."

"True," she answered. "I am not going to break down, Clifford. There is much to be done." [Pg 362]

They were received with extreme kindness by Colonel Elias Dayton, who had command of the Jersey line. No orders concerning Clifford had as yet been received from General Washington, he told them, save only that he must be closely guarded.

"And naught will happen to him until you have had time to see General Washington," he reassured Harriet, moved by her grief at parting from her brother. "'Tis a most distressing affair, and there is no one in the American lines who does not desire that General Carleton will give us the real culprit."

And with lightened hearts Mr. Owen and the two girls proceeded to Morristown, where they were to pass the night.

CHAPTER XXV [Pg 363]

AT HEADQUARTERS

"But mercy is above this sceptered sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute of God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's,
When mercy seasons justice."

—*Shakespeare.*

The route now took the little party through a most romantic country, but after leaving Clifford their distress of mind was such that at first they did not remark it particularly. Nowhere in the world can there be found more beautiful scenery than that along the Hudson River. The views vary from what is pleasing and picturesque to that which is in the highest degree magnificent. And so, as gentle wooded slopes were succeeded by bold promontories, deep vales by extensive valleys, hills by lofty precipices, Harriet and Peggy found themselves roused from their apathy, and their attention, in spite of grief, was caught by the majesty of the noble river.

War with its attendant evils receded into the background for the time being, recalled only [Pg 364] by the fortifications of New York Island, and the batteries of Stony Point and its sister garrison of Verplanck's Point on the eastern shore. Sometimes the journey led them through fine woods; at others, through well cultivated lands and villages inhabited by Dutch families. Sometimes there were long stretches of dark forests, wild and untamed as yet by civilization; at other times, the road wound along the top of the Palisades, those rocky heights that extend like everlasting walls along the Jersey bank of the river. Again, the road descended these rocky walls skirting their base, and they found themselves marveling at the broad expanse of the water which in places seemed like a vast lake.

As they ascended into the Highlands, cliffs seemed piled on cliffs rising precipitously from the water's edge, forming a surprisingly beautiful and sublime spectacle. The majestic river hemmed in by towering heights densely covered with forests made a picture of impressiveness and grandeur.

Again and again the maidens drew rein, sometimes uttering cries of delight as some new [Pg 365]

prospect unfolded its beauty; at others, sitting in silence awed by the magnificence of the panorama expanding before them. In such mood as this they approached West Point on the afternoon of the fourth day after leaving Chatham.

The river here ran in a deep channel formed by the mountains whose lofty summits, on every side, were thick set with redoubts and batteries. From the fort of West Point proper, which lay on the edge of the river, to the very top of the mountain at the foot of which it stood were six different forts, all in the form of an amphitheater so arranged as to protect each other.

“And this,” spoke Harriet with quickened interest, “is the fortress that General Arnold was to deliver into our hands?”

“Yes,” answered David Owen briefly. Americans could not even yet bear mention of the treason of the brilliant Arnold.

“It looks to be an important post,” commented the English maiden with a glance around that embraced all the grim redoubts of the lofty summits. “Had we obtained it the misfortune at Yorktown would not have occurred.” [Pg 366]

“Perchance not, lass. Here we are at the sally-port of the fort. I will turn you girls over to Mrs. Knox for the night, while I find quarters elsewhere. I for one am glad to reach here. It hath been hard riding. Are ye not tired?”

“I am, father,” answered Peggy wearily. “And yet I have been delighted with the beautiful river.”

“And I also,” agreed her cousin.

With the morning came the realization of the matter which had brought them. The noble river with its superb amphitheater of mountains no longer had power to enthrall their senses. Clifford’s fate rested upon the result of the interview before them, and that was the thing which now concerned them. Newburgh, where General Washington’s headquarters were, was not far distant. A ride of a few hours brought them to the southern extremity of the village, where the Hasbrouck house was situated. It was a farmhouse, constructed in the Dutch fashion, on the west side of the Hudson. The front stoop faced the river, and a beautiful picture of mountains, sky and water was spread before the eye, but it extorted but a passing glance. [Pg 367]

The army was at West Point, and only the life-guards were near the quarters of the commander-in-chief. Hence, there was lacking much of the bustle and movement which ordinarily existed about the chief’s quarters. An orderly took charge of their horses, and presently they were ushered into a large room which served as office as well as dining-room for the general. He sat now before a small table looking over some papers, but rose as they entered the room. He looked weary, and there were tired lines upon the strong face, but his manner was courteously attentive.

“Ah, Mr. Owen,” he said shaking hands cordially with David Owen. “I am glad to see you. I have excellent reports of the work you are doing in Lancaster. Miss Peggy, ’tis long since I have had the pleasure of seeing you. And—Miss Harriet!”

The smile died from his lips as he uttered her name. General Washington had an excellent memory for faces and events. Harriet’s duplicity at Middlebrook was not easily forgotten; so his expression changed, and his face grew stern and cold. Harriet’s color faded and she began to tremble. Nevertheless she sank in a deep courtesy before him. [Pg 368]

“It was my understanding,” he continued, “that you were banished from our lines. If this be true how is it that we are favored with your company?”

“Sir,” she answered, gaining control over herself and speaking in a steady voice, “’tis true that I was banished to New York; but I think you will find that ’twas only from Philadelphia. I did not understand that it was from the entire line. I know, your Excellency, that I have no right to come to you to ask a favor. I have no claim by which I can urge even consideration. Still, I do ask mercy. I do entreat you to use clemency; not because I deserve it, but because I do not believe that you would be guilty of aught that savored of inhumanity or barbarity.”

Harriet was very beautiful as she made her plea, her unusual humility lending softness to the customary hauteur of her manner. A perplexed look crossed the general’s countenance at her words. He bent toward her courteously. [Pg 369]

“Unravel the matter, I beg of you,” he said more gently. “Do I understand that something hath gone amiss for which you are entreating lenity?”

“It is not for myself, sir. My cousins here can bear witness that I came within your lines for

the sole purpose of seeing my brother." She raised her head proudly, and met his glance with unwavering eyes. "He was at Lancaster. At Lancaster, where he hath been chosen as the most unfortunate victim of retaliation. It is for him I plead."

"Your brother?" For the merest second a gleam of astonishment shone on his face. It faded, leaving his countenance as impassive as ever. He turned to the table, and picked up a folded document from among the many lying upon it.

Hastily he scanned the page, then looked up. "'Tis as I thought," he said. "Brigadier-General Hazen hath reported concerning that matter, and the young man herein named is not your brother, Miss Harriet. On the contrary, 'tis one Captain Wilson Williams who hath [Pg 370] been the unfortunate selected to pay the penalty."

"And Captain Williams is my brother, sir. My brother, Clifford Owen, who because father did not wish him to go into the service enlisted under another name. My brother, and he hath been chosen to die shamefully because another hath committed a dastardly crime. Sir, in the name of that mother whose son you are, I entreat you to have mercy upon him who is an only son, an only brother——"

"And a mother in New Jersey mourns an only son, and she a widow," he interrupted, his voice implacable in its sternness. "Miss Harriet, I lament the cruel necessity which alone can induce so distressing a measure. It is my desire not only to soften the inevitable calamities of war, but even to introduce on every occasion as great a share of tenderness and humanity as can possibly be exercised in a state of hostility. But for the barbarous and inhuman murder of Captain Johnson there must be satisfaction."

"And will it give satisfaction to wreak vengeance upon an innocent person?" she cried stung to bitterness. The grim countenance of the general was not encouraging. His eyes seemed [Pg 371] to pierce her as with cold steel. "Is it not as barbarous, as inhuman to execute one who is as guiltless as yourself in the matter? You, sir, are dealing ruthlessly when you visit such penalty upon a victim. It shows want of humanity."

"I am listening to you, Miss Harriet," he said patiently, "because you are grieved and anguished over the affair. I know that you are much overwrought. Therefore will I explain to you that by all the usages of war, and upon the principle of retaliation I should have been justified in executing an officer of equal rank with Captain Johnson immediately upon receiving proofs of his death, and then informing the British commander of what I had done."

"You are so stern," she cried with growing excitement. "So stern! So unfeeling!"

"Nay," he protested, and there was compassion in his tone. "Not unfeeling. Although duty calls me to make this decisive determination in the matter humanity prompts me to drop a tear for the unfortunate offering. I most devoutly wish that something might be done to [Pg 372] save his life."

"You do?" she cried eagerly. "Why, sir, 'tis easily done. A scratch of the pen is all that is necessary. Oh, 'tis a great thing to have such power! See, here are ink-horn, powder and paper! What doth hinder you from writing an order for his release?"

She stepped quickly to the table as she spoke, and picking up a quill held it appealingly toward him. His eyes softened.

"Stay!" he said. "I do feel just that way, Miss Harriet, but there is a duty that must be performed toward our people. There are many American prisoners held by the enemy. Among them some as young, as manly, as lovable as your brother. If the matter be suffered to go by without retaliation what assurance have we that they will not be as lawlessly dealt with as Captain Johnson?"

"Oh!" she said looking at him miserably. "But Clifford hath been guilty of naught. Were he a spy, an informer, a deserter, I would not ask you to abate one jot or tittle of his fate. I might in such case try to rescue him by trickery, by deceit, by any means that would save his life, [Pg 373] but I would not question the justice of his doom. But he is not a spy, not an informer, not a deserter——"

“I KNEEL TO YOU, SIR.”

“Nor was Captain Johnson,” he reminded her. “Yet he was hanged most treacherously.”

“But not by Clifford, sir! Not by Clifford! He would scorn to do such a deed.” She stood for a moment, regarding him with such pleading that Peggy choked. Suddenly Harriet crossed the room and flung herself before him.

“Sir,” she cried seizing his hand, “Harriet Owen hath never knelt to mortal man before save her king. I kneel to you, sir, and I beg, I implore you to exercise clemency toward my brother. He hath been guilty of naught save that he hath served his king. He hath a blameless reputation as a soldier, and you yourself are a soldier. It may be just to retaliate; I know not. But is there not mercy as well as justice? ’Twill be great and noble to exert leniency in such a case as this.”

“Rise, I beg of you,” he exclaimed, much pained. “I must do my duty, however abhorrent it may be to me. There hath been mercy shown already in that your brother hath had several days of grace, and the order for his execution not yet signed.” [Pg 374]

At that Harriet clung to his hand desperately.

“Do not sign it yet, sir. You will not give his life—give me then a little time.”

“For what purpose? Is not uncertainty full of anguish and suspense?”

“No, no, no,” she answered vehemently. “It hath hope, possibilities. Sir, give me time to go to Sir Guy Carleton to lay the matter before him. He is our own commander. He should give you Captain Lippencott, the one who did the deed.”

“And there we are agreed,” he made answer. “I will do this, Miss Harriet, though I fear that your efforts will meet with no success. With your commander-in-chief lies the only gleam of hope that the situation possesses. Sir Guy hath reprobated the act in no uncertain terms, but still he finds himself unable to do aught than to accept the rulings of the court-martial. Go to him, Miss Harriet, and bring all the influence you have to bear upon him that he may release to us this man, Lippencott. No one would rejoice at your success more than I. [Pg 375] Meantime your brother shall live until the result is made known to me. You shall have a reasonable time allowed.”

“Thank you, sir. I thank you——” The girl attempted to lift the hand to which she still clung to her lips, but a deadly faintness seized her. She trembled, grew pale, and fell in an unconscious heap at his feet.

CHAPTER XXVI

[Pg 376]

THE ADVENTURE OF THE GLEN

"Fair as morning beam, although the fairest far,
Giving to horror grace, to danger pride,
Shine martial Faith, and Courtesy's bright star,
Through all the wreckful storms that cloud the
brow of War."

—"*Lady of the Lake.*"

The morning gun at West Point had not ceased to echo among the surrounding hills the next morning when the horses for Mr. Owen and the two maidens were brought to headquarters. Harriet, quite recovered from her indisposition of the day before, vaulted lightly into the saddle, and bowed low as General Washington came forth to bid them farewell.

"Your Excellency overwhelms us with kindness, sir," she cried. "You have been nobility itself in granting this respite to my brother. I have no fear now as to the outcome of the matter. There is no doubt in my mind but that the real culprit will be delivered into your hands within a few days."

"I trust that it may fall out as you wish, Miss Harriet," answered the general courteously. [Pg 377] "As I have said, you shall have ample time for your mission."

"Thank you, sir. Ten days should be more than sufficient time. 'Tis but to go to New York, lay the whole affair before Sir Guy Carleton, and return."

"There are many things which might occur to bring about delay, Miss Harriet," he observed quietly. "In a case of this nature 'tis the part of wisdom to accept all that is offered. We will say two weeks; but General Carleton must give his decision by the end of that time. The matter now rests with him. I wish you all a safe journey."

He bowed gravely, and, overcome by the kindliness of this great man, the three left Newburgh much happier than when they entered it. Harriet was to cross the river at Dobbs Ferry, the post where all communication between the two armies was maintained, while Mr. Owen and Peggy were to return to Chatham to inform Clifford of the result of the interview with General Washington.

In high spirits Harriet laughed and chatted as she had not done for days, pausing ever and [Pg 378] anon to admire the beauties of the river, uttering exclamations of delight at some particularly imposing view. Before them lay West Point with Crow's Nest Mountain, Butter Hill and the two Beacon mountains; on the southwest, Pollopel's Island, in use at this time as a military prison, lay at the northern entrance to the Highlands; on the east were the fertile valleys of the Mattewan and Wappinger's Creeks, and the village of Fishkill Landing; behind them was Newburgh Bay with the little village of the same name upon its shores, beyond which lay a broad champaign country.

"Father and Clifford must see this before we sail for home," cried Harriet. "Oh, if I were king I'd never let the Americans deprive me of such a river!"

"If it affects thee like that, lass, perchance then thee has a slight idea of how we, who are natives of the country, feel toward those invaders who try to wrest it from us."

"I don't wonder at your feelings, Cousin David," she said. "'Tis only, being English, that it seems to me a mistake to give these colonies up."

"We have demonstrated by force of arms that we are no longer colonies, Harriet," he [Pg 379] reminded her quietly.

"Oh, I know, Cousin David," she replied gaily. "But, until peace is declared, I cannot but regard you as belonging to us."

At this David Owen laughed heartily, but his daughter's cheeks flushed, and her eyes sparkled.

"Thee amuses me, lass. Thy attitude is England's precisely. The king and his counselors know that they are beaten, but are loath to sign articles of peace, acknowledging our independence, because by so doing they surrender their last hold upon what they are pleased to still term 'colonies.' But it must come."

“A truce, a truce,” she cried laughing. “How can we acknowledge that we are beaten? When did England ever confess such a thing? At any rate you never could have been victorious had you not been English yourselves.”

Peggy joined her father’s laughter, and Harriet too was merry.

“Get all the consolation thou canst out that fact, Harriet,” said Mr. Owen. “So long as [Pg 380] independence is acknowledged we care not what sop England throws to her pride. But,” he added with a deep sigh, “I do wish most earnestly that peace would come.”

And so, in such frame of mind, for Harriet’s confidence was so great that it could not but infect them, Dobbs Ferry was reached. The girl waved them a lively farewell as she stepped aboard the barge which was to take her across the river.

“It won’t be a week ere I shall be back, Peggy,” she cried. “I don’t mind saying now that I have reason for my belief that Sir Guy will do as I wish in this. A week, my cousin, and you, and Clifford, and I will start again for Lancaster.” She secreted her passport as she waved again to them.

“I pray so, Harriet,” returned Peggy.

“She builds too strongly upon the belief that the British commander will help her, I fear me,” remarked Mr. Owen as the ferry pushed away for the far shore. Peggy turned to him quickly.

“Has thee no hope, father?”

“Very little, lass. General Washington warned Sir Henry Clinton what the consequences [Pg 381] would be if he did not give up the perpetrators of the murder of Captain Johnson. Sir Henry responded by ordering a court-martial. When Sir Guy came he communicated the findings of the court, and seemed to feel bound by the fact that it returned a verdict of not guilty against the leaders. I see not how Harriet can change the attitude of the British commander.”

“If she fails will General Washington carry out the execution, father?” Peggy’s lips tremblingly put the question.

“He must, child. He must do what is right at whatever cost to his feelings. This whole affair hath distressed him greatly, but justice to the army and to the public require that the measure be carried out in full. He did not come to his determination without mature deliberation, and his course hath been sanctioned by Congress, and supported by the approbation of the principal officers of the army. The general explained the matter at some length to me last night. It is peculiarly distressing to us, lass, because the victim happens to be of kin. Still, however painful the matter is, we must acknowledge the justice of the [Pg 382] proceeding.”

“Ye-es, father.” But Peggy’s voice was very faint, and she looked white and spent.

Just? Oh, yes; it was just, but granting justice; granting that it was the method of procedure in warfare, what comfort could that give to those who loved the boy? Peggy was greatly downcast in spirits when, as Harriet’s figure became a mere speck on the farther shore, she and her father resumed their journey to Chatham.

Colonel Dayton was greatly pleased over the report from headquarters.

“I hope that the guilty may be brought to punishment instead of this youth,” he ejaculated fervently. “I cannot tell you, Mr. Owen, how exceedingly distasteful this whole affair is to all of us. If it were not right and just we could not proceed with it. I believe that I voice the thought of every American when I say that I hope the sister will succeed in her efforts. Did the general send any message regarding the young man’s treatment?”

“There is a letter, colonel,” exclaimed David Owen, drawing forth the missive. “I had nigh [Pg 383] forgotten it.”

“This is most kind of the general,” exclaimed the colonel with an expression of relief as he perused the letter. “I will call the young man to hear it.”

In a few moments an orderly with Clifford in charge entered the room. The youth greeted his cousins affectionately, and listened attentively to the officer as he read the epistle:

“You will treat Captain Williams with every tenderness and politeness consistent with his present situation which his rank, fortune and connections together with his private estate demand. Further, inform the young gentleman that his sister hath been permitted to go to New York to place the matter in the hands of Sir Guy Carleton. No further steps in the

matter will be taken until his commander is heard from."

Colonel Dayton looked up benignantly.

"So there is hope that you may not suffer for the guilty, Captain Williams," he said. "If Sir Guy will but let us have Captain Lippencott, you, young sir, will not have to pay the penalty for this most atrocious deed. Let us hope that your sister will be successful." [Pg 384]

Clifford smiled rather wearily.

"'Tis but a prolongation of the suspense," he remarked. "She won't succeed. Sir Guy can't give up any man after a court-martial absolves him from blame. Still, I am glad that Harriet is well away. 'Twill be just as well for her to be with father until this whole miserable business is brought to a conclusion."

"Then, lad, thou hast no hope?" questioned Mr. Owen.

"None whatever, Cousin David. How long a time hath your chief given Harriet?"

"Two weeks, Clifford."

"Two weeks! Why, that is a lifetime," exclaimed he. "Much may happen in two weeks."

"True, Captain Williams; and, provided you will give your word of honor that you will make no attempt to escape, you shall be free to go and come at your pleasure," spoke Colonel Dayton.

"I give it, sir, and thank you," returned Clifford. "You have been and are most kind."

"Then we shall begin by leaving you with your cousins," said the colonel. "Come, orderly." [Pg 385]

"Is there aught that thou wouldst have me attend to, my lad?" asked Mr. Owen as Colonel Dayton left them. "If there is anything that can be done I should be glad to do it."

"There is something, Cousin David." Clifford looked at him eagerly. "I suppose the end will come soon after the two weeks are up, therefore I wish you would stay until 'tis over. You and Peggy. When I was in Virginia last year wounded, as I thought, unto death, Peggy came to me there that I might have some of my kindred near me in my last hours. My need is greater now than it was then. It won't be very long. I'd like a friendly face near me at the last."

Mr. Owen was almost overcome by the plea.

"My lad," he replied huskily, "it distresses me to refuse thee aught at this time, but I cannot stay. I am a soldier, as thou art, and under orders. Leave was given for a few days, but 'tis nearly gone. I will make an effort to come again before the two weeks are up."

"Then let Peggy stay, sir. Accommodations are easily procured either in the village, or out here with one of the officers' families. She would be well cared for, and 'twould be a comfort to me." [Pg 386]

The boyish face was full of pleading. He was very young. David Owen's eyes misted suddenly as his youth came home to him.

"It must be as Peggy says, lad," he rejoined, turning toward his daughter with concern. He had noted her pallor and sadness when he told her that there was but little hope for the boy, and he knew that if she stayed it must of necessity be a tax upon her strength. Peggy met his anxious glance with a brave smile. She was ever ready to sink self if by so doing she could give comfort to another.

"Certainly I will stay, if Clifford wishes it, father," she said. "I think I should like to, and Harriet would wish it, I know."

"Can thee bear it, lass, knowing that thy cousin's time may be short?"

"Cousin David," spoke Clifford quickly, "there isn't going to be anything melancholy about these two weeks. 'Twould benefit neither my cousin nor myself to dwell upon the approach of death; so——"

"She shall stay, lad," interrupted Mr. Owen. "Thy words remove the last scruple I had anent it. Would that I might be with thee also, but I shall try to come back." [Pg 387]

Accordingly when David Owen started on his return to Lancaster Peggy was left at Chatham. Mrs. Dayton had declared that she must make her home with them, and gratefully the maiden accepted the hospitality. Clifford, conformable to the instructions sent by General Washington, was subjected to little restraint. Relying upon the safeguard of

his honor the American colonel let him come and go through the cantonment, the village, and about the surrounding country at his pleasure.

Peggy had her own little mare with her, and Clifford having procured a mount, it came about that they spent long hours in the saddle, exploring the neighboring hills, the roads and byways around the camp. At no time did Clifford exhibit sadness or melancholy. Had it not been for the knowledge ever present in the background of their consciousness of what was to come it would have been a happy period.

[Pg 388] The days passed. Ten had gone by, but there came no word from Harriet. Peggy found herself growing apprehensive. Would Harriet succeed? she asked herself again and again. No word had come from her. Did it mean failure? She had been so sure. And Peggy was glad that General Washington had insisted that two weeks be the period given for the mission. That Clifford was not insensible of the flight of time was made known to her the day before the two weeks were up.

“We are going to ride as far as we can to-day, my cousin,” he said as the horses were brought round. “There may be word from Harriet, or from your general to-morrow. Perhaps something will occur that will prevent us from riding.”

“Where shall we go, Clifford?” asked Peggy falling at once into his mood. “Our longest ride is to the five knob tree on the Short Hills road.”

“That will do admirably,” he answered. “And the glen beyond. Let us go through it once more. It hath much of beauty and romance in its scenery.”

[Pg 389] The day was quite warm, but it was pleasant riding. Clifford was unusually silent, and for the greater part of the distance seemed absorbed in thought. He turned toward her at length smiling:

“I am not very talkative this morning, Peggy. I have been thinking of your father. He thought that he might return, you remember.”

“Yes, Clifford. And I,” she added tremulously, “have been thinking of Harriet. We have had no word.”

“She hath failed, my cousin. Had it not been so she would have been here. Harriet likes not to confess failure. I was certain that she would not succeed, and consented for her sake alone that she should make the effort.”

“Still, by that means thee had an extra lease of life, Clifford,” Peggy reminded him.

“I wonder if that hath been altogether for the best, Peggy,” he said seriously. “Sometimes, when after all one must undergo such a penalty as lies before me, the kindest thing that can happen is to have it over with without delay.”

[Pg 390] “Don’t, Clifford,” she cried shuddering. “I think that none of us could have stood it. It would have broken our hearts. With the delay we cannot but hope and believe that something will prevent this awful measure from being carried out.”

They had reached the five knob tree by this time, and beyond it lay the glen of which Clifford had spoken. It was as he had said romantic in its wildness. Various cascades leaped in foamy beauty across the path of the road which ran through the deep vale. Firs lay thickly strewn about, and the horses had to pick their way carefully through them. Copper mines, whose furnaces had been half destroyed by the English, were now overgrown with vines and half hidden by fallen trees, showed the combined ravages of war and nature. A few yards in advance of them the glen widened into a sylvan amphitheater, waving with firs and pines, and rendered almost impassable by underbrush. A short turning in the road suddenly brought them in front of a romantic waterfall. The cousins drew rein, watching the fall of the water in silence, for the sound of the cascade precluded them from conversation. The sun shone through the tree tops giving a varied hue to the rich greenness [Pg 391] of the foliage, and tinging with prismatic hues the sparkling water. So intent were they upon the downpour of the waterfall that they did not notice the dark forms which stole out from the underbrush, and stealthily formed a cordon about them. By the heads of the horses two forms arose suddenly like gnomes from the earth, and a scream escaped Peggy’s lips as a hoarse voice shouted:

“You are our prisoners! Dismount instantly.”

CHAPTER XXVII

[Pg 392]

"Say, what is honor! 'Tis the finest sense
Of justice which the human mind can frame,
Intent each lurking frailty to disclaim,
And guard the way of life from all offense
Suffered or done."

—*Wordsworth.*

At these words Peggy was much frightened, for she thought at once that they had fallen into the hands of the pine robbers. For the briefest second Clifford sat passive, then he let his riding whip fall in a stinging blow on the face of the fellow who held his bridle. With a howl of rage the man fell back, but sprang forward again as the youth, seizing the rein of Peggy's little mare, attempted to make a dash for liberty. Had he been alone the effort might have succeeded, but hampered with a second horse the attempt was futile. The cousins were again surrounded, and Clifford was dragged unceremoniously from his saddle. He struggled fiercely with his assailants, managing to shake them off so as to reach Peggy's [Pg 393] side just as one ruffian was about to lift her from Star's back.

"Away, sirrah!" he cried haughtily. "I will assist my cousin."

"As you will, captain," answered the man, falling back respectfully.

"Captain!" The cousins exchanged glances of surprise as the title fell from the man's lips. What could it mean? Both of them were puzzled, but neither made any comment. Resistance to such a superior force was useless. Their captors were heavily armed, and Clifford, of course, had no weapons. Now as the leader issued a command to march the youth spoke:

"What is the meaning of this outrage? What do you want with us?"

"Young man," returned the leader in a strong determined voice, "there is no personal harm designed either to you, or to the lady. If you remain silent and quiet you may reckon on good treatment; but if you resist——" He did not complete the sentence, but touched his pistol significantly.

"I see no help for it, Peggy," said Clifford grimly. "We shall have to go with them; though [Pg 394] for what purpose I know not. Aside from our horses we have naught of value——"

"Peace," cried the leader harshly. "We can't stand here all day. Forward, march!"

And with this the party started on a brisk walk. Two men walked in front of the cousins; two on each side, and the others brought up the rear, two of them leading the horses. The glen at this point became fuller of trees, and the road overgrown by a tangle of underbrush. Presently it dwindled until it became a narrow foot-path, disappearing in the distance in a mass of brushwood. It would have been impossible to pass over the path mounted, and the reason for leaving the saddle was now apparent. There were still short stretches which gave evidence that the road had been a well used thoroughfare at some former time, but now abandoned. This was, in truth, what had occurred, as it had been the road to the copper mines.

Notwithstanding the fact that they were afoot and were using precautions their persons more than once came into contact, rudely enough, with the projecting stumps and branches [Pg 395] which overhung the pathway. At length the party emerged from the glen, and turned off into a road which seemed narrower, and more overgrown with underbrush than the one just left. After a distance of perhaps a half mile they came into a cleared space of considerable extent. In the center of this space stood a large frame building whose courtyard, stables, and other appurtenances proclaimed it an inn. It might have been a prosperous and well patronized hostelry at one time, but at present it bore every appearance of neglect and decay.

Neither Peggy nor Clifford had been beyond the glen, and neither had heard of this tavern, so they looked at it now with much curiosity, for it seemed to be the objective point of their captors. As they entered the courtyard a boy came forward, and took charge of the two horses without speaking. It was as though he had been watching for their coming. On the piazza an elderly woman, evidently the hostess, bustled at once to Peggy's side with the obvious intention of taking her in charge. Clifford drew Peggy's arm within his own in a

determined manner.

“My cousin stays with me,” he said. “She goes not out of my sight.” [Pg 396]

“What nonsense!” ejaculated the leader angrily. “Did I not say that no harm was intended either of you? The girl will be all right.”

“I think so too, my cousin,” said Peggy after a glance at the landlady’s face. She was not ill looking, and the maiden was no longer afraid.

“It may be,” answered Clifford. “To be sure I shall keep you where I shall be certain of the fact.”

“Very well,” said the leader shrugging his shoulders. “’Tis not my affair. Step in here, captain.”

Again the cousins wondered, but without a word they entered the room indicated. There was no one within, and for the moment they were alone. Peggy turned toward him quickly.

“What does thee think of it all, Clifford?” she cried.

“I have a strong suspicion as to who is responsible,” he answered with darkening brow, “but we shall see.”

Just at this moment the door opened precipitately to admit one at whom Peggy stared, then rubbed her eyes to look again; for it was Harriet Owen. [Pg 397]

“At last, my brother,” she cried advancing toward him and throwing her arms about his neck. “We have you at last. Oh, won’t the rebels howl when they find their victim gone?”

“Harriet!” Clifford unclasped her arms, and held her so that he might look at her. “I feared this. What is the meaning of this?”

“It means life, liberty, freedom, my brother,” she cried exultingly. “I planned it all, though I did of a truth have assistance. I had spies who found that you were permitted to ride about the country. I kept a watch for several days that I might have you brought here.”

“For what purpose?” he asked coldly. “You could have seen me by coming to Chatham.”

“Chatham?” she answered impatiently. “Clifford, don’t you understand? I could not come to Chatham, because I failed. Sir Guy will not give up that Captain Lippencott to the rebel general. Sir Guy! Poof! I weary of him!” She gave her foot an impatient stamp. “Why should he shield a refugee when an English officer’s life is at stake? And I have helped to further his plans too, my brother. I carried goods into Lancaster for him, contraband they were. ’Tis the plan now to subdue the Americans by their love of indulgences, and by so pampering them draw out the money from the country. When all is gone they must surrender. War cannot be carried on without money. I helped him in his plan, I say, and now he will not do this for me.” [Pg 398]

“And that wagon with the false bottom was where those goods were?” he said. “Harriet, how could you do it? With Cousin David who hath been so kind to you in charge of that work of detection.”

“I did not know that he was there, Clifford. As for the false bottom in the wagon, I knew naught of that, as I said. I was not told of that. It was a——”

“A cask in a barrel of vinegar,” put in Peggy quietly. “John found it, Harriet, but he did not speak of it to father, or Robert, or thy brother here.” [Pg 399]

“John Drayton found it?” she cried, amazed. “Why, how did he come to look in the vinegar?”

“I think ’twas something that thee said which caused him to be suspicious, Harriet. So thee sees that that part of thy general’s plan hath failed.”

“I am glad of it,” cried Harriet. “Glad! Glad! He would not help me. He will only investigate further. And General Washington will wait no longer when he has heard from him. Clifford, you need too much explanation. The time hath come to act.”

“Do I understand that you are responsible for having us brought to this place?” he asked.

“Yes, oh, yes,” she answered hastily. “Only Peggy was not to come in here. She was to be kept in another room, and after all was over she was to be returned to camp.”

“After what was over, my sister?” His voice was cold, but Harriet did not seem to notice it.

“Your escape, Clifford. Come, we have no time to lose. Fresh horses await us in the stables, saddled and bridled ready for instant use. Here are clothes for a disguise. Don them, and [Pg 400]

we leave at once. We are to make a wide détour to the north of Chatham, reaching the Passaic River again at Newark. A boat will be there in the bay to take us to New York. It cannot fail if we start now."

"And Peggy?" he questioned so calmly that she should have taken alarm from the quietness of his voice.

"Peggy is to go back to Chatham, and tell the rebels they may seek another victim," she replied gleefully.

"Peggy to go back to face Colonel Dayton with information that I have escaped?" he cried, amazement written on every feature.

"She was not to know it, Cliff, but you would have her to come in here. Beside, they wouldn't harm her. She is a Whig herself, remember. Oh, she may come with us," she added as his brow grew dark. "Only, Clifford, we must make haste. The longer start we have the better chance we stand of success."

"Who are those men that brought us here?"

"Hirelings," she cried. "Of course I paid them well. Don't ask so many questions, Cliff. They are natives from near here. They will do anything I ask." [Pg 401]

"Come, Peggy," he said rising. "We are going back. Not all the hirelings in the world shall make me break my parole."

"Clifford, 'tis not the time for quixotic foolishness. Do you not understand that Sir Guy hath sent word to General Washington that he will investigate further? General Washington does not want that. He wants Lippencott, or, failing him, a victim. He will wait only so long as it takes Sir Guy's letter to reach him. It means death, Clifford. An ignominious death."

"And do you know that you are asking me to break my parole, my sister? That you are asking me to break my word of honor? That you wish me to betray the trust reposed in me by a chivalrous foe?"

"A chivalrous foe!" she scoffed. "Is it chivalrous to slay the innocent for the guilty? I tell you, Clifford, that truly as you live I have taken the only way to save you. You are justifiable in breaking any word given under such circumstances. Is life of so little worth that you do not care for it? What hath rendered you so indifferent?" [Pg 402]

"Life without honor hath no charm for me, my sister," he returned solemnly. "A parole is more binding upon a soldier than ropes of steel, or chains of iron would be. Men have broken paroles, but when they do they no longer are esteemed by honorably minded men. Such are poltroons, cowards. I will not be of their number. A truce to this talk! If I am to die, I will die as a soldier, blameless and of spotless reputation."

"Clifford," she entreated him earnestly, "'tis the only hope. You have already broken your parole in passing the prescribed limits of the rides. I had regard for your scruples by having you brought here. And now, since you are here through no fault of your own, you can take advantage of the fact to escape."

"Sophistry," he uttered shortly. "That is no salve to the conscience, Harriet."

"But the death, my brother?" She was very white for Clifford was moving toward the door. "'Tis no way for a gentleman to die."

"The mode is not at all to my liking, my sister," he answered gravely. "Hanging is not, in very truth, a death for a gentleman; still a man may be a gentleman though he be hanged." [Pg 403]

He put his hand on the door-knob and turned again toward Peggy. But Harriet uttered a cry of anguish.

"I'll never see you again, Clifford," she cried. "And father will be broken-hearted. He helped me in this."

"Harriet!" he cried. "Do not ask me to believe that Colonel Owen prefers his son's life to his son's honor? I'll not believe it."

"Believe what you will, my brother, only come with me," and she clung to him pleadingly. "I'll call those men, Clifford."

"You shall not, Harriet," he answered putting her aside. "Instead get your own horse and come back with us."

"I cannot, Clifford. I must see our father. Aren't you going to kiss me?"

But Clifford turned from her, saying coldly:

“You have wounded me too deeply, my sister.”

“Clifford, thee must not leave thy sister so,” interposed Peggy. “Mistaken she may be in her efforts for thy liberty, but ’tis done through love for thee. ’Twould be monstrous to leave her unkindly!” [Pg 404]

“I mean not to be unkind, my cousin,” he returned. “But consider my feelings when my own sister hath tried to put me in a position that would reflect upon mine honor.”

“Thee must not be too hard on her, Clifford. Women do not regard such things as men do. When their affections are bestowed all else is subordinated to them. Doth a mother, a sister, a wife cease to love when man hath lost his honor? I tell thee such things seem different to us. Thy sister hath intended thee no wrong. ’Tis because of her love for thee that she hath done this.”

“True, Peggy,” came from Harriet brokenly. “True.”

“Peggy,” cried Clifford in astonishment. “Such words from you who are the soul of honor? You would not ask me to do this.”

“No; but ’tis because of my upbringing, Clifford. I have been taught that a word once passed must be kept. That a promise must not be broken. Therefore, I understand why thee would prefer death to the breaking of thy parole. I am proud that thee feels as thee does about it. I am prouder still that even thy sister cannot tempt thee to break thy word great as is thy love for her. Yet underneath it all I have a heart of a woman, and that heart aches for thy sister.” [Pg 405]

“’Fore George!” murmured the youth gazing from one to the other in perplexity. “I never dreamed of this. I thought of course that such things were regarded alike by both sexes. I ——” He passed his hand over his brow thoughtfully. Then his expression softened. “I have much to learn. Harriet!” And he opened his arms.

“My brother,” she cried. “My wonderful brother! And you will go with me?”

“No,” he answered while he kissed her. “No, Harriet. However such things may appear to you, for me there is but one course: I must return. But come with us.”

“I cannot, Clifford. I must go back to father.”

“Then I must leave you, because we have been long, too long away from camp. And now good-bye!”

“Something may yet come up to save him, Harriet,” whispered Peggy as Harriet followed them weeping to the piazza. [Pg 406]

“No,” she said disconsolately. “This was the only hope, Peggy. Everything hath been done that can be done. I shall never see him again.”

There was no one about. Long afterward Peggy found that this state of things had been prearranged in order that the inmates of the inn might not be held responsible when Clifford’s flight should be discovered. Clifford himself brought their horses from the stables. Silently they mounted, then turned for a last word with Harriet. But she had sunk upon the steps of the porch, and with her face buried in her hands, was sobbing in heart-breaking accents:

“Clifford! Clifford! Clifford!”

CHAPTER XXVIII [Pg 407]

“HOW COULD SHE KNOW?”

“To-morrow! O, that’s sudden!
Spare him,
spare him!”

—“*Measure for Measure.*”

Colonel Dayton met them as they reëntered the camp. His brow was wrinkled with anxiety, but it cleared as if by magic at sight of them.

“Odds life, captain!” he cried. “I feared lest something had befallen you. It is long past your usual hour for returning.”

“Something did befall, sir,” answered Clifford, who had expected questioning. “I crave pardon for the delay. We were like not to have come back at all, but through no fault of ours. In fact, sir, we were set upon by a party of miscreants in the glen beyond the five knob tree, and captured. At the place to which we were conducted was a person through whom——” He hesitated unwilling that Harriet should be connected with the affair. “In short, Colonel Dayton,” he said frankly, “I would prefer that you do not question me concerning the manner of our release. As soon as possible we came back.” [Pg 408]

“Say no more, sir,” exclaimed Colonel Dayton. “That you did come back proves you an honorable gentleman. I might have had to mourn a prisoner, but once more hath martial faith received justification. It will give me great pleasure to report your conduct to the commander-in-chief.”

Much relieved that the matter was to be probed no further the cousins dismounted, and were preparing to retire to their respective domiciles when the voice of Colonel Dayton arrested them.

“I wonder,” he was saying, “if this doth not explain the letter that I received to-day from General Washington?”

“What letter, sir?” asked Clifford quickly. “May I inquire if it contained any further orders regarding me?”

“Certainly; and I am obliged to answer that it does contain orders. Listen, and you shall hear them, though it gives me great pain to read them. They mean a curtailment of your privileges, captain.” [Pg 409]

Whereupon he produced the missive, and read as follows: “Sir, I am informed that Captain Williams is at the camp without a guard, and under no restraint whatever. This, if true, is certainly wrong; I wish to have the young gentleman treated with all possible tenderness consistent with his present situation, but considered a close prisoner and kept with the greatest security. It is well to be careful. There are many rumors afloat anent a rescue, which may be but idle talk. Still, when dealing with a foe every precaution should be used that there is no weakness in our defenses of which he may take advantage.”

“So end our rides, Peggy,” remarked Clifford, smiling slightly. “’Tis a preliminary to the final order.”

“I trust not, captain,” exclaimed the officer. “This merely limits you to the confines of the cantonment. I should not like the general to consider that I was negligent. It would have been the same, sir, had not your misadventure of to-day occurred.”

“I understand, colonel,” answered the youth deferentially. “I appreciate the courtesy you have ever shown me. I think, on the whole, ’tis best. And it might be worse.” [Pg 410]

“Yes,” spoke Peggy. “It might be worse, Clifford.”

So there were no more rides; but as the weather began to be very hot, and exceedingly dry, they consoled themselves with the reflection that riding would be extremely unpleasant under such conditions. Another week glided by, in which there was no sign of Harriet, nor was there any further order from the commander-in-chief. It seemed as though they had been set down in the midst of the cantonment and forgotten. The strain began to tell upon Clifford.

“Would that it were over,” burst from him one morning as he sat with Peggy under the shade of a tree near the quarters of the Dayton family. In the distance a company was drilling, and the orders of its officer came to them faintly.

Peggy let fall the ox-eyed daisy whose petals she had been counting, and turned toward him in dismay.

“Clifford, thee don’t mean that,” she cried.

“But I do, Peggy,” he answered passionately. “The fluctuations from hope to despair, and from despondency to hope again are far more trying than a certain knowledge of death would be. It keeps me on tenter-hooks. So long as the thing is inevitable, I wish it would come.” [Pg 411]

Peggy looked at him anxiously. His face was pale, and there were deep circles under his eyes that spoke of wakeful nights. His experience with his sister had been far more distressing than she had realized. It came to the girl with a shock just how care-worn he

was.

“Would that father were here that he might comfort thee,” she cried tearfully. “Thee needs him, my cousin.”

“An he were, he would say—‘My lad, thy promise was that Peggy should not be saddened by talk of thy woes; yet here thee is dwelling upon thy sorrow both to thy detriment and hers.’”

The transition to David Owen’s manner was so abrupt that Peggy smiled through her tears.

“I did not know that thee was possessed of the art of mimicry, my cousin,” she remarked. “Harriet hath it to perfection, but thee has never shown sign of it before.” [Pg 412]

“’Tis only one whom I know well that I can mimic,” he told her. “Sometimes, I believe that I know Cousin David better than father.”

“And thou shouldst have been my father’s son,” she cried. “Why, thee looks enough like him to be his son. Then thee would have been my brother, as thou shouldst have been.”

Clifford smiled at her warmth.

“In that case,” he said quizzically, “I should have been an American. I wonder if I should have been a Quaker, and a rebel with the rest of you? Or should I have been a Tory?”

“Oh, a rebel! A rebel!” she replied promptly, pleased that his melancholy was vanishing.

“I doubt it. I cannot imagine myself as other than loyal to my king any more than I can think of myself as a Quaker.”

“Neither can I think of thee as a Quaker,” she said. “Some way thee doesn’t fit in with the Society.”

At this Clifford laughed outright.

“That is because you know me as I am,” he observed. “Now I cannot think of you as being anything but a little Quakeress. You see, we get our ideas of persons when we first know them, and then we cannot change.” [Pg 413]

“‘And cannot change,’” she repeated with some amusement. “Clifford Owen, thee didn’t like me at all at first.”

“No, I did not,” he responded, and laughed again. “’Twas because I did not know you aright. Peggy, see how light-hearted you have made me. Our merriment hath caused Colonel Dayton to give us unusual attention.”

Peggy glanced at the officer. He had been watching the drill, but several times had turned to look at them. As the drill ended he came slowly toward them.

“You seem quite happy this morning,” he observed. Something in his manner struck the girl with foreboding.

“Yes, colonel,” answered Clifford. “I had an attack of the blues, but my cousin hath charmed them away. We were trying to imagine me an American.”

“We should welcome you, sir,” spoke the colonel courteously. “May I speak to you a moment, captain?” [Pg 414]

Clifford rose instantly.

“It hath come then?” he asked quietly.

“Yes,” answered the colonel huskily. “It was hard to break in upon your mirth, but I thought you would prefer to have me tell you than to hear it from another.”

“You are most kind, sir.” The youth’s voice trembled ever so little. “We were too merry, my cousin. ‘Against ill chances men are ever merry. But heaviness foreruns the good event.’” His tones were steady as he finished the quotation, and he added: “I am ready at any time.”

But at this Peggy uttered a cry.

“Now? Oh, that would be inhuman! Surely not now?”

“Nay,” said Colonel Dayton, alarmed by her paleness. “’Tis not as you think, child. He goes to the guard-house now. The sentence will not be carried out until to-morrow morning.”

“’Tis so sudden,” she protested piteously.

“Nay, Peggy, it hath been too long deferred,” demurred Clifford. “’Tis well to have the [Pg 415]

anxiety and suspense over. You must not give way."

"But what can I do, Clifford? Thee has no one but me to do for thee. How can I comfort thee?"

"Dear little cousin," he said softly, "you have done much already. Think what these last weeks would have been for me had you not stayed here. Be brave a little longer. The colonel will let me see you again."

"Yes," said Colonel Dayton briefly.

And Peggy was left alone. Alone! With wide, unseeing eyes she stared at a patch of green grass in front of her where ox-eyed daisies grew like golden stars. Alone! Harriet had not come, as Peggy had been hoping she would. And her father! Could he not get leave? Alone! Alone! What comfort could she, a mere girl, be to her cousin in this trying hour?

Far afield the milkweed nodded a soft welcome to the butterflies winging, like flying flowers, over the fields. A bumblebee droned drowsily near, humming his song to unheeding ears. Where the tall pine trees of the forest met the sky argosies of clouds spread their portly sails along the blue. In the heat of the July morning Peggy sat shaking like a leaf. [Pg 416]

"I must be brave," she told herself again and again. "He hath no one here but me. I must be Harriet and Cousin William both to him. I must be of comfort to him."

Long she sat there under the tree trying to pull herself together, but after a while she rose and made her way into the house. It was well on toward the end of the afternoon when Colonel Dayton came to her.

"Your cousin wishes to see you, child," he said pityingly. "He bears up well, but I need not say to you that he will need all his fortitude to go through with this ordeal."

"I shall not fail him, friend," said Peggy with quivering lips. "I am all of kith or kin that is near him. I shall not fail."

But the maiden had need of all her resolution when she entered the guard-house where Clifford was, for he was most despondent.

"I am glad it is ended, Peggy," he said gloomily. "The restlessness of waiting is over at last. All the feverish anxiety, the hope, the longing, are past, and the end hath come. Do you remember last year, when John Drayton, that Yankee captain, was condemned to this same sort of death, what father said? He said, 'The vicissitudes of war are many, my son. By sad fortune you might find yourself in the same condition as this young fellow.' And here I am, in very truth, condemned to die on the gallows. I have been thinking of it all day." [Pg 417]

"Clifford," she cried in alarm, for there sounded a note of agitation in his words that made her fearful lest he lose his self-control, "thee must not talk like that. Think on something else."

"But to die like this," he cried. "An Owen on the gibbet! 'Tis bitter, bitter! I had planned a different death. 'Twas on the battle-field. Gloriously to fall, fighting for the king and England. I do not fear death, my cousin. It is not that. 'Tis the awfulness of the mode. I cannot help but think of that other death which I would so gladly die. I have ever loved martial music, and 'twas my thought that at my death the muffled drum would beat for a soldier's honorable funeral."

"Clifford! Clifford!" she cried. He was so young, so noble, and yet to die a cruel death on the scaffold! It was hard. What comfort could she give him? He was in sore need of it. [Pg 418]

"Bear with me for just a little, Peggy," he said. "It hath eaten into my heart—the manner of this death. I have talked bravely all these long, weary days of waiting, but oh! if they would just shoot me! The shamefulness of a gallows!"

"Don't!" she cried suddenly. "I—I cannot bear it."

The boy pulled himself together sharply.

"Forgive me," he said speaking more calmly. "I'll be good now, my cousin, but 'tis enough to make a man rave to contrast the death he would die with the one he must. I'll think of it no more."

"Thee must not," she said faintly. "What—what can I do for thee, Clifford?"

"I have writ some letters," he said picking them up from the table. "Will you see that they are sent? I need not ask. I know you will. One is for Harriet; I was too hard on her, Peggy. I

see it now. One is for father, and one for your father and mother. Had I been their own son they could not have treated me with more tenderness. And, Peggy——” [Pg 419]

“Yes, my cousin?”

“There is one for Miss Sally,” he said with slight hesitation. His face flushed and he busied himself among the papers on the table. “’Fore George,” he cried with an abrupt change of manner, “I can’t forget that look of scorn in her blue eyes! It haunts me. I writ before, you remember? She did not reply, but sent word that she had no hard feelings. ’Twas all I had a right to expect, but somehow—— I have writ again, Peggy, to tell her—— Well, you know I don’t want her to think me altogether contemptible.”

It was such a youthful outburst, and so natural that Peggy had hard work to retain her self-control. Then, like a flash, she knew the comfort she could give him. Leaning toward him with brightening eyes she said softly:

“Sally doesn’t think thee so, Clifford. She hath a high opinion of thee. She told me to tell thee something at the very last—— And that would be now, would it not?”

“Now, or never, Peggy. What did she say?” He listened eagerly. [Pg 420]

“She said that she considered thee the finest gentleman that she ever knew.”

“She said that?” The youth caught his breath quickly.

“Just that, Clifford. The finest gentleman that she ever knew,” repeated the maiden impressively. “Was not that much to say?”

“It was, my cousin. It overwhelms me.” His eyes were misty, and in them there was wonder too. “It is the highest praise that she could have spoken. ’Tis strange that she should so speak; because, Peggy, I have always wanted to be a gentleman. Oh, I am by birth, I know. I don’t mean that. I mean just and honorable, chivalrous and gallant, performing heroic deeds, and—and all the rest of it,” he finished boyishly.

“And thee is all that, Clifford,” said Peggy gently.

“No,” he said with unwonted humility. “I would like to be, but I am, in truth, a pretty stiff, stubborn, unreasonable sort of fellow. You have had cause to know that, Peggy. And so hath Sally. If life were, by any chance, given me I should try to be all that she thinks me; but I am to die. To die——” He stopped suddenly, and his eyes began to glow. “’Fore George!” he cried, “if I cannot live I can die as she would have the ‘finest gentleman’ to die! What if it is on the scaffold, and not the battle-field? Though it be not a glorious death, it can be glorified! How could she know that that was just what I would need to put me on my mettle? How could she know?” [Pg 421]

“Then it hath helped thee, Clifford?” spoke Peggy, marveling at the transformation in him.

“Helped me? It hath put new life into me. It hath given me courage. Why, do you know the shame of the thing had almost prostrated me? An Owen on the gallows, Peggy. I would not have minded so much if the execution had taken place right after we left Lancaster, but to have it hanging over me day after day for so long. Peggy, it hath eaten into my heart.”

“Oh, Clifford!” she cried pityingly. “I did not dream thee felt it so!”

“I did not want you to know, little cousin. I would not tell you now, but that you have brought me the cheer that I need. How good you have always been to me, Peggy. I wonder if the world holds anything sweeter than a Quaker maid! That one should so highly esteem me——” He smiled at her with sudden radiance. “I shall have pleasant thoughts to go with me now, Peggy. You will tell her?” [Pg 422]

“Yes,” she answered, and added chokingly: “I wish father were here.”

“And so do I. I hoped that he would be with me at the end; I believe that he would be here if he could.”

“Thee shall not be alone, Clifford. I am going to be with thee.” Peggy spoke bravely enough, but her eyes grew dark at the very thought, and she began to tremble.

“Not for the world, Peggy!” he cried, horrified. “I would like to have Cousin David with me, but not you. Oh, not you! I can suffer firmly what ’twould kill you to see.”

“But to be alone, Clifford?”

“It can’t be helped, Peggy. I won’t have you there. Promise me that you won’t go.”

“I will do as thee wishes, my cousin,” she answered tremulously. “But—but I will be here at [Pg 423]

the door as thee comes out. I could not bear to have thee without a glimpse of a friend, or ——” She could not finish.

“Be at the door if you wish, little cousin. I should like that, but go no further.” He arose and held out his hands. “It’s good-bye now, Peggy.”

A sense of suffocation overwhelmed Peggy, and she could not speak. He was so young, so noble, so manly in meeting his untoward fate, and yet he must suffer this ignominious death without the comfort of a friend’s face near him. As she found her way blindly out of the room a passionate prayer rose insistently through all her being:

“Oh, that father would come! That father would come!”

CHAPTER XXIX

[Pg 424]

IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH

“... A darker departure is near,
The death-drum is muffled, and sable the bier.”

—*Campbell.*

The beautiful sunset retreat was sounding its inspiring notes as Peggy left the guard-house, and slowly made her way across the parade-ground. There was a note of pathos in the strain which seemed peculiarly impressive, and all at once Clifford’s words came back to her:

“I have ever loved martial music.” Then, because there seemed naught else than waiting before her, she sank down under the tree where Clifford and she had sat that very morning, now so long ago, to listen to the music that he loved. Suddenly, as she listened, there came to the girl a dim sort of understanding. There was a permeating tonal effect in the music, striking at times, merely suggestive at others, which seemed to breathe the spirit of [Pg 425] bivouac and battle, of suffering and patriotism, and the yearning of great devotion. A lump came into her throat. An indefinable emotion swept her with an appreciation of the spirit of a soldier which renders him happy at the thought of dying in his country’s battles. The flood-gates of Peggy’s tears were open, and she wept unrestrainedly. Presently Colonel Dayton saw her sitting there, and came to her side.

“My child,” he said sitting down by her, “I have just been in to see your cousin. Your visit hath cheered him greatly. He bears up wonderfully. Manly he is, and noble. Never hath a duty been so repugnant to my feelings as this one is. Were it not just I could not perform it.”

“I cannot speak of justice, sir, when my cousin is to die,” sobbed she. “It may be just. I know not. My countrymen are not unkind; they are not stirred by vengeful thoughts. It must be right, else General Washington would not sanction it; I am but a girl. I do not know. But oh, sir! to those of us who love my cousin it doth seem that mercy should temper justice.”

“Affection blinds us, Miss Peggy,” he said, and sighed. “Under its influence we are apt to [Pg 426] forget that other boy to whom not even justice was given. If men were always just there would be no necessity for mercy. Had justice been rendered Captain Johnson your cousin would not stand in need of clemency.”

“True,” she said. “True. It must be right, since such good men say so. I cannot see it now. All sense of equity is lost to me, lost because the victim is my cousin. Some time——” She paused unable to proceed.

Presently she looked up at him. “Colonel Dayton,” she said, “it hath occurred to me that the matter may not end here. That perchance the enemy in reprisal for this—the loss of one of their officers—may wreak vengeance upon one of ours of like rank. That would necessitate another retaliation; to be followed by still another on the part of the enemy. Sir, where will it stop?”

“That very thought hath come to me, child,” he said gravely. “And the thing is possible. This matter hath distressed General Washington greatly. He hath never been so troubled since the treason of General Arnold, and the execution of Major André. The affair hath been [Pg 427] considered impartially by the principal men of the army, by Congress, and by General Washington. Miss Peggy, as there is a God in heaven, we believe that we are doing right.

There is not one of us whose inclination does not prompt to mercy, but we dare not show it. The peculiarly atrocious murder of Captain Johnson cannot be ignored."

"I know, I know," she murmured, passing her hand over her brow, and looking at him with eyes full of pain. "'Tis strange that Fairfax, who was my friend, and Clifford, who is my cousin, should both be concerned in this."

"It is strange and hard, my child. But vex not yourself with questioning. 'Tis better to accept the inevitable with resignation, as your cousin hath done. He doth not question the justice of the decree."

"He is a soldier, sir," she said, "and versed in the law of war."

"He is a gallant gentleman, Peggy. He will meet his doom bravely. But you! Would that some of your people were with you."

"If father were but here," she wept. "If father were here to be with him. 'Tis hard to go to death alone. Oh, sir, thee won't mind if I——" [Pg 428]

"Not to the execution?" he exclaimed hastily.

"Clifford will not permit that, sir. 'Tis only that I may stand at the door of the guard-house to give him a last good-bye. He is alone. His sister would wish it."

"Is it wise, Peggy?" he asked regarding her with deep concern.

"Yes, oh, yes! 'Twill cheer him to have a friendly face near him."

"If it will be of comfort to either of you, it may be done," he said rising. "Come in, child. Mrs. Dayton must take you in charge."

Obediently Peggy followed him to the house. The colonel's wife was very kind, but presently left her, thinking that she slept. It was strange that no word had come from Harriet, she mused. Was it possible that she had indeed lost all hope after her failure to rescue her brother? It was unlike Harriet to give up like that. Peggy could not believe it. Why then had she not heard? And her father! Perhaps he was even then speeding toward them. Surely, [Pg 429] surely, something must occur to prevent this dreadful thing from happening!

The daylight faded. Twilight melted into darkness. From the camp the voices of the soldiers in song or story floated in to her. Peggy went to the casement window and stood staring out into the night. Tattoo sounded. The noises of the camp died away, for the soldiers' day was ended. Would there never be another day for Clifford? How was he bearing it out there alone in the guard-house? Would his high courage remain with him to the end? That he would die bravely she did not doubt; but to die!

For what was she watching and waiting? She did not know. She was hoping against hope that something would happen to prevent her cousin's death. It was the night which had brought rescue to John Drayton at Yorktown the year before. Would it not be as kind to Clifford? So Peggy kept her vigil, and the hours passed. Once, the room grew close, and, faint from watching and grief, she slipped out under the trees. There was no moon, but the [Pg 430] stars kept watch in the sky, twinkling down at her with quiet friendliness.

In the valley the placid river murmured softly. The hills in the distance seemed but a darker, lower sky lost in the obscurity of the night. From out of the gloom the tents gleamed ghostly white. It was so still that she could hear the footsteps of the sentries as they made their rounds. With the faint streaking of the dawn came a sound that caused her to flee, horror-stricken, to her room. For the sound was that of hammering. The gallows was being erected.

And at that awful sound hope fled from the girl's heart. All night she had waited, hoping, believing, that something would come to prevent the execution. Now she felt that all was over. Clifford must die.

Calmness settled upon her. For with absolute despair came a peace—a numbness that left her insensible to anything save the fact that she must be brave for Clifford's sake—that he was alone, and she of all his kindred was there to give him comfort. So Peggy prepared for the ordeal before her.

The execution was to take place at nine o'clock. Long before that hour the people from the [Pg 431] countryside gathered. A great concourse of farmers, and citizens from the near-by farms and villages, all conversant with the details of the affair, came to see the unfortunate victim.

Peggy saw none of them as she went with leaden feet to the guard-house. No one said her

nay as she took her position by the door. The guards glanced at her compassionately, awed by the whiteness of her face, and the awful calmness of her manner. The cousins had come to be well known in the camp, and there was not a soldier who did not commiserate the youth's fate.

How fast the moments go when one is expecting a dread event! It seemed that it could not be time when the drums beat assembly, and the soldiers filed into place. A squadron of dragoons and a battalion of soldiers formed in a hollow square. Within their ranks was a cart in which the prisoner was to be taken to the place of execution. The bitterness of death fell upon her as she watched for Clifford's coming. She must be brave. Of all his kindred [Pg 432] she alone was there to bid him a last farewell. That was all of which Peggy was conscious. She did not know that the military band had taken its position in the procession, and that the entire Jersey line was forming as for parade.

A stir at the door betokened the coming of the prisoner. The door opened, and two guards appeared. Behind them, with a guard on either side, came the unfortunate young man who was to pay the penalty of another's crime. He was very white, but composed. As the morning sunlight fell upon him he looked so young, so handsome in his scarlet uniform, that a murmur of pity rose, and spread among the people. A mist dimmed the youth's eyes as he caught sight of the little figure standing by the door. He spoke to one of the guards, then stepped quickly to her side, stooped, and kissed her.

"Thank you, little cousin," he said. "All is well with me."

With firm step he passed on to go to his ignoble death. As he took his place in the cart the drums began to beat the dead march, and the procession moved slowly away. Peggy heard [Pg 433] nothing. Her eyes were fixed on the scarlet coat of her cousin. He did not turn. He did not look to right, nor to left. Like a brave, gallant gentleman he was going to his doom. As long as she could see him her eyes followed him. Her breath came gaspingly as the procession disappeared around a bend in the road. Her senses reeled. The ground was slipping, slipping——

An exclamation, sharp, penetrating, brought her to herself. The guard near her had paused in his round, and was gazing at a cloud of dust which had suddenly appeared on the Morristown road. If it concealed horsemen they were coming at a furious pace. Curious knots of people began to cluster in groups to watch its approach. Through Peggy's dulled apprehension a thrill of interest ran. As the quick beat of galloping horses sounded on the morning air she started. Hope electrified her being. Could it be that some one was coming with help for Clifford? She ran to the road and strained her eyes toward that approaching cloud of dust. And then, from out of its enveloping particles three horses emerged. The foremost rider was standing in his stirrups, and high above his head he waved a flag [Pg 434] frantically. A murmur of excitement stirred the watchers as the sunlight caught the pure folds of the banner. It was a white flag. A white flag: the flag of life, of salvation. Peggy shrieked at sight of it. A shriek that mingled joy with an agony of apprehension lest he be too late. Lest he be too late! She tore the kerchief from her neck and waved it wildly. She called to him entreatingly to hurry, hurry, and knew not that her cries could not be heard. She wrung her hands at her helplessness. On came the horseman. Nearer and nearer he drew. The horse's flanks were steaming. His eyes were strained and blood-shot. Blood flecked the foam flew from his nostrils, but still his rider lashed him to greater speed. He called to her as he passed: "Which way, Peggy? Which way?" She raised her hand and pointed toward the bend in the road, and he thundered on. She had known it was Drayton before he called. She knew too that her father and Harriet rode behind. Her father come at last! Peggy was sobbing pitifully now, every vestige of self-control gone. David Owen brought his horse to a sudden stop as he came opposite her, stooped, and swung her like a [Pg 435] child up in front of him. She clung to him crying:

"They have taken him, father! They have taken him!"

"Steady, lass! Please God, we'll be in time."

They were beside Harriet now. Harriet who, with pale, set features, never turned. Her eyes were fixed on John Drayton's flying figure as though all her hope lay with him. Faster and faster he rode. The white flag streamed above him. His horse was running like the wind.

The bend in the road was turned at last. Peggy hid her face against her father's shoulder afraid to look. But—— Clifford? She must know. She sat up, but at first the crowd was all that she could see. A black mass of swaying people whose heads were turned in their direction to see what the commotion portended. The mass parted as Drayton dashed toward it, leaving a clear path to the cart. And oh, thank heaven! Clifford sat there safe, safe. The provost-marshal stood with his hand on the rope, arrested in the very act of performing his [Pg 436] awful duty by John Drayton's hoarse shout:

“Forbear! Forbear in the name of Congress! A reprieve!”

CHAPTER XXX

[Pg 437]

AND THEN THE END

“Here the free spirit of mankind, at length,
Throws its last fetters off; and who shall place
A limit to the giant’s unchained strength,
Or curb his swiftness in the forest race.”

—Bryant.

A mighty shout went up from the people as they heard the words. It was followed by another, and still another until the Jersey hills echoed with the sound. Men flung their hats in the air and were not ashamed that tears, all unchecked, lay on their cheeks. The extreme youth, the beauty of the unfortunate young man had gone straight to their hearts. He was one of the enemy, but his manly bearing in the face of an ignominious death commanded respect and admiration, and had produced the stern joy that is felt by warriors toward a foeman worthy of their steel.

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In compliment to the occasion, the band struck up a lively English air, and in the general enthusiasm which followed there was a rush for the cart. Clifford was lifted bodily to their shoulders and borne, amid boisterous acclamations, to his relatives.

A true Briton has an abhorrence of any display of emotion; so now, although more moved than he had been of the menace of death, the youth struggled to retain his composure. His features worked convulsively, and his lips quivered. He could not trust himself to speak, but stood, white and trembling, endeavoring to maintain an appearance of calm. Colonel Dayton saw his agitation, and made his way at once to his side.

“Friends,” he said lifting his hand for silence, “we all rejoice at this most fortunate outcome of a most unfortunate matter. But it hath been very trying to those deeply concerned, so I would suggest that we give three cheers for Captain Williams, who hath shown us how gallantly a brave man may face death, and then leave him with his friends.”

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At that the tumultuous concourse stretched their throats and cheered with all their might. Then followed three cheers for Congress, and three for the commander-in-chief, General Washington. By this time Clifford had mastered himself sufficiently to speak, and he said something in a low tone to Colonel Dayton. Again the officer raised his hand.

“Captain Williams proposes three cheers for Captain Drayton, who brought the reprieve,” he said.

Then pandemonium broke loose. Cheer after cheer rent the very air. Hoarse shouts of “Drayton!” “Drayton!” sounded, but no Drayton appeared. Under the confusion incident to the delivering of the reprieve he had slipped away to give his well-nigh spent horse the attention of which the noble animal stood in need. Then, being in want of rest himself, he had thrown himself prone on the grass under a tree, and was at that very moment fast asleep. So, finding their calls for him vain, the crowd finally dispersed in high good humor.

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Yet these were Jersey people. People who but a few short months before had cried to Congress for retaliation for the cruel murder of Fairfax Johnson. Had Lippencott, the murderer, stood before them to pay the penalty of his dastardly deed, the situation would have been different. They were a kindly people as well as a just one; so now compassion, respect and admiration led them to rejoice that this fair young life was not to be offered as a sacrifice in a blood reprisal.

At length Clifford was left alone with his relatives. For a time their hearts were too full to do more than utter ejaculations of thankfulness, or lavish terms of endearment upon him. When calm finally prevailed both he and Peggy were eager to know all that had occurred.

“As ye know, I expected to return in a short time when I left here,” began David Owen. “When I reached Lancaster, however, I found that the enemy had been unusually active in the matter of contraband goods, so that my department was almost overwhelmed with

goods to be examined, seized, or distributed. A soldier's duty comes before everything, and even though one who is dear should be in peril, he must perform it. I could have put Drayton in charge had he been there, but it seems that he felt that he must exert himself in Clifford's behalf, and so had obtained leave of absence a few days after our departure. Major Dale had assumed Drayton's duty in addition to his own, but despite that fact he gave [Pg 441] me what assistance he could, so that at last I was able to leave. I found Harriet at Philadelphia——"

"Found Harriet where?" exclaimed Peggy amazed.

"She must tell how she came to be there," smiled her father. "We passed through Morristown yesterday, by the west road, on our way to Pompton, where we expected to see the Marquis de Chastellux; the reason for this will come in Harriet's narrative. We missed him by a day, so bode there for the night, expecting to come here to-day. Just as we were ready to start for this camp this morning Captain Drayton dashed into the yard, calling for a change of horses. You may imagine our feelings when he told us that the execution was set for this morning. Had it not been that he also told us that he held a reprieve I do not know what Harriet would have done. There was no time to be lost, if we would reach here in time, so, as soon as his horse was ready, we were off with what result ye know. Drayton hath worked tirelessly in the matter. He hath come from headquarters with but little rest either [Pg 442] for himself, or his horses, and was in the saddle all night after riding all of yesterday."

"But why, why?" asked Clifford bewildered. "Why should Drayton so concern himself about me?"

"And now 'tis my turn to explain," broke in Harriet. She did not tell him that Drayton had been actuated by gratitude toward her because she had assisted him in escaping from a similar plight at Yorktown. She did not wish her brother to know the part she had taken in that affair, so now she ignored his question, and began her explanation. "I gave up hope that day you and Peggy left me at the inn, my brother. I knew of nothing more that could be done, so resolved to go back to father. Judge of my surprise when, a few miles beyond Morristown, Captain Drayton overtook me. He was on his way to headquarters then. I told him all that had occurred, and the exact state of affairs. He advised me to go back to Philadelphia to try to enlist Count de Rochambeau's aid. The Congress and General Washington held their French allies in high esteem, he said. If their sympathies could be [Pg 443] enlisted it would have great weight. He had been in Philadelphia himself seeing gentlemen whose standing was such as might be expected to exert influence. He was urging that memorials and petitions should be sent Congress in such numbers that their appeal could not be overlooked. At the Highlands he intended seeing the principal men of the army, and last of all General Washington, to relate how I had——" She checked herself quickly, and bit her lip. After a moment she continued:

"Of course I went to Philadelphia. There was no one at the house but the servants, so I asked Sally Evans to stay with me. Peggy," turning toward her cousin suddenly, "I never can tell you what a help she was. That I had been a spy at Middlebrook was against me. That I had been banished the city just the year before militated against anything that I undertook. I realized keenly the difference in being there with my kindred, and then without them. I almost despaired of doing anything, but Sally would not let me give up. She was full of suggestions. The gentlemen of Congress would not see me, so Sally cornered Mr. [Pg 444] Jacob Deering, and coaxed, and pleaded until, for very peace, the poor man told her that he would do what he could for us. Through him I got a letter before the Congress.

"Then Sally went to see Betty Williams. Betty's Frenchman, it seems, is an attaché to the French Minister. This gave us access to both the Minister and Count de Rochambeau. Meantime, Captain Drayton's work began to take effect, and letters poured in upon the Congress urging clemency. The French gentlemen advised seeing the Marquis de Chastellux, who is a great favorite with your general; so, as Cousin David had come by this time we set out for Pompton, where we expected to find him. 'Twas there that we met Captain Drayton, of which Cousin David hath told you. Clifford," speaking with impressiveness, "'tis thought that you will be sent to Philadelphia to be under the eye of the Congress while the matter receives due deliberation. If you are, I want you to go to Sally Evans, and thank her for what she hath done."

"It will give me great pleasure, my sister," he answered. A smile, winsome in its radiance, [Pg 445] parted his lips, and he gazed across the valley at the distant hills. At the hills? Or did he see instead a pair of blue eyes swimming in tears through which divinest pity shone? Did he see a saucy, piquant face framed in ringlets that escaped in bewitching wilfulness from under the dainty cap of a Quakeress? Did he see—— Harriet's voice, tremulous from a mist of tears in its laughter, broke in upon his musings.

“And oh, John Drayton’s hat,” she was saying. “You should have seen it, Peggy. When we started this morning ’twas nearly straight. Oh, not entirely! That would be impossible. Somehow I could not take my eyes from it. The harder he rode the further on the side it got. I remembered that Cousin David had said that all through the battle of Hobkirk’s Hill he had fought with it on his ear, and had been made a captain for valor. Peggy, it came to me that with him it meant confidence, and a determination to succeed. I knew that he would reach here in time so long as that hat was at a perilous angle. If he had put it straight I should have died.”

“Harriet,” said Clifford in determined tones, “I want to know why Captain Drayton was so interested? Why should he exert himself to avert an untoward fate from me?” [Pg 446]

“Because,” answered Harriet. “Oh, because, Clifford. He did it for me. Now don’t ask questions, there’s a good fellow!”

Clifford’s face became thoughtful.

“I see, my sister,” he said gently. Harriet flashed a glance at Peggy, then laughed. Her brother’s inference was plain.

“I wonder where John is?” cried Peggy.

“He hath been asleep under a tree, my dear,” spoke the colonel’s wife. “And ’tis time for dinner. Will you ask him to come in?”

“Let me go, Peggy,” said Clifford hastily. “I would like to speak with him.” And knowing that her cousin would prefer to see Drayton alone, Peggy assented.

Drayton lay on the grass, lazily stretching himself, as Clifford approached. He rose and began to brush off his dusty uniform.

“I’d be sent to the guard-house if this uniform were to make its appearance on parade, wouldn’t I, captain?” he asked easily.

“Captain Drayton,” said Clifford huskily, “you have given me no chance to thank you for the service you rendered me. I want to do so now——” [Pg 447]

“Don’t,” said Drayton. “It gave me great pleasure to be of service. Why need we speak of it further?”

“But I owe you my life, sir,” cried Clifford.

“Nay,” smiled Drayton. “You owe it to your sister. I did it for Harriet.”

Clifford winced perceptibly as John Drayton used his sister’s name without the usual prefix. It had been unconsciously done, but this of course he could not know. He started to speak, but before he could do so, Drayton was speaking:

“You need not fear a repetition of to-day, Captain Williams. Anxiety and suspense are not pleasant companions, and I’d like to tell you just how things are. The temper of the people all over the nation hath changed regarding this affair. ’Tis beginning to be openly talked that mercy should supersede the necessity for retaliation. Then too a letter hath come to General Washington from your own general in which he deplores the action of Lippencott. [Pg 448] He asks for further time for investigation, and promises that no more such atrocities shall be perpetrated upon American prisoners, which was our chief motive for reprisal. And your father, Colonel Owen, hath protested strongly against thus using a prisoner of the Capitulation of Yorktown, claiming that such an one cannot be used as hostage in any manner. Our chief, sir, is exceedingly jealous of his honor. He would do naught that would savor of a breach of faith with the enemy. For this reason, and others, he hath consented that more time shall be taken by all parties for deliberation. In fact, Captain Williams, everything points to a pleasant termination of the matter; although you may find the waiting necessary for deliberation long and irksome.”

“Sir,” spoke Clifford with emotion, “you have made me twice your debtor: First, in bringing the reprieve; and now, by relieving me of anxiety. A man may meet death with fortitude; no man can bear an indefinite suspense which may have the gallows for its termination. I cannot thank you as I would wish. Words cannot express my gratitude. But, sir, I believe [Pg 449] that I can contribute toward promoting your happiness. You have said that you did this for my sister; Harriet acknowledges that it was for her. I have always been persuaded that a deeper feeling existed between you than either would confess. Our first altercation was, I believe, regarding this very fact. That I have been prejudiced, I’ll admit frankly. But now, sir, I want to tell you that any objection that I may have had against your suit to my sister is withdrawn. More, I will use whatever of influence I may have with my father to advance your happiness.”

“Eh! What?” stammered Drayton in confusion. His face had been a study with its varying expressions as Clifford talked. “Er—a—— Well, you see——”

“Do you mean that your feelings have changed, sir?” demanded Clifford his brow darkening.

“On the contrary,” exclaimed Drayton settling his neck ruffles hastily, “my esteem for Miss Harriet hath increased. But, captain, in America ’tis customary to consult the lady before such matters are arranged. I shouldn’t like anything done until her wishes are expressed.” [Pg 450]

“Your delicacy does you great credit, sir,” spoke Clifford holding out his hand. “I have been wrong in my estimation of you.”

“And I appreciate your offer of assistance, Captain Williams.” Drayton shook his hand warmly, sincere admiration in his eyes. “’Twas handsomely done.”

“And now,” exclaimed Clifford almost gaily, “as our little affairs are settled, I must bring you in to dinner. The colonel’s wife hath commissioned me to do so.”

“I am not up to it yet, captain. I shall find a bed somewhere, and sleep a while longer. Odds life! how seedy lack of sleep doth make a man! Present my compliments to the ladies, will you?” Drayton sank back on the grass as he spoke.

“With pleasure, sir,” answered the other.

Punctiliously they saluted, and Clifford strode back to the house. John Drayton laughed softly.

“Now that,” he said, apostrophizing the tree, “that is what might be called an amende honorable. Whew! wouldn’t I like to see Harriet’s face when he tells her!” [Pg 451]

Some hours later, having slept off fatigue, washed, and freshened himself from top to toe, Drayton approached the colonel’s quarters. On the piazza sat David Owen, with Peggy on one side of him, and Clifford on the other. His arm was about his daughter; his other hand rested on the younger man’s knee. It was a pretty picture; full of affection and quiet happiness. John Drayton stopped short at sight of it. His face whitened, and a look of consternation flashed into his eyes. Crushing his beaver over his eyes he wheeled, then strode away. The three had been so absorbed that they had not seen him, but Harriet came upon the piazza in time to catch his expression.

“Peggy,” she called.

“Yes?” Peggy went to her quickly alarmed by the insistence of her tone.

“Go to that captain of yours at once. He is troubled.”

“John troubled, Harriet? Why——”

“’Tis naught but what you can remedy, you little goose,” cried Harriet shaking her. “Don’t you dare come back into the house until you have corrected his misapprehension. I won’t have John Drayton made unhappy to-day!” [Pg 452]

“But——”

“Oh, go!” She caught Peggy suddenly and kissed her. “Go!”

And wondering much Peggy sped down the path after Drayton. He heard her light footsteps, and waited for her.

“Why, how tired thee looks, John,” she exclaimed startled by his appearance. “I thought thee had a good sleep. Thee has worn thyself out by thy exertions. And all for us. Yet thee hath given us no chance to thank thee.”

“I was glad to do it, Peggy. Clifford is—Yes; he’s a fine fellow,” he said as though he were obliged to acknowledge the fact. “He is well worth saving. I was glad to do it. Yet—yet I am thankful that I did not know——”

“Know what?” she asked as he came to a pause.

He did not answer, and the girl looked at him in perplexity. Presently she spoke:

“I think I never saw thee with thy hat on straight before, John. I like it not.” [Pg 453]

“I did not know.” He touched it indifferently. “I always find it so when I am discouraged, or hopeless.”

“But why should thee be discouraged or hopeless now?” she queried amazed.

“How shall I bear it when you are in England, Peggy?” he cried suddenly, and turned from her.

Peggy saw a great light. When she spoke it was with sweet authority:

“Put thy hat as thee always wears it, John. Then let me tell thee about Clifford and Sally.”

“About whom?” Drayton swung about with precipitation.

“About Sally and my cousin, Clifford. I want to tell thee how a message from her cheered his dark hours; I want to tell thee how she helped Harriet; and I want to tell thee, most of all, John, what I am hoping will happen if Clifford is sent to Philadelphia. Dear Sally!”

“Dear Sally!” he echoed fervently, settling his hat in its accustomed place with the jaunty gesture that she loved. “Dear, dear Sally,” he added with growing enthusiasm as he met her laughing eyes. “I shall like to hear about Sally. Tell me, Peggy.” [Pg 454]

It was three months later. Congress had recognized the altered sentiments of the country regarding the case of retaliation, and Clifford was set unconditionally at liberty. England had advised that hostilities be suspended, so that—while the two armies retained their respective positions, one in New York, the other in the Highlands—it was only as a precautionary measure. The prospects for peace were at last assuming reality. There were yet many months to come before the terms would be agreed upon, and the treaty signed; but American Independence was not only achieved, but recognized at last by England.

It was a bright October day. Peggy sat with her mother in the sitting-room of the dwelling in Chestnut Street. The air was just chill enough to warrant a fire, and the two were deep in conversation before its pleasant warmth. The door opened hastily, and Harriet, looking marvelously beautiful in a new riding habit, stood on the threshold. [Pg 455]

“I am going for a ride with Robert, madam my cousin,” she said, and the rich color flooded her cheeks as she pronounced the young man’s name. “We may be a little late. You will not mind?”

“Nay, Harriet.” Mrs. Owen smiled at her fondly. “I hope that thy ride will be a pleasant one.”

“Mother,” spoke Peggy as Harriet closed the door, “how this terrible contagion of domesticity, as General Washington puts it, hath seized everybody! Here Betty hath married her Frenchman and gone to France; Clifford is to come for Sally before he sails for England; and now there is Robert and Harriet. What does thee think of them?”

“I am much pleased,” answered the lady. “It will be the making of Harriet. Robert is of a strong, true nature which will command her respect. He hath invested her with every noble quality, believing her to be as lovely in character as she is beautiful in person. Harriet likes to be so considered. Peggy, rather than fall below his ideal she will become all that his fancy paints her.”

“I am so glad that we are not to lose her, mother. Harriet hath become very dear to me.” [Pg 456]

“And mother is glad that thou art not to go across the seas, Peggy. At one time I feared that perchance Clifford——”

“And so did John,” laughed Peggy.

Transcriber’s Note:

Minor changes have been made to correct typesetters’ errors; otherwise, every effort has been made to remain true to the author’s words and intent.

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